

# Madison FOURSQUARE

20

## Winter Issues

[SC] As I write this, the time change was last weekend and spring feels like it's on the way for real, at last. It has not been a hard winter for me, really. The snowfalls we had here in Madison were manageable. I say this judging that the heaviest snows we got were easily handled by our smaller snowblower and several were minor enough that I just scraped them off by hand. I took a risk last fall and elected not to spend the money to get our larger snowblower ready for winter this year. I have to make special arrangements to have it taken in and returned from service since I lack either a pickup truck or a trailer to take it in myself. After seeing the freak snowfalls they had elsewhere around the country, I probably won't take a chance like that again. We had a cold snap in January that grew tiresome, but not as grueling as in past winters. Of course the biggest winter hassle of all is the fight to get back and forth to work. Now that I'm retired I'm finding winter is much easier to live with.



No more commuting to work. Dept of Transportation building, Soon to be destroyed (imploded?). Exciting!

One of the winter issues we have been dealing with this year is car trouble with our 1999 Lincoln Continental, our only vehicle. A starting problem in December ended up requiring us to replace a fuel pump. After that we had a mysterious problem with the engine, a slight jerking whenever I was accelerating. This went on for a bit and we had our usually reliable mechanic look at it twice. The second time, he had the car for two days. He also could feel the problem behavior, but after doing everything he could think of to the engine he had to just give up and told us to try taking it to a dealer. It turned out the transmission was shot, something that did not occur to either our mechanic, Dan, or me. Of course you can't get a new transmission for a 20-year-old

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Our trusty 1999 Lincoln

car, you have to get a rebuilt one. The dealer's supplier of rebuilt transmissions for ancient Lincolns did not happen to have one for our year, so they had to rebuild one for us, which takes about 2 weeks. All of this has meant that we have had a lot of experience renting cars lately.

I have mentioned before that it is good for us to rent cars now and again, as technology moves forward steadily in the automobile world. I have come to be familiar with keyless starting and those (wonderful) rearview cameras and other modern features. We still love our old car. These latest troubles are the most serious issues we have ever had with it. In the decade or longer that we have owned it, we only had to maintain it regularly and replace tires, brakes and one battery. It has about 185,000 miles on it and still looks pretty good since we got it repainted four years ago. We will probably keep it a bit longer, but we are starting to think about our next car and rentals can help sort out what we most care about in our next car.

After our mechanic threw in the towel trying to figure out what was wrong with the car on a Wednesday, I called the Ford dealer for an appointment. The soonest we could get in would be the following Tuesday. I saw no reason not to just drive the car until then, but returning from an errand the following day the Check Engine Light came on. I called the dealer back and asked if I could drop off our car now, even though our appointment would not be until the next week since I could no longer drive it anyway. They said sure, and they let me know they had a discount with Enterprise on a rental.

I should mention that, even though I drive an old Lincoln Continental, I don't much care for big SUV's, pickups or vans. They feel top heavy and much too bulky. Jeanne does not like having to climb up into a seat, either. I always avoid getting trucks as rentals unless I specifically need a truck.

I ended up at Enterprise rental mid-afternoon on a Thursday. Over time I have learned that rental places are often short of cars by the afternoon. I asked for a compact. They only had two cars left on their whole lot, a minivan and...a Chevy Camero. "Jeez," I said. "I guess I'll take the Camero."

I have not driven a car like this since my 1977 Pontiac Trans Am back in the early eighties. Yes, that was the car from *Smokey and the Bandit*, except mine did not have a removable T-top. It was black with a big Firebird on the hood (or "Fire-chicken" as an old buddy used to call it, derisively.) The Camero was not as flashy as my old Firebird but it growled to life very satisfyingly in the rental car lot. I had some fun driving it home down the Beltline. I could not wait to show it to Jeanne. I expected she would flip, but my only other choice had been a van!

I got home and fetched Jeanne right away to show her what I got. As we got out to the driveway, I gestured toward the car. Her reaction?

"What?" she said.

"It's a *Camero!* A muscle car! I really had no choice." I said.

She shrugged. It just looked like any other small car to her. I suddenly remembered that she has almost no interest in cars themselves beyond their practical capabilities. She would likely see a Rolls Royce in the driveway as just a large car with nice curves. She thinks most sport cars look like bugs. Visually she likes cars with curves and interesting colors, but she probably could not distinguish a Tesla from a Toyota. She could care less about the engine under the hood beyond providing the boost she wants when she merges into traffic. What a letdown. Oh well, at least I would enjoy it.

We kept it over the weekend and by Monday morning we were both ready to take it back and ask to switch it out for something more boring. When it comes to cars, a lot has changed for me since I was 25. The Camero was still fun on the Beltline but it was hard to see out of. The front windshield was kind of squeezed like it was squinting slightly, the side windows were small and the back window was utterly useless. It had a rearview camera, which only works in reverse, otherwise you had the extra big side



The Camero

mirrors for seeing behind you. It sat close to the ground which made for a rough ride in the city. You could feel every bump as if your ass was riding on a washboard. The trunk and back seat were tiny. The biggest problem for us were the two doors. I had forgotten how big the doors are on a two-door car. We usually go shopping on Saturday morning for our food and supplies for the week. This means several stops in parking lots. The Camero was poorly suited to this as it made getting in and out of the car with those huge doors a struggle. I like to park rental cars in our garage at night for security. The Camero was much smaller than our Lincoln, but I had a hell of a time putting it in the garage because our 1920's era garage has a pole in the middle. The big doors and the side mirrors on the Camero meant I could not get the car in without having to open my door into the pole to climb out.

At least the experience will help us in deciding what not to get in our next car.

## Comments, Turbo #380 Cover

[SC] Magnificent cover, Steve, even if I have only the faintest idea what it means. Even after reading the explanation in your zine. Indecipherable science can be impressive.

## Greg Rihn

[SC] We have not seen *The Greatest Showman*, but I was certainly wowed by the version of the Oscar nominated song, "This is Me" performed at the Oscars. I was also interested in the play *Equivocation* you described.

Speaking of the Oscars, we watched at home once again. Out of 24 categories, I only guessed correctly 8 times. Although, when I fill out my ballot, I'm not usually interested in trying to figure out who is most likely to win so much as choosing which film I personally thought deserved to win. This, of course, assumes that it makes sense in the first place to compare films and performances against each other in this way. I have always thought the Oscars and other award shows are deeply flawed in many ways, but Jeanne and I see enough movies every year that we still find it fun to watch the show and compare our choices. This year I can happily say that I liked or admired all the Best Picture nominees. I was less impressed overall with *The Shape of Water* than the Academy was for the Best Picture of the Year, but not sorry that it won.

[JG] I also wish we had known about *Equivocation* in time to see it. We just watched a PBS series about Queen Elizabeth's spy network and most of one episode concerned the Gunpowder Plot. And we're always up for seeing Jonathan Smoots! Thanks for the summary.

## Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] I loved your report from Geriatria, I live there now, too, I think. I was particularly impressed with your dead-on, description of the changes in communication, especially with the young. Words mean different things and a sense of being “out of sync” can be profound. Most of my in-person interaction with younger people these days is with staff in retail establishments, restaurants and coffee houses, and also with our nieces and nephews and grand-nieces and nephews. Even though these conversations are not usually long, I still am often left feeling out of sync.

[JG] Ursula gave her speech, “An Envoy from Senectutus,” at WisCon 20 (not 30), and it was indeed wonderful, and more meaningful to me now than it was then. It is posted here:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20070718205642/http://www.wiscon.info/downloads/leguin.pdf>.

I have had some thoughts about my new homeland, Geriatria, too. It seems to me that a lot of what I expected I would feel as I aged, was based on opinions of those around me, e.g., not actually citizens of Geriatria. A lot of these opinions are completely wrong.

The other day, I was talking with my Aunt Donna on the phone. Donna is in her 80s and is the younger sister of my mom (Inez); Donna was reminiscing about their mother and grandmother. It was the first time I had heard any of these stories and I realized that my impressions of both these women, my grandmother and great grandmother, were seriously flawed.

Apparently my grandmother, Catherine—Donna and Inez’s mother—loved to paint landscapes and portraits when she was young, but she quit painting after she married my grandfather because he thought it was a waste of her time. My Aunt Donna is, and my now deceased Aunt Charlotte were, wonderful, accomplished painters. One of Donna’s paintings hangs on our living room wall. It’s clear that my artistic inclinations are probably due, at least in part, to a genetic inheritance through my grandmother. I wish, so much, that I could see one of Catherine’s paintings, but Donna says that she has never seen any of them. So sad!

My grandfather, Donald, mellowed after his children grew up, married and had their own children. I was his favorite and I certainly never felt that he thought art was a waste of my time; he encouraged me to do what I loved to do. In fact, he built me a potter’s wheel when I was 18 and about to graduate from high school. But he was apparently an inflexible, stern patriarch to his own children, wife and also, his mother, who moved in with the family after her husband (Donald’s father) died. My mom and aunts all had sort of scary stories about his anger whenever they attempted to defy his rules. But Aunt Donna’s story about him and his mother is one that I never heard before....

Apparently great-grandmother Bess, and Donald’s wife, Catherine, did not get along at all. Bess had ruled her own



This is Donna Helwig’s painting, hanging on our living room wall:

household too long to feel comfortable taking a subservient role in Catherine’s household. And Catherine felt as if Bess was constantly criticizing how she did things. They all lived together in a small house in the country, far away from the city—5 kids, mom and dad, and grandmother. There was only one car, which Donald drove to work every day. The bus system did not extend to their neighborhood. So the only way any of them could get places was on foot or by hitching a ride with Donald. Grandpa gave rides to his daughters when they got jobs after high school. He also dropped his mother, Bess, off at her sister’s house to visit, once a week.

This is where Donna’s story surprised me. My memory of great-grandmother Bess is of a very, very old, tiny woman, unable to sit up straight because her back is bent over with arthritis. She sits in a chair during our visits to grandma and grandpa’s, rarely speaking a word, not even looking interested in the conversations around her. I knew nothing about her and I assumed there was little to know. Damn. It turns out that she was a determined woman, angry at the situation she found herself in, but resourceful enough to figure out a way to carve out a little freedom for herself.



One day Donald received a phone call from the hospital while he was at work. “Your mother has had an accident. She fell down the stairs ... at work.” It turns out that every week when Donald dropped Bess off at her sister’s house, she in fact did not visit with her sister. Instead, she walked down the street to a house where she was employed as a housekeeper. In this way, she earned a little money that was her own to spend, and escaped for a whole day from the stressful situation back home.

I’ve been thinking of that story a lot lately and realizing that my life is my own to make and enjoy, and has almost nothing

to do with the often disparaging and uninterested gaze of those younger than myself.

### *Lisa Freitag*

[SC] I enjoyed your enthusiastic description of your new hobbies. It made me realize that I really don't have any hobbies myself. I have a few vices that I once thought were hobbies, but aren't. I have not been drawn to many of the usual things like gardening, cooking, woodworking, or crafts. I've been very conservative about volunteering my time. I'm still too jealous of my time and fearful of commitments that might interfere in some adventure we want to go on. Still, you make finding some activity that you can lose yourself in for awhile on a regular basis sound attractive.

[JG] Great to hear about how you are getting back into set design. That sounds like a lot of fun. I worked on a couple sets in high school, and also designed the backdrops for our senior prom (though I didn't attend. Much weirdness followed.)

Thanks for your comment to me about the sexual harassment thread. I agree; the time for playing nice is over.

### *Steven Vincent Johnson*

[JG] Beautiful constructs/art, Steve! You must have a really excellent printer to get such rich blacks.

### *Darlene P. Coltrain*

[SC] I expect that we will see you at WisCon, and any other Turbo members who make it this year. At least we know where we can find the Turbo dealers room gang.

[JG] See you at WisCon. For the first time in many, many years, I will be exhibiting work in the art show. I thought for awhile about trying to reserve a dealers room table for the Tiptree Award, to sell coloring books and our massive inventory of t-shirts. Maybe sometime in the future. But right now I can't think it is likely that we could actually sell many of those t-shirts. We are looking for a way to do that, without requiring that I be on constant call to fulfill on-line orders. I really need to get rid of some of the bins-o'-shirts in our attic!

### *Catie Pfeifer*

[SC] We also enjoyed *Black Panther*. My favorite parts were also the great support T'Challa had from strong women characters and the impressive character of Erik Killmonger. I did not see Killmonger as a sympathetic character, but the arc of his storyline and the conclusions he draws about how the world should work from his perspective make sense and provides the whole story with depth and truly compelling stakes to fight over. I also loved how the movie showcases

the deep bench of terrific African American actors who we should see much more often.

[JG] Ditto. What a fine movie and a great segue from the usual superhero plot.

### *Jim Hudson*

[SC] *Early Man* was also on our list of movies to see, but we waited just a bit too long. Aardman movies are always must-see events for us. It's still playing in town as I write this, but at just one theater with only morning showings. I guess we will just wait. I feel that going to movies in the morning is just wrong somehow, even for retired folk.

I was also saddened by the passing of Ursula Le Guin, very possibly the greatest artist I have had the pleasure of meeting, hanging out and having dinner with. She was 82 and had lived a good life, but I will miss most of all her wisdom, clear voice and sharp sense of humor on issues she chose to address.

[JG] It was fun to go out with you and Diane on one of your Jamie days, to see *A Wrinkle in Time*. It's hard to think critically about that movie, though I think it was very good, because of how important it was to me as a kid.

Excellent quote from Ursula, via Tracy Benton. It's like she was talking about WisCon.

### *Cathy Gilligan*

[JG] To be fair I don't think all travel is "hideous, unbearable and miserable." Just too much of it.

### *Andy Hooper*

[SC] So many more interesting stories mixed through your list of Nycon attendees, not the least of which was the story of Mario Racic and the mysterious Francis. I was also drawn in by the peculiar story of William Sykora. Makes me wonder what he was up to between the time of his dark listing in *Fancylopedia 3* in 1960 and his death finally in 1994.

The piece you ran from Clifford Wind was laugh-out-loud funny. I worked as a cook in a Ground Round restaurant in Cedar Rapids for one semester in college. I learned three things: steak fries dipped in melted cheese are positively addictive, how to judge the doneness of steak by gently pressing with your fingers and that I was far more comfortable working in a machine shop than I would ever be in a kitchen.

[JG] You make miniature fantasy armies. I asked my father to bring home a gigantic 5'x3' piece of corrugated cardboard (he was a package designer at Mead Containers), so I could make a much larger "Future History" chart than the one Robert Heinlein published with some of his stories. I put in every novel and every short story; every character; every scientific

and technological advance; and every bit of history I could find in the background of Heinlein's fiction. I was obsessed. Sadly, I did not know about Excel Spreadsheets. If I had, I would have had a much easier time than I did typing, cutting out words and phrases, and painstakingly gluing them onto the chart.

Nice to hear Clifford Wind's voice again. His bad-restaurant story about the Kolbeh restaurant suddenly reminded me of Scott's and my visit to a so-called Mexican chain restaurant, born in Montana, that served gravy with all its entrees. I have forgotten most of the experience, including the name of the restaurant.

### Jim and Ruth Nichols

[SC] First, I liked both the pictures you ran in your zine this month.

Ruth, I always like it when people write about what they are reading. Scandinavian crime novels sound like a wonderful idea. I was blown away some years ago by Peter Hoeg's novel *Smilla's Sense of Snow*. Not long after that I was drawn completely into Stieg Larsson's *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* series, including many of the film and TV adaptations. I also liked the TV series *Wallander* with

Kenneth Branagh, but I have not read the novels (yet). So more suggestions are always welcome. On the other hand, sometimes my mood for fiction is affected by the weather. Lately I have been thinking a lot of reading a classic Western in a hot, dry climate. Scandinavia might appeal to me more in a few more months.

[JG] Nicola Griffith's (non-SF, mystery) Aud Books are written with a definite Scandinavian style. Aud is the name of the main character, who (tangentially) has her own LinkedIn page. *The Blue Place. Stay. Always*. I love those stories.

### What's new

[JG] In last month's issue of *Foursquare*. I reported that I had drawn 18 new Space Babes. Well, there are actually 37 new ones now. I think I may be at a stopping point. I am polishing, now, no longer drawing new art for the book. Ellen Klages is writing an introduction for the Space Babe Coloring Book. I hope to go to print in April. It's very exciting. I have frequently been very productive in late winter and spring, but it's a change to find myself pouring energy into a personal project instead of WisCon. A good thing, for sure.

—Jeanne Gomoll & Scott Custis,  
March 2018

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Pictures from a lovely day spent hiking over the Boardwalk Bridge, which is part of the Lower Yahara Rivertrail over Lake Waubesa on a Sunday afternoon. It's not quite Spring yet. The trees are still bare, but the temperature is (relatively) warm, and we all come out in droves to enjoy the day.

