

This issue of *Madison Foursquare* is brought to you by Scott Custis and Jeanne Gomoll, who live at 2825 Union Street, Madison, WI 53704.
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Cover—Jae Leslie Adams

[SC] Lovely cover incorporating a Mark Twain quote and cancelled British postage. We all admired it at the collation gathering.

Greg Rihn

[SC] I have been meaning to tell you that I appreciate, and learn from, your detailed reviews of events you attend. I don't have a great interest in ballet in general, but reading your background on *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* was very interesting and informative. Also true for the *Elijah* symphony, *Honor Among Thieves*, and the rest, though I am far more likely to seek out music and movies. You put a lot of work into your reviews and I want you to know that I read them all, and always learn a lot.

I have long thought the Madison Film Festival was pretty good, especially for a city the size of Madison. I thought I might go after I retired, but I have not managed it yet. This spring I thought they had an attractive selection of films once again, but with our big garage project happening at the same time, I elected to skip it. Maybe next year if our schedule is not so full. They are going to lose access to the six-screen AMC Hilldale theater next year, and that will be a big challenge for them. We'll see.

Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] I am so very sorry about your fall, and I hope your recovery is going as well as possible. When Jeanne tripped and fell on her knee outside the YMCA a few years ago, that was hard for me, too. She was on the ground in profound pain and I was helpless to do anything. Since she was not bleeding, there was nothing for me to do but witness her agony until she was ready to be helped back up and taken in to be checked out. I was far better off than she was, of course, but it's hard to just stand by when someone you love is in so much pain.

Thank you for your background commentary on *Vienna Blood* and *Three Pines*. We enjoyed both series.

Regarding your "sermon," your arguments were well made as usual. I would add that we live in a large, growing, complex capitalist society. So many elements of our lives and culture are governed by

constantly increasing complexity and competition. Communication is competition, too. So many people and organizations are competing all the time to get and hold our attention. It seems to me the change toward more and more vivid and extreme (and misused and inappropriate) language everywhere is just part of our world now. It used to be that “fuck” was the nuclear bomb of swear words. Today the Roy Kent character on the comedy series *Ted Lasso* is basically defined by his constant use and variations of the word “fuck.” It gets our attention and amuses us, but in a few years we might wonder why his character seemed so radical “back then.”

I loved your untitled poem.

[JG] I also found knee pain and recovery from knee surgery to be very painful. I think I will leave it at that, however, since **Diane** is scheduled for knee surgery this summer, and there is no reason to repeat the story I think I've already told.... Nevertheless, you have my profound sympathy for your ordeal.

Your comments about *Vienna Blood* point at the thing that most interested me: the characters' belief in the permanence of their traditions and reputations, all of them oblivious to the obvious rumblings of change, a lot of it very bad, all around them. I sometimes wonder what *our* world and time looks like to people from the future who are aware of what is coming.

Your sermon on virtue transmuted from vices reminds me of the on-line phenomenon known as AITA stories (“Am I the Asshole?” stories), which mostly seem to be confessions of rude, hurtful, or disagreeable behavior employed against people who are portrayed as even more rude, hurtful and disagreeable. Most often, commenters reassure the story-tellers that they are indeed NOT the asshole, though a not insignificant number of storytellers do get chastised and told that in fact, yeah, they are the asshole. It's a strange situation in which people seem to take pride in their bad behavior when it is performed in the service of squashing worse behavior. Many of the stories roast entitled “Karens” and mothers-in-law. And there are subgenres called “Malicious Compliance,” and “Petty Revenge.”

My image of Baba Yaga comes from an illustrated book of Russian Fairy Tales that I brought with me from home when I moved to Madison, but have since lost. I don't remember when I actually acquired it, though it's most likely that my godmother, Aunt Charlotte, sent it to me as a birthday or holiday gift when I was little. I remember Mom shaking her head sometimes when I



Russian Fairy Tales, by Marie Ponsot (rans.); illustrated by Gianni Benvenuti (Cover art, left; Interior art, right)

unwrapped a gift from Aunt Charlotte (her older sister) and saying, “She always gives you such weird stuff.” Well, if you count pastels and watercolor supplies weird, which I certainly did not. But anyway, the illustrations in that book were fabulous. I remember Baba Yaga's house, propped up on chicken legs. And Baba Yaga herself dressed in gauzy, torn black rags. I don't remember what happened to the book. I'm sure I didn't get rid of it on purpose; maybe I lent it to a niece or nephew. Hmmm ... I just googled the book and found it! Artwork from an individual story shows Baba Yaga. The cover artwork (above) shows a detail from “Tsarevitch Ivan, the Firebird and the Gray Wolf.”

Lisa Freitag

[SC] As I wrote in my comment to **Jim & Diane**, we had a good time at Minicon. Thanks to you and Greg. I hope the committee regarded it as a success.

I thought your visit to the His Lai Temple was a fine article. I looked it up on a map of L.A., and I don't think I have ever been near that part of the city. A “suburban, upscale Chinatown” obviously nestled near the hills sounds interesting even without the Temple.

[JG] I am confused about the vast number of Buddahs that decorated the Buddhist temple. Do they each represent a significant follower of Buddah? Or do they symbolize different aspects of the one Buddah? Catholic churches often display multiple images of Christ—at various ages and playing out a part in familiar bible stories. Is this what is going on with the multitude of Buddahs?

Pat Hario

[SC] I enjoyed reading about your adventures at the trivia contest in Stevens Point. In the age of the Internet, I was wondering how trivia gaming would work and I was impressed at how well it has adapted. The puzzle hunt events in cars sounded more physically active than I usually think of trivia gaming. Good time.

I had a good time helping demolish your shed. I won't say much more in case you decide to write about it, other than to say that your sense of how many folks would show up was much better than mine. I was afraid only Bodden and I might make it, but turns out that letting people cut loose to destroy something with hammers and pry-bars has a wide appeal even among the social security/medicare set.

If you don't mind a little armchair diagnostics, I think your car is leaking air conditioner fluid.

[JG] I wish I could have joined the demo crew that took down your shed. I usually like destroying things or just throwing things out. But I think I will have to restrict myself to witnessing stuff like that now.

Google Books may have scanned some of the books you need for trivia contests, especially if they are out of copyright. If so, they would be accessible on-line and searchable. Type in titles at:

<https://books.google.com>

Carrie Root

[SC] Wow, great trip report and gorgeous pictures!

I don't envy you that long drive down and up the I-5/US 99, though I image it was much less crushingly boring than driving the long way across Illinois. Definitely a job for a good, but not too distractedly complicated, audio-book. Isn't Corvina close to the Hacienda Heights neighborhood **Lisa** wrote about? I always liked croquet, though I've never been talented at it. I've not played in a long time. Last summer Jeanne and I tried out Corn Hole (the ugliest game name in the universe) in the backyard at her brother's house. I have no gift for that either, but it was pleasantly simple.

Your question to **Diane** about who would have taught you how to stack cash bills for a bank prompted me to mention something I have noticed recently about cash transactions in stores. For years I've noticed how few cashier staff in coffee shops know how to make change. They long ago became

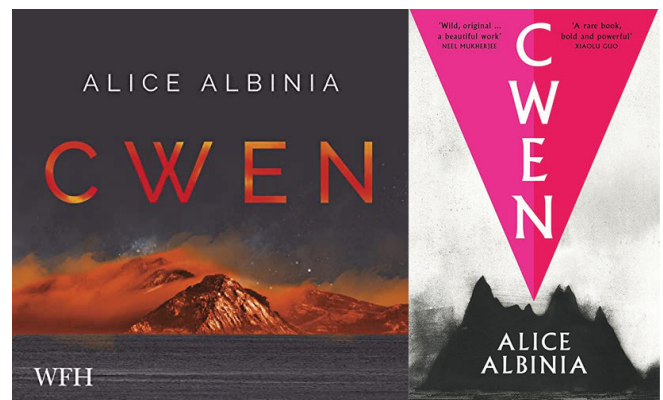
reliant on the computer register telling them how much change to give back to a customer in a cash transaction, with no idea how to do it themselves if the machine failed. I'm patient when bad things happen and they struggle by doing arithmetic in their head, or on a scrap of paper, to figure it out. Lately I've begun to notice they sometimes hesitate after ringing me up when I present them with cash instead of a card for payment. They are a whiz at checking out a debit card, but they sometimes have to remember how to enter a cash transaction. I'm stubborn about still using cash, but I can see that it will probably be me who will eventually need to adapt.

[JG] Re yct Luke—We stopped getting CSA boxes for reasons similar to yours. Too many squashes. But also, not enough corn and yellow beans. So, I am grateful for learning to cook with unusual veggies during our CSA years, but I prefer going to the farmers market and buying stuff I need and am sure that we will be able to use during the upcoming week.

Lovely plant and travel photos! Thanks!

Carrie, I have to thank you so much for suggesting that the SFw/oBorders Book Discussion Group read Alice Albinia's novel, *Cwen!* I knew nothing about it till you nominated it, though I see that it was recommended for the 2021 Otherwise/Tiptree Award. (They didn't publish an honor list for that year, but I sure hope *Cwen* will eventually be included.) Wow. I love it. *Cwen* goes beyond the familiar battle of the sexes story to a serious consideration of what a post-patriarchal life might look like.

I am reminded of one of my favorite books, *Illicit Passage*, by Alice Nunn, which examined the mechanics of a feminist revolution, a revolution from within. As the individuals in the asteroid mining town in Nunn's novel learn self-confidence, their lives change. And as the people organize, the social order changes.



Audiobook cover art (left). Paperback cover art (right)

The establishment panics and looks for “the usual suspects”—the revolutionary agitators, the bomb-throwers, and entirely misses the secretaries, mothers, factory workers, and servants plotting radical change right under their noses. *Illicit Passage* is a novel of mistaken assumptions, misdirected expectations. In fact, we never actually hear the main character (Gillie) speak. We only learn about her from characters who dislike or are intensely jealous of her. That we end up liking her very much anyway, in spite of the strongly biased points of view of the other characters, only strengthens our admiration for her.

And similarly, *Cwen*'s protagonist, Eva, does not tell her own story. We hear about her from the women who worked with her and the people whose lives she helped change. Also, like *Illicit Passage*, the revolution in *Cwen* is a gradual, nonviolent shift. Eva's documentary project, which interviewed islanders at 6-month intervals, demonstrated the profound changes, but at the same time revealed that many people weren't actually conscious of most of the changes.

We will talk more about this at the book discussion, but I wanted to thank you and also alert other *Turbo* members about this fantastic feminist SF novel.

Andy Hooper

[SC] As I write this, Jeanne and I are in the middle of watching the last season of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, so your Horror Host article on Don Sherman was particularly interesting. I also liked how Sherman's story gave us an insight into the evolution of the comedy business over the years. Great article.

Regarding your comment to **Ruth** on the proliferation of “identical rectangle” apartment buildings in Madison. You are correct, of course. This is deliberate. In recent years, Madison failed to keep up with new home construction as the population boomed. In her first term, our current mayor is trying to address the problems of housing shortage and skyrocketing rents by encouraging apartment construction anywhere they can be built and as fast as possible. In order to keep rents affordable, the new buildings are built cheaper using cement on the first floor and wood frame on the upper stories. Their exteriors all use the same mixtures of brick and colored metal siding. I support the effort to build more housing, but I think the rush to throw up cheap buildings will hurt us down the road as they deteriorate. I think 40 years will be the most we can expect from them. On walks in

the neighborhood, I have already noticed non-brick siding surfaces showing signs of wear on the Carbon building at Union Corners. I was looking at a section of wall that was somewhat sheltered and not even facing the street.

[JG] I second Scott's thanks to you for linking up horror host history with the evolution of stand-up comedy and the great series, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. I love that show and, along with *Ted Lasso*, know that I will soon be missing the characters from these wonderful comedies since there will be no future seasons for either of them.

You asked if Alice Sheldon would have “derived strength from being in the sisterhood of speculative fiction with Russ and Le Guin and Kate Wilhelm.” I don't know about Kate Wilhelm, but Sheldon's correspondence with Le Guin and Russ, I think, was truly important to Sheldon's emotional life. You can read some of the correspondence in *Letters to Tiptree*, edited by Alisa Krasnostein and Alexandra Pierce (which includes letters from many other members of the feminist SF community). At the Tiptree Symposium in Eugene, Oregon, in December 2016, Le Guin read aloud a few of the letters she wrote to Tiptree. Someone else (possibly her biographer, Julie Phillips) read alternately from Alice's letters. Their correspondence around the time of Tiptree's unveiling as Sheldon was particularly moving. Sheldon worried that she would lose Le Guin's friendship when her gender was revealed and Le Guin realized that Tiptree had been lying. Most of the room was sobbing (me too) as Le Guin read her reply, assuring Sheldon that she still loved her. Russ' friendship was also hugely important to Sheldon, who talked to Russ in several of her letters about her realization that she might be a lesbian. You can read several letters between Tiptree and Russ on the Literary Hub (lithub.com). I was thinking specifically about those letters when I speculated that Sheldon's compartmentalized life made it difficult to reach out to people who would have been most able to help her. So, yes, my answer to you is yes.

I second **Jim**'s proposal that we set up a Google Doc to schedule a Turbo Con. I assume you would propose that this takes place during your next visit to Madison?

Marilyn Holt

[SC] It's wonderful to hear from you, Marilyn. I hope your prognosis is good and treatment is going as well as it can. Congratulations on successfully chairing the Endeavour Award and attending Norwescon. Sorry about your loss of Snowy.



Jim Hudson & Diane Martin

[SC] Denny Lien’s passing was a bit of a shock for us, having just seen him at Minicon. Very sad, but perhaps better than a long, painful decline. We had a good time at Minicon. The best for me were the meals out and other visiting with friends and people we knew, like Denny (also Kim Kofmel & Mark, and Karen Schaffer & Mike Ward). I had met Denny before, but did not know him well. The thing I liked best about the Doubletree hotel was the roominess of the place. Lots of big open spaces which relieved some of my concern about Covid. We kept our masks handy for panels and smaller spaces. When we checked in, they greeted us as “loyal Hilton members in good standing” and upgraded us to a room on the top (15th) floor. We had no memory that we’d ever signed up to be Hilton members, but that was okay with us. The top two floors of the hotel were key-only access. It was not as swanky as the Concourse’s Governor’s Club floors, but the room and view were nice. The quiet and sense of exclusivity were reduced a bit when it turned out the Con Suite was on the 14th floor, so all the convention members got access anyway. We hardly noticed.

I liked all the programs I saw at Minicon, **Lisa**, so congrats to you. As we were driving up there, **Steve S.**, I wondered what the chances were that Greg Ketter would have an ordinary trade paperback copy of *Little, Big* for sale at his table. When we stopped by on our way around the Dealers Room, he had one so I grabbed it. A summer reading project, I think.

Thanks for all the TV recommendations once again. They are always very helpful. We are looking forward to reading Aoki’s *Light from Uncommon Stars* as our book group’s June selection.

I smiled at your comment about our new jail. Finally approved. It’s a county project rather than a

city project, but the controversy that held it up for so long was classic Madison. Now the F-35’s are beginning to show up (20 total, coming in gradually over the next year.) Keep some ear plugs handy. I think even west-siders will get to hear them from time to time.

[JG] Our recent viewing:

Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story (Netflix series). The mere fact of this story’s existence felt almost science-fictional to me. The first season’s cast of Bridgerton was of course famously made up of black, brown and white characters. The second season’s plot was devised to explain how and why that happened in the alternate Bridgerton universe. Lots of fun too. Recommended.

The Diplomat (Netflix series). I loved Keri Russell in the 2013-18 series, *The Americans*, (and was delighted to see her in *Cocaine Bear*, too), and she is fantastic in this new series about a career diplomat posted to the United Kingdom immediately after a mysterious terrorist attack on a British ship. Russell plays a “working” ambassador, as opposed to an appointed, ceremonial ambassador. Her husband, played by Rufus Sewell is also a career diplomat; their relationship is complicated and messy. The dialog is fast and very smart. And the story is compelling and complicated. Season one ends in a cliff-hanger of sorts and, sadly, I expect that we will have to wait much too long for season two, given the writers’ strike. Nevertheless, highly recommended.

The Last of Us (HBOmax series). This was way better than I expected from a story based on a video game. I loved the gorgeous fungal creature designs. They were so beautiful that I sometimes forgot to be scared. The story idea, of an out-of-control Cordyceps fungus, which creates zombie ants in real life, but—in the series—evolves to infect humans, is a really excellent science fictional idea. Recommended.

Air (movie, seen in an actual theater). Despite the fact that this movie can be seen almost as a commercial for Nike shoes, it reminded me a lot of *Moneyball*, and I enjoyed the “origin story” of the phenomenally successful marketing idea of “Air Jordans.” I read an article about the recent spate of “product” movies—*Air*, *Tetris*, and *Blackberry* (which tells the story of the first smartphone)—about which the reviewer mused that commercial products are trumping people as movie subjects. But I disagree. These movies certainly focus on products, but they are first of all about the people who invented or marketed or stole them. And these people are being treated in these movies as heroes. The suits and corporate types who have more and more to do with movie-making these days want to see movies in which people like them—men like them—get to act heroically or at least save the day. Recommended if this idea intrigues you. Avoid it if you’re turned off by it.

Mrs. Davis (Peacock series). We’ve only seen the first two episodes of this series so far and our first impression is that it has a profoundly paranoid worldview in that no person, no fact, no belief can be trusted because the AI that controls the world is so powerful. Nonetheless, it is also a rather witty and light-hearted story starring a nun skilled in sleight-of-hand magic and impressive horse-riding skills whose mission is to destroy Mrs. Davis, the AI. I’ll hold off on making a recommendation until we’ve seen a few more episodes.

I will try to remember to talk more about my vivid dreams with Diane when I see you guys next. I’m currently stuck on a detailed and complicated HALF a story which in my dream, ended on a cliff-hanger. I typed out the story and hoped to experience the second part the next night, but nope, that didn’t happen. (Maybe that means I have to subscribe to a dream stream?) So now I am trying to flesh out the second half of the story using more traditional methods, such as pounding my forehead with my fist, doodling, pacing, staring at the screen, that sort of thing. At least it’s not a depressing story, in fact it’s mostly comedy and melodrama and I am making slow progress.

Catie Pfeifer

[SC] Terrific trip report to the Canary Islands, with photos! Tenerife has always sounded exotic to me. I have never thought of going to the Canary Islands before, but it sounds great. I think your approach was exactly right, a moderate amount of touring and

sightseeing with lots of opportunity to just relax and soak up the beauty, plus great food that you can’t get at home. Your visit to Teide Park reminded me of our first trip to the big island of Hawaii. You were surprised that the arid scrub of the high mountain did not seem to fit with what you’d seen of the rest of the island. On Hawaii, we were having to adjust to driving around the island by going from desert in the west to farmland in the north to rainforest in the east and finally freezing cold and snow when we drove partway up a mountain. Islands are amazing.

I liked your mailing comments, too.

[JG] I enjoyed your trip report to Tenerife and Gran Canaria. It sounds as if you made excellent use of your time there! (Sorry about the Covid though.) Were there a lot of tourists there when you visited? I am wondering because I so rarely see these islands on popular vacation lists. Did you need to know some Spanish? Or were most natives fluent in English? Great pictures too. I realize I’ve seen many versions of the tree, El Drago, reproduced as pen and ink drawings...especially El Drago’s twisted, knurled trunk. Some of the drawings I’ve seen make the canopy into a different shape, adding fruit or whatever works for the drawing’s meaning.

Jeannie Bergmann

[SC] Best wishes to you as you get your meds straightened out and deal with this new thyroid issue.

I expect we will be attending the Not-At-WisCon party. Thank you for doing it. Let us know what to bring.

I think *Devil’s Mark* is my favorite of your fine pieces this month.

[JG] I don’t think I want to expand the eco-disaster dream story. It’s depressing enough in just that little glimpse. But it felt good to put it down onto paper and get it out of my brain.

Wow, “Crepuscle” was satisfyingly creepy. Perhaps the carnival ride will evolve further as the kids grow older and nightmares of modern human life will displace the bloody beasts.

Steven Vincent Johnson

[SC] I love the Canoe Trip painting!

Regarding your comment to me, I remember seeing enough of Trump in the media 30+ years ago that I would readily agree with you that he seems to have

gone on a long mental decline since then. He used to be rather slick, sort of greasily charming back in the day. Now he's is a far worse public speaker than W. Bush, which is saying a lot.

I take your point, Steve, and you may be right but I think Trump's got enough survival savvy left, even if it's just muscle memory now, to make it in a cell block or prison yard. That isn't really the point. I need for him to be publically held accountable, even if that means doing time in a private room on a prison psych. ward. I don't want him to keel over from a stroke or heart attack. I don't want him shunned or placed on house arrest. I want him in a locked room, looking out barred windows at the world. I don't much care if he's not his "old" self or even remembers how he got there. But I have to admit that by the end of their terms, I felt much the same way about Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George W.

[JG] I've always liked that painting, Steve. I especially like the subtle coloration of the sky and its reflection in the water below.

I think one of the most revealing recent moments was when Trump apparently forgot that he cheated on one wife while having an affair with his next wife. The story was covered in all of New York's gossip columns and was quite controversial at the time. But even though Trump seems to thrive on being the center of controversy, he apparently forgot all about this chapter in his life.

Elizabeth Matson

[SC] Thanks for the yurt update once again. I hope further securing the ropes will eliminate your leaking water problem. I never paid any attention to Tyvek house wrap until we wrapped it around your yurt. Now I see it everywhere. They just wrapped our garage in it before adding the new siding.

The Scandinavian Design exhibit sounds delightful. The Milwaukee Art Museum is one of my favorites. We don't get out there often enough, but we always enjoy it when we go.

Good for you continuing with the National Park hats. The hat pictures (really, all your pictures) turned out very well this month.

I did not start going to a gym until after I retired. Gyms are a time sink. I don't know how I would have made the time when I was still working. After retirement and until the pandemic, I was going to

the YMCA four-five times a week. I'm reluctant to return partly because of Covid risk and partly because the YMCA is far enough away that I have to drive there. It's too inconvenient and time consuming. I'm seeking a more convenient option.

Project Hail Mary was a book group success. I think listening to the audio-book version was helpful to me getting through those science info-dumps you mentioned. Had I read the book instead, I may also have found them slow-going or just skimmed through them. You were missed at the meeting, but, of course, we all miss meetings from time to time, and not all books work for everyone. I actually like the fact that it isn't our top priority to pick books that everyone will necessarily like.

[JG] I hope you get to spend some time in the yurt this summer. It seems to have been living a life without you. Swarms of hornets, water leaks, splitting seams... I am imagining a story told from its perspective, abandoned on a meadow, left to observe life and seasons change around it.

I am intrigued by the first-Friday-of-the-month story slam at Mother Fools. I'd like to drop in for one of them.



What's New

Our garage: ta da!

It looks much better than it did and we are happy. Siding has been installed and electricity gets hooked up next week. But I have no more exciting videos to share, so I will spare you the details of the final stages of our garage renovation.

When I worked as a graphic designer for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, I periodically

contacted park supervisors and asked them to send me photos of their parks to use in brochures. I wanted images of sailboats silhouetted against colorful sunsets over the lake, dreamy views of hiking paths winding through primeval forests, sunlit waterfalls, and snow-covered fir trees. The park supervisor sent those pictures to me (thank you!), but inevitably, they also sent me photos of recent renovations: New out-houses. Recently constructed garages. They were so proud of the new construction. I remember one photo which featured the proud park supervisor, arms akimbo, and a big smile on his face, standing in the middle of his new, perfectly painted, asphalt parking lot. I would laugh when I flipped through the photos

and showed them to my fellow graphic artists. We would all smile and shake our heads. “Does he want us to publish pictures of his new parking lot in the brochure?” we joked.

And now, just days ago, Scott and I stood on our newly-poured concrete driveway and gazed at our newly sided garage, and beamed at one another. I guess I have a greater understanding now of those park supervisors and their *feelings* about their parking lots.

If you want to see the full video of our garage being moved back and forth, I posted it on YouTube:

<https://youtu.be/jwn3xsPdyJA>

From Becoming

Sunflower Forest, by Jeanne Gomoll

One summer, my biking route to work took me through a deliriously beautiful sunflower forest. Van Gogh would have painted it.

The summer of 2000 was a great season for biking to work and back. I started riding sometime in March. One of the things I enjoyed most about my ride to work were the gardens—which is an unusual thing for me to focus on, believe me, not being what anyone one would think of as a gardening sort of person. You will notice the absence of any actual technical plant names in the following account.

Most of my route to work traversed a five-mile stretch of asphalt path poured over an abandoned railroad bed. (Another mile traversed city streets.) One half-mile section of the path was carefully tended on both sides: one side was taken up with 12 community gardens, and on the other side was a prairie. Both prairie and community garden spread outwards away from the bike path for about a half a city block. I'd enjoyed watching the little prairie evolve over the last six years. Each year, prairie stewards dug up a 12-foot-square garden somewhere within its boundaries, into which they transplanted typical prairie plants. The specially cultivated patch filled with amazing colors and varieties throughout the summer and in the fall its plants released their seed to the winds and propagated downwind across the prairie, which stretches conveniently west-east, which is the direction most winds blow in the Northern Hemisphere. Each

fall, the stewards scrambled through the waist-and shoulder-high grasses, digging out non-prairie plants, i.e., weeds. Every few years, on a windless spring day, those same folks burned the prairie in order to remove invading scrub oak and aspen, which left to their own devices, would have transformed the little prairie strip into a forest. Buffalo did not graze in the area, not that I witnessed anyway. A few weeks after the burn, the ground rippled with green sprouts and flowers. In 2000, the colors were riotous, and each morning as I swung onto my bike, I looked forward to seeing how the view had changed from the day before. I loved those moments when I glided through cool morning breezes along the narrow band of prairie in the middle of a city. It was moments like that when I understand how my childhood images of the Little-House-on-a-Prairie world were pinched, limited visions of a mere un-mowed lawn. The variety of plants in the real thing was amazing and gorgeous.

The gardens on the other side of the bike path had always been fun to watch too. The contrast between chaotic prairie on the south and carefully plotted and planned gardens on the north kept me amused. But it was also useful to take note of which veggies were about to premiere at the farmers' market by the garden harvests. When orangey-pink patches started peeking through the tomato vines, you could be sure that there would be sweet, juicy tomatoes available Saturday morning on the square. The community gardens didn't



function well as sweet corn barometers, though, since there just wasn't enough acreage in a single person's plot to grow anything except corn if they wanted to do that. And most of these urban farmers preferred to plant several dozen kinds of vegetables and flowers in the space allotted, one crop crowding, intermingling, and overlapping the other. It was fun to notice the differences between plots as I rolled past and speculated upon the personalities responsible for the various farming styles. At the beginning of the season, the plots all looked basically alike. The winter temperatures had killed practically everything, and most of the farmers began with good intentions, rototilled their entire plot, and seeded carefully. But even in the early part of the year, the subtle differences became visible. Big compost piles tended throughout the winter gave the plants of some plots an early boost. Terraced topography and lovingly built structures for climbing plants suggested that some farmers had big ambitions for their plots. These differences caused one plot to bloom eventually into a Garden Beautiful photo, while another languished into a virtual briar patch of weeds, which was of course frowned upon fiercely by the prairie stewards across the path who feared contamination of their prairie.

Sunflowers were more numerous this year in the community gardens than they'd ever been before. I'd been meaning to ask someone if sunflower seeds' prices had risen. Perhaps these Madison gardeners all read the same gardening newsletter and hoped to make a killing in the sunflower seed market this fall. In any case, the sunflower plants—a varietal which allowed several sunflowers to bloom on one stalk—were rampant this year. In one patch (or possibly two adjacent patches), farmers had chosen sunflowers as their major crop. The flowers seemed to bleed yellow into the air around them. Smaller lower plants squatted beneath the waving, giant flowers, but a biker spinning past this portion of the gardens might have been excused for exclaiming, "It's a sunflower forest!" which were my exact words one morning. On the third day, while I was filling my packs and getting ready to leave in the morning, I remembered to add a camera to my gear so I could snap some photos of the scene Van Gogh would have been wild to paint. (Did you know that Madison shares approximately the same latitude as the south of France?)

It felt so good to return to biking after my hip replacement. The first weeks were weird. The temperature had crept above 40°F by late March, which was usually my cue for getting my tires and

spokes checked, locating my gear, and switching transportation modes from bus to bike. This year, for a few days, in spite of warming temperatures, I procrastinated and invented convoluted rationalizations. The day I heard myself say that I'd take the bus one more day so that I could finish reading a novel, was the day I realized I was a bit afraid of getting back onto my bike. I realized that I was worried about that first moment when I lifted my right leg up and over the seat. I wasn't sure I would be able to do it, even though the pain that crippled me last year had completely disappeared. Even so, when I finally beat back my fears with logic and gathered my gear together and went out to the garage, I was still nervous. In fact, I found it impossible to simply get onto my bike in the normal way. I positioned my bike so that I could lean my left side against the house as I carefully raised my right leg up and over the bike. That's the way I did it the previous year, just before it got too damned painful to put my weight on my left leg and too scary to try without support. But I didn't have to cheat for long, just a couple days, and I finally convinced myself that my leg wasn't going to ambush my brain with pain. Soon afterward, I was swinging my leg up and over, and a few weeks after that I'd gotten into acceptable aerobic shape so that I could pedal hard and resume my usual habit racing the bus to work...slowing down, of course, to enjoy the sunflower forests along the way.

Further west along the bike path, the narrow fields along the bike path were untended by either community gardeners or prairie stewards. The city mowed the grasses and weeds in the spring and fall, but mostly it all just grew wild. But even these strips of weeds somehow grew unusually colorful this summer. One side effect of the community gardens' highly productive sunflower forests was an unexpected crop of volunteer sunflowers further down the path. Birds, I suspected, could be thanked for this, since the direction was counter to the prevailing winds, and in fact it was not yet the season for unharvested sunflower seeds to actually dry up and blow in any direction. But however the seeds got there, some of them had enough time to grow to four or five feet before the fall mowing, and some of them were located far enough away from the bike path to avoid the blade altogether. I eagerly anticipated a ride to work, several years in the future, that would take me through several miles of sunflower forest arching from both sides of the bike path.