

Madison foursquare

86

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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What's New

Deer Hit

[SC] The following is an email I wrote last month to **Jim Hudson**. The two of us tend to be the drivers for our theater group to our American Player's Theater shows near Spring Green, WI. The incident described happened about 10:00 PM while Jeanne and I were driving back from our last show of the season, *Proof*, on November 17. We'd had a nice dinner before the show and the performance that night was brilliant. Jim drove four of our group in his car for this show. Only Jeanne and I were in our car. Jim's group left APT grounds before we did, so we were not behind each other on the highway.

"FYI to my fellow APT driver—

Jeanne and I hit a deer on the way home from APT last night. We are okay and the car is okay, though we have a new scratch/shallow dent on the passenger side rear door.

We were between Black Earth and Cross Plains. We were wide awake. I'd had coffee at the intermission and we were both listening to the APT Talkback podcast. There was no warning. An adult buck with antlers suddenly scrambled out of the right-hand ditch and moved onto the road. He was too close to miss. I tried to slow the car and, with no on-coming traffic, I started to edge over the center line away from him, but he was just too close. I was not going to jam on the brakes or swerve the car because I did not want to lose control and I wouldn't have missed him anyway.

There was a bump. I pulled over as soon as I could to inspect the damage (I could do nothing about the deer.) As we were looking at the car, a nice young fellow who had been driving behind us, pulled over to check if we were okay. I asked him about the deer. He said he'd seen the whole thing and he saw the deer running across the ditch toward the low field beyond. Hopefully okay, too. Judging from the scratch, only his antlers must have touched our car.

I figure we were lucky that he did not get in front of the car forcing me to hit him head-on. That would have been much worse. He may have been coming up to the road from behind a culvert. His eyes never shone. His eyes never caught our



Scott hanging wreath on garage

headlights, so no shine. I hope he's okay, but I also hope he has a bitchin' headache this morning because he scared the crap out of us for a couple minutes.

Anyway, just a heads up. Be careful out there."



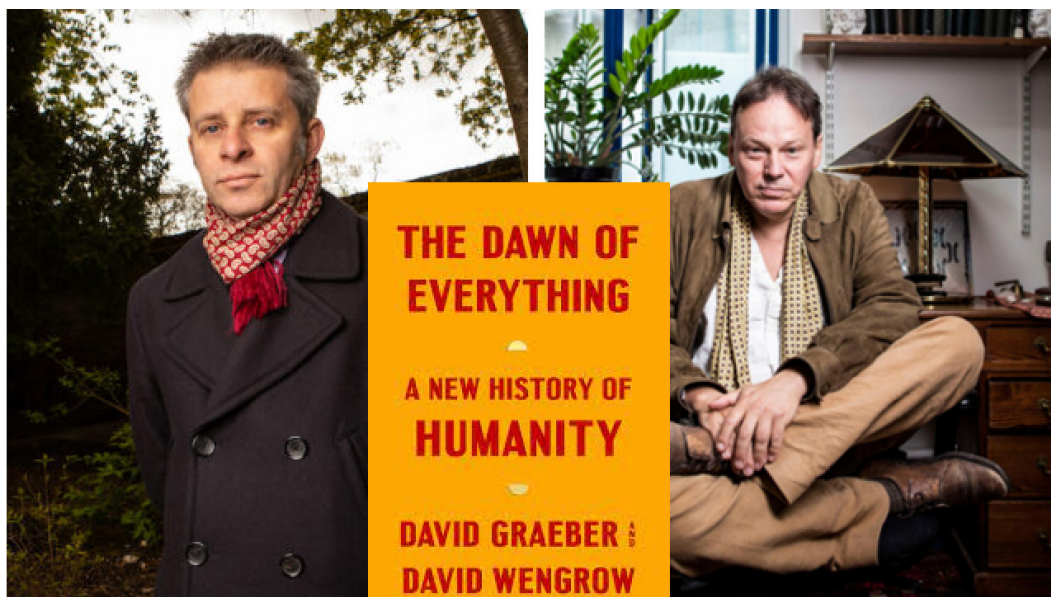
The Dawn of Everything

[SC] I spent a big chunk of October and November reading *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* by David Graeber and David Wengrow. I had read a review that sounded intriguing a while ago and I picked up a copy when it appeared in paperback. Graeber was a professor of anthropology at the London School of Economics. He died in 2020. Wengrow is a professor of comparative archaeology at University College of London. Their book is about re-evaluating our long-held beliefs in how ancient humans really lived and how civilization evolved. Here they describe one version of how we tend to view early human history.

"Once upon a time, the story goes, we were hunter-gatherers, living in a prolonged state of childlike innocence, in tiny bands. These bands were egalitarian; they could be for the very reason that they were so small. It was only after the 'Agricultural Revolution,' and then still more after the rise of cities, that this happy condition came to an end, ushering in 'civilization' and 'the state' – which also meant the appearance of written literature, science and philosophy, but at the same time, almost everything bad in human life: patriarchy, standing armies, mass executions and annoying bureaucrats demanding we spend much of our time filling out forms."

They go on to describe how this view is bunk and how our actual history is much messier and more interesting than we knew.

Since I have very little formal background in either anthropology or archaeology, the book was a bit of a slog for me at times. As you see above, the authors displayed a sense of humor, but the book still tended toward the academic with extensive footnotes. They also assumed a familiarity with archaeological sites and discoveries I had not heard of. Yet the book was full of ideas and revelations about humanity's past and thoughts on what a clearer view of our real history might mean for us today. It's not a casual read, but I think I would profit from reading it a second time in a few years. They cited work by Alfred Louis Kroeber (Ursula K. LeGuin's father) in several places and at one point even discussed one of LeGuin's stories.

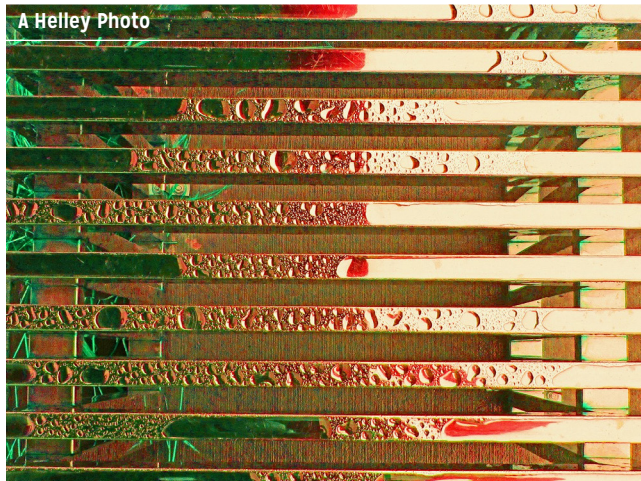




Don Helley, apparently surprised to find his work on display.

Don Helley Art

[JG] Scott and I went to Don Helley's Art opening at the State Line Distillery. There are some really wonderful photos displayed—all playing with light, reflection, depth, and abstraction. You can see them at the State Line Distillery through the end of January. We hung out for a while on opening night with **Luke** and Julie McGuff who also attended opening night.



A Helley Photo



My favorite photo of Don's – a self portrait

Comments

Covers

[SC] Great job on the covers, Steve and Darlene. It's interesting to compare the colors in the version on the front cover to the photos on the back.

[JG] Beautiful afghan and nicely lit cover!

Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] Thanks as always for the report on the wonderful annual Lytheria production. I always look forward to finding out what you guys came up with this year. Mad Max was a very inspired idea, I thought. We can expect to get a respectable number of trick-or-treaters at our house every year, but I run hot and cold as to whether I'm in the mood to deal with them or not. Some years I look forward to it and some years I'd rather avoid the whole thing and go out to a movie and dinner.

I liked your thoughts on "things." I feel Jeanne and I have reached that point in life when we have to rethink our relationship to things. As we are getting older, and have had the experience of seeing what happens to stuff after the owner(s) pass away, we are looking at our collected possessions with an eye to the future and what sort of outcome would like to see. We want to keep what we need and what matters to us, while ejecting what we don't really "need." A process I think is harder than it sounds.

[JG] I enjoy hearing from you and **Greg** about your Lytheria productions so much! I wonder if many of your patrons live outside your neighborhood and make special trips to experience the show each year. If so, parking must be hard to find on your street that night! After 37 years, some of your earliest patrons have no doubt grown up and bring their children and grandchildren to visit you on Halloween night. What a cool tradition! I'm sorry this year was so cold though.

Talking about giant yard decorations.... Last week we were visiting Scott's family in Anamosa, Iowa, and drove past a yard decorated with a dozen or more inflated creatures – Santa and an assortment of other holiday-related and a few Marvel-universe characters. It wasn't a particularly large yard and so the scene was almost alarmingly crowded and chaotic. No plot was discernible. Later that night we drove past the same house and noticed that all the creatures had been de-flated and lay in sad latex puddles on the lawn. A Grinch hit-squad had gunned down all the creatures! Or so we theorized. Or maybe an offended neighbor unplugged the display.

I'm glad you persevered, even with an injured foot, and were able to attend Benjamin Bagby's performance. I feel like I am sharing a little bit of your experience – at least the part involving listening to the pronunciation of ancient Anglo-Saxon words – as Scott and I listen to the audio recordings of Nicola Griffith's *Hild* and *Menewood*. I recognized your use of the word "scop," too, which I wouldn't have before reading/listening to these two books. (We are both reading along on our iPads as a very talented performer reads the books aloud to us.) I need to do a little research about languages in seventh-century Britain. Hild knows many languages (including Irish and Latin), but relies most often on two very different "local" languages: "British" and "Anglisc." After we finish with *Menewood* I plan to learn more.

Things! One could write a book, maybe several, with that title. Our relationship with things is so complicated. My relationship with things resembles yours more than it reflects those who argue that things distract us from truly valuable experiences, relationships, and personal growth. The most valuable things to me are what I make with my hands, in that they reflect my aesthetics and are sculpted with my understanding of the world. Self-made things, for me, are attempts to both discover and express my experiences, relationships and epiphanies. I often understand my feelings and opinions more clearly only after writing or making art about them. And as you point out in your essay, things are embedded with the memories of their use, and for that alone, they become dear to us. Yes.

On the other hand...

I can understand why young people might think derisively about cars, big houses, etc., if they have concluded that they will likely not be able to afford them, or if they are angry that fossil-fuel-guzzling vehicles are poisoning the atmosphere and that wild spaces are being destroyed by sprawling urbanization. I certainly sympathize with the rejection of the idea that "the person who dies with the most toys wins." It's all about rejecting the "things" valued by previous generations because they don't fit in with the ideals and life experiences of a new generation.

So, with that in mind, Scott and I are trying to look at our possessions from the perspective of our likely heirs. Who is likely to need or value this or that? Some things are easy – like finding a home for my Tiptree/Otherwise Award books. Some things are harder. In addition, we're also looking at our things from the

perspective of our older selves. Our needs and wants have evolved over the years.

I loved the poem about Autumn's assault by Vortex!

I wish you good health and good healing after your January surgery!

Greg Rihn

[SC] Thanks for keeping us in the loop on your progress with the job hunt. Thanks also for your comments to us on *Richard II*. I'm still curious about it, maybe APT will do it sometime. I find that Shakespeare's history plays are more entertaining if I do a bit of historical research beforehand.

I liked all your reviews. *Candide*, *Beyond King Tut*, and Loreena McKennitt were the standouts to me. Most of your reviews end up being positive, which signals to me that you guys do a good job of choosing the shows you see. We try to, but we recently finished the four-part HBO MAX series *Catherine the Great* starring Helen Mirren, and it was fairly dreadful. If it had been any more than four parts, we'd have dumped it. Very sketchy history but lots of sex and angst about sex, relationships, jealousy, and struggles for power. Dull dialog competing with poor acting (with the exception of Mirren and a few others). The best parts were the production values. The sets, costumes and make-up were lush and gorgeous.

[JG] Re your summary of *Candide*... I had a great aunt whose name was Cunegunda. I always thought it was one of the most unusual names I'd ever heard. I forgot that Voltaire used it in his novelette and I wonder now if one of my Polish relatives was an admirer of the story or play.

Steven Vincent Johnson

[SC] Congratulations on the paint job on the house and your success saving the back porch. It looks great! I think finishing house projects is very satisfying, even if all I'm doing is paying the bill. With houses there's always more to do, of course.

I'm looking forward to seeing an animated version of your orbital mechanics ideas (it might help me understand it), or a student-built model.

Interesting thoughts on clouds and life.

[JG] Congratulations on your home renovations! Good job.

Darlene Coltrain

[SC] Thanks for the “action” shots of Steve in non-orbital motion. In my experience with con committees there are very few “simple” ideas that can’t be improved by making them more complicated. Too bad about those “heated discussions” but the finished product was beautiful and you deserve a cup of tea, something sweet, and a quiet moment.

[JG] The story of how the blankie cover came to be reminds me of the epic quest to acquire a good photo of the Tiptree quilt, which was significantly bigger than king-sized. The first time we took its picture, we hung it onto the back of **Diane**’s house on Kendall Avenue, from the second floor.



That gave us some amusing, though not very detailed photos. The next time we laid it on several conference room tables lit by fluorescent lights, and tried taking a photo in much the same way as **SteveVJ** took a picture of your blankie, standing on a chair, on tip-toes, with arms raised, and lights flooding. None of these methods were satisfactory, not least of all for color accuracy. Finally, we ended up hiring a photographer, Chris Maitzen, who specialized in large-scale photography and hung the quilt inside his barn studio. That’s the image that I used for the Tiptree Quilt poster. It always sounds easier than it turns out to be. Congratulations for surviving the project.

I referred to your blankie as an “afghan” in the first mailing comment. That’s the word we always used in our family when my mom made one. Do you use that term?

Luke McGuff

[SC] Jeanne and I have finished *Hild* and (as I write this) we are about halfway through *Menewood*. We listened to the audio-book versions (with terrific accents and pronunciation of difficult old words) but also followed along with the eBook versions. We tried just listening to *Hild* and following along on the maps and other supplementary information but it was too confusing because so many of the words do not look like what they sound like, so we decided to read along with the text. That was very helpful. Very dense and detailed, but fabulous, stories.

One of the reasons I enjoy reading about your walks and birding adventures is because they are such a change from what most of us are doing for entertainment. I go on bike rides or walks most days, weather permitting, but I tend to stick to neighborhoods. I don’t know for sure, but I don’t think there are any coffee shops in the middle of Cherokee Marsh or the 9 Springs E Way.

It’s a relief to hear that you do like your job, even with the challenges. I hope you are able to make your goal. It sounds like your coworkers are on your side, that’s good news.

It was fun seeing you and Julie at Don Helley’s gallery opening. More of that please.

[JG] As Scott says above. We are loving *Hild* and *Menewood*. One of the things, among many, that struck me was Griffith’s descriptions of how so many tasks necessary for survival in seventh century Britain were incredibly labor-intensive, and relied frequently upon on-the-spot invention, in contrast to how simple these tasks have now become. Most people have no idea how most of the tools and comforts we rely upon are actually made. I was especially impressed by how much work was involved for Hild to simply write a letter: slaughtering the sheep, skinning the sheep, removing the hair, covering the skin with a lime solution, stretching the skin on a wooden frame, and then scraping and buffing the skin over and over again ... and that’s just to make a few sheets of parchment! Hild also made her own ink, wax for the seal, wax stamp, and pen. It took weeks! And after writing the letter, she sent it off via a network of friends and could only hope that it would actually be delivered, eventually.

I have also been thinking of Nicola Griffith’s Aud Torvingen series – *The Blue Place*, *Stay*, and *Always*. I read them a long time ago and liked them a lot, but my memory is a little foggy. I do remember that the main



character of these books is a woman Norwegian ex-cop named Aud Torvingen, who was amazingly competent in almost every field. She was an expert fighter, almost super-human in her physical abilities, and an expert user of all weapons. She was also brilliant, Sherlock-Holmes-level perceptive, and incredibly learned in many fields – language, art, cooking, wine, science, history, and much more. I remember thinking that Aud Torvingen was a superhero without a costume. I wonder now, if Griffith went looking for a historical person whose exploits might have been accomplished by an Aud-like character. And that is how she settled on Hild as the heroine for her latest novels.

Nicola Griffith's women characters are literally "strong women," and that reminds me... Many years ago, I had a long conversation with Gwyneth Jones about so-called "strong women" characters. We were talking about her latest novel in the *Bold as Love* series (a science-fictional version of the King Arthur myth) and I praised Florinda as being a strong woman character. Gwyneth sort of exploded and went on a rant about how she hated that phrase and how she felt that some feminists believed that all characters in books written by feminist authors should be strong. She pointed out that Florinda wasn't at all physically strong. I agreed and said that I thought there were all sorts of ways for a character to be strong – that I thought Florinda was a dynamic and formidable character. Gwyneth seemed mollified, and ever since, I have wondered if this was one of those subtle ways that British and American feminism differed – each with a slightly different vocabulary and emphasis. But here I am now, reading what I would call a very feminist work (I am loving all the women leaders taking charge in *Menewood!*), by a British-born author, set in Britain, whose almost super-humanly strong character, Hild, would probably have made Gwyneth Jones sort of uncomfortable. I hope I get to continue this conversation with Gwyneth someday.

It sounds like you have co-workers that like you and value your work. I'm glad you're enjoying it. Make sure to take care of yourself so that you don't wear yourself out before getting to your 5-year goal!

Walter Freitag

[SC] I think your separation of TV options into "content" vs. "shows" makes sense, though from a television/streaming service executive's viewpoint, it's all content. From their viewpoint, it only matters who is paying to create it. In my case, I like both content and shows almost equally, it just depends on

my mood and the time I'm willing to make available to watch. I think I have a fairly broad taste in shows, which probably helps me find more stuff I think is good because I'm willing to take a chance on something. With content, I'm less willing to watch just anything. I prefer fact-based documentaries, how-to videos and news from sources I judge to be reliable. Content has to be more compelling to me than choosing to spend the time reading an interesting non-fiction book.

Andy Hooper

[SC] Entertaining Horror Host article once again. Somehow it seems appropriate that L.A. would be the home to the most costumed hosts, since it's also home to many of the horror movies and source of much of the monster culture. It was good to see that some of the hosts went on to work in movies and on TV shows.

Regarding your comment to us on marriage, I agree that back in the mid-1980's when Jeanne and I met, marriage seemed to be losing its relevance unless you were planning to raise kids. Certainly, that's the way I looked at it. Since Jeanne and I had agreed early on that kids would not be in the picture, why would we need to marry? In the years since then marriage has become vital for many people to hold on to health care coverage or bolster immigration status, plus there was the fight for gays and lesbians to legally marry. Intermarriage of people of different races or religions remained stubbornly controversial. Marriage remains the simplest and most straightforward way to settle an estate, once you begin to accumulate significant assets. Marriage has not become the anachronism I thought it would be.

[JG] I think Jon Stewart isn't as interesting as he was when he was doing *The Daily Show*. I still admire him for his activism but I haven't kept up with his Apple TV show. I'm pretty sure that his disappointing ratings must account, in large part, for his show being canceled. Nevertheless, I can totally understand not wanting to add the fee of yet another streaming service to your budget. I am thinking that the best strategy might be for us to eventually become serial streamers: signing up for one or two services at a time and when we've seen the shows that interest us on those platforms, canceling, and signing up for another one. And so on. But I suspect that since Apple's offerings, especially its science fiction, are so excellent,

that we'd keep Apple for a much longer period than other services.

As for my needing a LoC column (thanks for the compliment) – if we end up getting any responses from the zines posted on FANAC, I will try to include them. But so far, I don't know if anyone has taken notice of the *Madison Foursquare* pdfs posted there. No LoCs yet.

I hooted at your hate-ode to asparagus. I don't share your opinion but have no doubt about your sincerity!

Carrie Root

[SC] We hosted thirteen of Jeanne's family for Thanksgiving this year (including the two of us) and we had to use the dreaded card table extension to seat everyone. We literally used it as an extension to our dining table, which pretty much maxed out our capacity for a sit-down dinner together. They're all adults now. It was easier to smooch them together when some of them were kids. If the lone single niece ever decides to bring a friend to Thanksgiving, we will be in trouble. As a side-note, my sister and sister-in-law were both appalled when I told them we were having thirteen at one table. Apparently, my mom was even more superstitious than I remembered because they both insisted that mom would never have permitted thirteen people at a table in her house.

[JG] To continue Scott's story of our unlucky dinner party... I was amused almost to choking when Scott's sister informed us that we had luckily avoided demonic repercussions for daring to seat 13 people at our table because of the card table extension. It turns out this superstition has a loophole: that one must seat 13 people around one – specifically ONE, *not* TWO kluged-together tables – in order to feel the full brunt of the curse.

The dinner turned out fine. Surprisingly, one of the most popular dishes was what I chose to make as a vegetarian main course (in addition to a 23-pound spatchcocked turkey), because my nephew Jake's sweetie, Olivia, is a vegetarian. I made spinach-leek lasagna and everyone loved it. Scott and I enjoyed finishing off the dish as leftovers a couple days later.

Season two of *True Detectives* was actually on a real situation and had a Wisconsin connection. Did you hear about how Scott Walker campaigned for Wisconsin Governor promising that he would halt the Chicago-Milwaukee-Madison-Minneapolis high speed rail project? And then when he won the election, that's just

what he did? He'd assured voters that he would use the billions of dollars in federal funding for something else, other projects, than the trains, but when he won the election and turned down the funding, the Feds clawed back the money. If we refused to use the money for what it was intended, they elected to give it away to a state that would. And that state turned out to be California, which planned a high-speed train line between Los Angeles and San Francisco. THAT'S the pot of money which inspired all the corruption described in season two of *True Detectives*. It was sort of interesting to find out that the pot of money was basically doomed to be wasted from the outset.

Elizabeth Matson

[SC] I'm glad you chose to share your grandfather's story in the apa. Your performance brought the story to life, but it's quite compelling on its own, and your photos were an additional treat. What a lovely tribute to him.

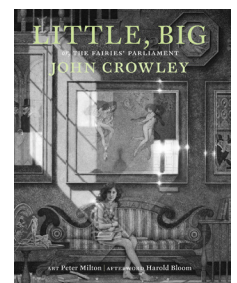
[JG] I'm so glad your family saved your Papa's letters and that you were able to piece together this lovely memorial of him.

Jae Leslie Adams

[SC] Welcome to the new world of cars. We have a Kia the same year as yours. Kia is the cheaper version of Hyundai, so reading about your tour of the car's interior sounded familiar to me with only a few differences. A few years before I retired one of my colleagues bought a new Prius. He told me later that Toyota suggested he and his wife take a class they were offering to learn to operate the car. These days most cars are little more than rolling computers, as you are discovering. Keep the owner's manual handy, there are many things that can beep at you that you will want to be able to translate into human.

Regarding your comments to me, on driving, I do not think I knew you didn't drive until you were 30, and living in Madison. I'm impressed. I learned to drive in the country and did not venture into a city until I felt confident I could control the car. I'd have been a lot more nervous about learning to drive from the start in a city.

On *Little, Big*, **Steve S.** has suggested a plan of action on the book and I have included a schedule on the next page for anyone who wants to weigh in.



Little, Big reading schedule

Jan, Chapter 1, books 1–3	July, Chapter 4, books 1–2
Feb, Chapter 1, books 4–5	Aug, Chapter 4, books 3–4
March, Chapter 2, books 1–2	Sept, Chapter 5, books 1–2
April, Chapter 2, books 3–4	Oct, Chapter 5, books 3–4
May, Chapter 3, books 1–2	Nov, Chapter 6, books 1–3
June, Chapter 3, books 3–4	Dec, Chapter 6, books 4–5

So read Chapter 1, books 1-3 and discuss in the January *Turbo*.

“Winter is an annual disaster, but you can plan for it.” Well said.

[JG] I asked Joe Siclari if he wants copies of the issues of *Cube* you have (#56-63) for FANAC and he wrote back saying, “yes, please!” I’d be glad to scan them for Joe, or you could just mail them to him if your goal is to get rid of stuff. Let me know.

Re postcards. Except for the occasional brilliant art postcards that we receive from you, most of the postcards I receive in the mail are mass-produced advertisements and I usually drop them into the recycling bin without examining them carefully. But the other day, I got an unusually interesting one from a marketing guy. A guy, Eric Thompson, apparently wants to help me attract clients and doesn’t realize that I have retired from the graphic design biz, at least in terms of needing clients. The postcard wasn’t the interesting thing. It was the address label. Above my business name (Union Street Design, LLC), address, and instead of my name and title, it said: “Deliver to the hands of -The Artistic Overlord-” Much laughter. I haven’t actually tossed the card yet.

Thanks for your comments on my graduation/marriage essay. We are in agreement.

Jim Hudson & Diane Martin

[SC] I’m glad COVID did not ruin your trip, at least. If you managed to do and see some cool stuff, relax, and be pampered a bit, that’s a win.

We also enjoyed *Clyde’s* at Forward Theater. This is shaping up to be a very good year for them. I think we must have seen *Proof* back when you did in 2002. There are still times when I miss the old Madison Rep under Scott Glasser and Joe Hanreddy.

Another great batch of photos. I found it hard to pick a favorite this time, but the sweet one of the newlyweds in Central Park has to be one.

[JG] We haven’t watched *For All Mankind* yet. We’re waiting for more episodes to drop before starting season four. But we’ve seen other shows, listed below alphabetically because I can’t remember in what order we watched them.

Catherine the Great (Max) Starring Helen Mirren and Jason Clarke (as Potemkin). For a historical drama centered on political intrigue, there wasn’t much history or political intrigue in this series. It was lovely to see Helen Mirren swaggering through opulent sets, wearing gorgeous costumes, and obviously enjoying her commanding role, but what the series mostly wanted to tell us about was the love affair between Catherine and Potemkin. Basically, they couldn’t keep their hands off one another, and at the same time couldn’t live together because they both had such strong personalities. Catherine suffers a stroke and dies in the final episode, so there is no sense that the producers expected to continue with a second season. Which is fine.

The Crown (Netflix) The sixth and final season of this fascinating series about Queen Elizabeth starred Imelda Staunton as the eldest reincarnation of the monarch. The season was divided into two parts and the second part dropped in mid-December. The first part was mostly focused on Princess Diana, but I most enjoyed the second part in which elder Queen Elizabeth (Staunton) conversed with two younger versions – Claire Foy (youngest) and Olivia Colman (middle) – as





she contemplated the end of her reign. I liked how the show portrayed the relationship between William and his grandmother. I'm not an Anglophile, and I'm aware that the story told on-screen contained generous doses of fiction, but I liked it quite a bit.

Fingernails (Apple TV) Starring Jessie Buckley. In the world of this movie, science is able to tell a couple whether they have (or have not) found true love. Some people split up when they get negative results, even though they seemed to be happy beforehand. Other couples decide not to get tested and worry nevertheless that their true love might be someone else. One character discovers that she is his true love, but that he is not her true love. The whole testing thing seems flawed, stupid, and cruel, which is highlighted by the extremely weird and painful testing method that requires the extraction of a whole fingernail from each person tested. Weird and frankly, not much fun.

The Gilded Age (Max) Starring Christine Baranski, Cynthia Nixon, Carrie Coon, Louisa Jacobson. Studying the American Gilded Age offers lots of lessons applicable to current-day America. Both then and now, the gap between extremely wealthy and poor exacerbates many societal problems. The show does offer quite a few insights if you're looking for them, but you sort of have to read between the lines. There are several real historical events and people who show up embedded in *The Gilded Age* plot lines – Thomas Edison's electrification of the New York Times building, Jim Crow laws, railroad magnates and robber barons, railroad strikes, Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, Caroline Astor's and Gloria Vanderbilt's opera house feud, and a field trip to the Tuskegee Institute. My favorite character, Agnes van Rhijn, is played by Christine Baranski and she is splendid. Her character resembles Maggie Smith's Violet Crawley in *Downton Abbey*. Neither suffers fools and both are very witty, though Agnes is younger and more vital. *The Gilded Age* is primarily a soap opera set in the late 1800s with sumptuous costumes and wonderful acting. I don't care. I really enjoy it.

The Holdovers (theater, now streaming on Apple TV) Starring Paul Giamatti as a curmudgeonly instructor at

a New England prep school in 1970, who remains on campus during Christmas break to babysit a handful of students with nowhere to go. He soon forms an unlikely bond with a brainy but damaged troublemaker, and with the school's head cook, a woman who just lost a son in the Vietnam War. The

movie *looked* as if it had been made in 1970, which was interesting. Well-acted and a really good story that doesn't proceed as one might expect.

The Last Movie Stars (Max) A six-part series documenting the journey of Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward from struggling actors to famous movie stars. The series was directed by Ethan Hawke, who was given access to audio-tapes recorded by Paul Newman that were originally intended to form the basis for an autobiography. But Newman dropped the project. Hawke could not get permission to use Newman's recorded voice, and so George Clooney voiced Newman's part. Laura Linney's voice was used for Woodward. Highly recommended.

Napoleon (theater; now streaming on Apple TV) Starring Joaquin Phoenix. This movie is sort of the antithesis of history told as a "great man" narrative. There are spectacular battle scenes, including a horrific "trap" Napoleon set for a Russian army on a frozen river, and the incredible battle at Waterloo which finally clarified for me how Wellington's infantry square strategy worked. Phoenix did a great job, I think, showing how Napoleon commanded the love and loyalty of his troops, but the movie wasn't much interested in the larger historical drama. Which was OK. Recommended.

The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar (Netflix) A very Wes Anderson production starring Benedict Cumberbatch and Ralph Fiennes, and others. It is based on a Roald Dahl short story and is about a rich man who discovers a clairvoyant guru who is able to see without his eyes. The rich man (Cumberbatch) learns the technique in order to cheat at gambling. In the visual Wes Anderson style that resembles a children's picture book (in my opinion). Weird but fun.

Pat Hario

[SC] Lovely comments, as always, but, just so you know, we still want that trip report.

Regarding your comment to me, I love the movie *American Graffiti*. It came out the summer before my senior year in high school. I have seen it, or parts of it many times. The reason I say "parts of it"

was because it had a long run at my hometown movie theater when it came out and a buddy of mine was one of the projectionists. I used to slip in the street-level stairway entrance to the projection booth, visit him while he was working, and see parts of the movie several times.

[JG] Season three of *Good Omens* has been approved. Yay!

You think of Mass as a time to sit quietly and think about life? Maybe Masses have changed since I attended mumble-mumble years ago. (Wow, that would be 59 years ago, now that I do the math. It would be astounding if Masses had not changed. A lot.) Anyway, I never got much thinking done during mass because of the constant stand up, sit down, kneel, sit down, stand up, sing this, chant that, stand in line, etc. etc. What I did instead was claim to go to a later mass than the one Mom attended, and then to spend the hour sitting somewhere inconspicuous and read a book until the mass let out and I could go home again.

Ellen Klages likes clowns for real. She even went to clown school.

Karl Hailman & Hope Kiefer

[SC] Good grief, Karl! I hope you are recovering without further complications. I could see how this might have gone worse in a couple ways, but at least you weren't on a ladder. These days I hardly do anything outside without my phone in my pocket.

I enjoyed the story about your trip east to the wedding. Getting makeup help at Nordstrom's was a good idea. In the past that floozy gin has tried to convince me I can dance, too. No one needs to see that.

I'm so sorry for the loss of Mike DuCharme, Larry Taylor and Mazy the cat.

[JG] I have a question Karl: In spite of frequent hiking and rollerblading, two dances at the wedding exhausts you??

I also like the make-up counter solution to Karl's black eye. Seems like something that would fit into the plot of an action-adventure spy movie. The hero steps into Nordstrom's looking completely different than how they appear when they exit and thus evades their followers.

Ruth & Jim Nichols

[SC] I wish you all the best on your upcoming cataract surgery, Ruth. Welcome to Medicare, Jim.

Nice photo of Alex and Tom in Hawaii. After our two trips to Hawaii, my favorite island is the big island of Hawaii. I like the variety of having eight climate zones and three distinct volcanoes on one island. If you're tired of the weather where you are, just drive around the island until you find something completely different.

[JG] Neat effect with blue type overlaying the leaf photo on page 1, but I'm afraid my eyes protested strenuously and I had to give up trying to read it. I hope I didn't miss a life-changing, crucial story.

Lovely photos!



Scott hanging wreath on garage, impressionistically

Ouch, again, though I really don't want to dwell on it.

One of the things I dislike about getting older is that we necessarily pay more and more attention to our body's failures. So many conversations among groups of my aging friends are dominated by updates on our various illnesses, pain, limitations, and doctors' appointments. It makes perfect sense that we talk about things that require our attention, but I get nervous about the feedback loop engaged when I talk about health concerns more than any other topic. I fear that I will gradually begin to think of myself mostly in terms of my health issues.

I remember sharing a concern with my brothers that it might be getting dangerous for Dad to walk around the house without a cane or a walker. To allay our fears, Dad regaled us with a detailed description of how he moved from bed to bathroom and back to bed at night, describing how he leaned on a specific spot on the bathroom vanity and took advantage of certain handholds to make his way safely across the bathroom floor. He was obviously proud of his strategy and had given a lot of thought to the mechanics of moving around his home. Even as his explanation reminded me of my own careful strategy to mount and dismount my bike in spite of hip pain, I dreaded the thought that my world would someday shrink to such a small focus.

It may be that the fear of a shrinking life focus explained my reluctance to talk about my own health issues. I feared that if I talked about the pain in my ankle, or my hip, or my knee (all of which have been sites of major medical problems), I would pay more attention to that pain and would then find it more difficult to distract myself from it. Talking about something made it more real for me. It was the downside of my “Pretend to Become” model. Talking about something worked the same way as pretending to be something: the something became real.

In 1998 I attended a “Perceptual Learning Theory” workshop and gained a bit of insight about my tendency to avoid thinking about physical issues. Our teacher explained that there were three learning “modes”—audio, visual and kinesthetic.

Audio: We listened to a tape recording of a rambling one-way conversation. Some people listened and were easily able to summarize what they'd heard. Other people got so irritated by the fast-talking, disorganized

speaker, that they tuned out most of the recording. I was mostly amused and constructed a parallel story of what the speaker's companion might be thinking of the long-winded story.

Visual: We each examined two very complicated images with no obvious connection between them. Some people described their pictures with lots of detail; others were amazed that anyone could say more than a few words about them. I found lots of detail and constructed several elaborate hypotheses involving religious symbolism and color theory to account for the two pictures' juxtaposition.

Kinesthetic: We were asked to close our eyes, dive inside ourselves, and think about what we felt for a couple minutes. I found myself tongue-tied. I'd barely begun to sweep away the distractions of thoughts and conversations before people started cataloging the sensations they were feeling in their *eyebrows*, for god's sake! When it was my turn, all I could say was that my elbow hurt, that I must have bruised it earlier in the day. I couldn't remember when it had happened. I realized that I sounded very much like the people who expressed exasperation that there should be more than a couple words to be said about a conversation or picture.

That workshop showed me that I tended to ignore sensations and often have a hard time describing what I am feeling. Perhaps I should have spent more effort talking or writing about my health contemporaneously, rather than doing so only after the problem was resolved, when I could construct a funny story about it in the past tense. But my behavior didn't change much in the years after that workshop-inspired epiphany. I haven't developed a better kinesthetic awareness of my body.

So, it shouldn't come as a surprise to you that I've chosen to write about *all* my major health issues in this one single story. I don't want to dwell on this stuff here in this book any more than I like talking about them anywhere else. On the other hand, some of my health issues have led to significant changes in my life, so I can't totally ignore them. You can ignore them if you want to! But if you continue reading, I promise to try my best to tell interesting stories and to focus on the amusing bits.