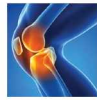


Madison Foursquare

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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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Scott Custis [SC] and Jeanne Gomoll [JG]

December 2019 for *Turbo-Charged Party Animal* #402.



What's New

[SC] A lot happened in November in kind of a short period of time. We bought a new car, our first brand new car, on the 15th. We hosted Jeanne's family for an early Thanksgiving dinner on the 23rd, and Jeanne reported to the hospital on the 27th for her total left knee replacement. After that, life got a bit calmer.

Deciding on a car was a long process. I will spare you the details of the options we looked at and discussed. I thought we knew what we wanted several times. Like buying a house, we discovered what really mattered to us during the process of examining options. We wanted something smaller and easier to drive in the city where we do 90% of our driving. We particularly wanted to avoid vehicles we'd have to climb up to get into the seats. We wanted a very late model. We were ready to try a foreign make with good reliability ratings (I'd only ever owned various G.M. or Ford products before). I wanted maximum safety equipment, having been impressed with some of the new safety features available and we wanted to get mileage around 50 m.p.g. Also, we wanted something that was not beige, white or gray. Price was an issue, too. In the end, the Kia Niro worked out for us.

Hybrids are new tech to me and I wanted some of the latest available safety features, so we decided not to buy a used one. We looked at the inventory of new 2019 end-of-year models available locally and found one that came with a full safety package. The only safety feature it lacked that I would have liked was all-wheel drive, but that is not available on Niros as yet. I thought we could live with front wheel drive and possibly invest in a set of snow tires. We liked that we sit up higher than we would in a Prius or Ioniq without feeling like we have to climb in, and I liked the

configuration of the storage area in the Niro better than the wedge shaped storage in the Prius. And we both like the snazzy blue. So there you are.

As has been the case for several years, Jeanne's brother Steve returned home from Hong Kong for a brief annual business trip, so we hosted an early Thanksgiving with Jeanne's family. We had a comfortable size gang of ten of us for dinner. Jeanne did the turkey, vegetables, a cranberry salad and a dessert, but out-sourced some of the other dishes to family volunteers. For entertainment, Steve showed us pictures of his adventure with friends hiking up to Mt. Everest Basecamp in October. After dinner we played a couple hilarious games of Mafia.

Jeanne checked in to the hospital for a total left knee replacement the day before actual Thanksgiving. I will leave her to recount her experience in more detail other than to say that the procedure went smoothly and she has been recovering steadily. Still, it's no picnic. Much harder than any of her hip replacements. But I'm pretty sure she'd agree it will be worth it.

[JG] I've had both hip and knee operations.... Hip replacement surgery provides instantaneous relief. One wakes up from the anesthesia and notices immediately that the extreme pain that one has been dealing with 24-7 (walking, sitting, sleeping, all the time) is simply GONE. There is some pain from the incision, but that is easily addressed with Tylenol. There is a certain amount of hassle in recovering from hip surgery because it's necessary to avoid bending at the hips beyond 90° for a couple months, but it's really not all that painful. Knee replacement is very different. First of all, the pain that sent me to an ortho surgeon wasn't a constant 24-7 experience. My left knee hurt like the devil only after walking for an extended time; the definition of "extended" having gradually shrunk over time to the point where a shopping expedition at Woodman's qualified, but still: Relief was only a matter of relaxing and putting my leg up. So, I didn't experience the deliriously wonderful ABSENCE of pain when I woke from knee surgery. Warnings that pain resulting from knee replacement surgery is more or



less 24/7 and that the physical therapy necessary to regain bending capability and strength is extremely painful and sometimes torturous turned out to be quite true. I've been relying upon decreasing doses of oxiconin for three weeks now, and still feel greatly relieved whenever it's time to take the next pill (well, half-pill at this point). Nevertheless, I see improvements in flexibility, strength and comfort every day. I am doing my exercises conscientiously; I go to a PT "class" twice a week with a group of other knee replacement patients, and we commiserate with one another. One day, several of us were instructed to do some high-step walking and I had to laugh at the scene. "What's funny?" asked Bill, who wiped perspiration from his forehead. It may have looked like our workouts were easy but we all definitely look forward to ice packs after our PT session. In answer to his questions, I said "The Ministry of Silly Walks!" As I looked around at our group, it seemed like we could easily have been featured in an episode of Monty Python. But, as it turned out, I was the only person in our group who had ever seen any of the silly walk bits, or indeed, was at all familiar with Monty Python. I received a few side-eye glances after that. The moment reminded me of when I awaked from surgery and was still paralyzed below the waist by the spinal block. I'd been warned that this would happen and that it would dissipate rapidly, but it was still very weird to send a message down to my toes to wiggle, and not be able to communicate with a body part. So I laughed and said, "I am the dread pirate Roberts! Where is the Princess Bride?!" The nurse looked deeply worried until I explained the movie reference. But...more side-eye. In any case, I have discarded the walker in favor of a cane, so things are improving. Scott and I are even talking about going to see a movie early next week. Life will gradually return to normal. And then I will have to decide whether my right knee can go a while before being replaced. X-rays reveal that I have lost pretty much all the cartilage in both knees, but my left knee has caused me significantly more problems than the right for sometime. We will see.

Well, I'm going to try to write some mailing comments now, but it gets sort of uncomfortable if I sit at the computer too long, so if my side of the conversation begins to dwindle, you will know why...

Comments

Greg Rihn

[SC] It's been a long time since we went to a performance of *Turandot*, and I think the one you described would have been awesome.

We have not seen *Maleficent*, *The Addams Family*, or *The Current War* but thank you for your encouraging comments. I have been accumulating a list of must-see films since Jeanne has been in recovery. I think we will have a lot to look forward to.

The final installment of your trip report was well worth the wait. Once again I must compliment you on your choices of things to do, all sounded like great fun particularly the Sedlec Ossuary. Truly weird. I also appreciated your details on food you encountered.

[JG] *Turandot* is my favorite Puccini opera! And thanks for the film reviews. Because I've been mostly keeping to the house recovering from knee surgery, we've missed a few. I was interested in checking out *The Current War*, and your review reminds me to try to see it or stream it later. Thanks for the great trip report!

Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] What a delightful account (with nice photos) of the Halloween goings on at Lytheria house again this year. Superheros, woo hoo! Greg looked terrific.

Re your comment to JG on cat wrapping, we were unable to host our annual Christmas party for our book discussion group this year, but in the end we were able to attend the party hosted in our place by one of the group members in her condo's community room. In the course of the evening, Jeanne and Richard S. Russell attempted to describe cat wrapping to a room of decidedly pro-kitty book group members. The attempt was met with muted amusement and a lot of skeptical looks.

[JG] One woman at our book discussion, who has known me for only a couple years, looked at me with a mixture of surprise and horror after hearing about my cat-wrapping past. I suddenly realized that she probably knew me only as that nice older woman with the very strong opinions about books. She had never been involved with the fanzine-publishing, WisCon-doing local SF community, and so to hear about my involvement in a sort of legendary event completely befuddled her. Last year, she commented on the party invitation I sent out, complimenting me on my talent for drawing and suggesting that I might want to think about selling my work. Funny. Makes me realize that there are no doubt many hidden depths in people with whom we become acquainted as we get older. We ALL have histories that aren't necessarily well-known.

Thanks for the peek into your Halloween production, and your thoughts on cake decorating.

Marilyn Holt

[SC] You heat your house primarily with wood? How cold does it usually get in the winter in your area? I would guess that hauling in wood would be a fair amount of work to keep a house warm. What sort of wood burning furnace have you got? My dad used to have a fireplace insert in his living room he used a lot in the winter. It not only got cold outside, his house was on the top of a ridgeline so it was also frequently windy. Since his old house was not particularly

well insulated, he needed the insert in his living room to help out his regular furnace in the winter. It worked fine, but on really cold, windy days, he'd have to bring in wood several times a day.

I did not know you were also beekeepers. If you don't harvest the honey, do you have someone come and do it? Sorry for all the questions, but your zine piqued my curiosity this month.

[JG] My grandfather was a bee-keeper. He loved spending time out there with his hives, and friends and relatives loved getting chunks of honey in jars from him. When he died, the thing I asked for as a remembrance was one of his bee books with its very funny chapter on "Lady Bee Keepers."

Our paid TV stations are Netflix, Amazon Prime, and CBS Access (which not only has the *Star Trek* shows, but also the very excellent series, *The Good Fight*.)

Andy Hooper

[SC] Your piece, "Sign of the Grief Eater" was very moving. My dad and my uncle Max were both big ham radio geeks for many years and when they died my ex-brother-in-law Robert (a fellow ham) ended up going to amateur radio gatherings and gradually selling off their gear. Robert was willing to do it and the families greatly appreciated it. I see an echo of your very thoughtful willingness to find a home for fanzine collections, though not always for dead fans. It's not exactly the same. Robert has his own gear and he was not burdened by concerns about preserving ham radio for posterity. Still, being able to find a good home for fairly exotic things can be a sad, but an important and appreciated, duty.

I also wanted to mention what a lovely photo you ran of Stu, Andy and Lucy. Also many really fine illos this time.

Re your comment to me, I found a photo of my dad with his flight crew that I promised I'd run. One of my pappy's great mysteries was why he never flew after the war.



Even here, Dad (far left) is not standing at his full height.

He never mentioned any sort of trauma related to flying (though he wouldn't have mentioned it even if he'd had some). He never flew again and did not even take a trip on a commercial plane until sometime in the '80s.

I was a regular at the local movie theater as a kid and I often recommended movies to my mom that I thought she'd like. I remember telling her how much I liked the movie *Airport*, with Burt Lancaster and George Kennedy. Well mom convinced dad to go. Mom reported to me later how bad an idea that had been. Apparently dad got so caught up the movie by the end he was sweating and felt he was flying the plane from his seat at the back of the theater. Not a pleasant experience for him. He complained about it for years. I never suggested anything like that to them again.

Years later, in the eighties, after my mom was gone, dad shocked me with the news that he was flying to Florida over the holidays with a special friend (a lady). I was not shocked because of her, I was shocked that she'd talked him into flying somewhere with her. I remember paying attention to the weather around the time of their trip and it seemed to me they would have to fly through a snowstorm on the way back. Which they did. I could not wait to ask him how the flight had gone for him after they got back. He was fine. Apparently their seats had a view of the wing. Even though the weather was snowy with poor visibility, he could see the wing well enough, and, judging by the movements of the plane, he felt he could tell what the pilot was doing and why. The pilot was doing a fine job, so pappy was perfectly comfortable. Who would have guessed?

[JG] I also liked your perception of your role as a sort of "sin-eater," helping friends deal with collections left behind by loved ones. I think you are quite right that your service is a much-appreciated Good Deed.

We will consider posting our zines on eFanzines.com at some point—after, I think, I've finished my 1987 TAFF report. Of the people to whom I've mentioned this long-belated project, I haven't sworn any to secrecy, but I'd rather put it out there without a lot of fanfare. It's possible, we haven't decided for sure, but it's possible that Scott and I will take a road trip in our new car down to Texas for Corflu 37, which would be a very cool place to unveil the thing. By the way, its title is *TAFForensic Report*. Work has taken a pause as I gradually increase the amount of time my knee will allow me to sit at my computer, but I've definitely gotten to the "Let's get this thing finished!" stage, and am eager to move ahead with other projects, like organizing my fannish writings and art, e.g., memoirs. I should probably talk to Geri Sullivan about the best way to distribute copies of the TAFF report; I'd like all proceeds to go to TAFF.

"I think it is essential that we intervene and preserve our own work while we can; no one else is going to do it for us, particularly not when we're gone." Indeed. Thanks Andy.

Steve Johnson

[SC] Since you submitted last month, I have been following your posts on FB and I know your surgery was successful and you are in recovery at home. Let's hope the news for you continues to be good. Recovery is no waltz in the tulips, but "indignities" are something I think we'll all get used to as we get older. As my old man used to say, "Getting old is not for pussies."

[JG] I'm glad to hear that your surgery was successful, Steve. I thought a few times about the fact that we were both slowly recuperating on opposite sides of town with the help of our wonderful partners.

Jim Hudson & Diane Martin

[SC] As always, we are anxiously waiting for some sort of definite news on Diane's mysterious medical issues. Thanks for keeping us informed.

I also greatly enjoyed *Doll's House, Part 2*, much more than I thought I would. Colleen Madden and Jim DeVita were in fine form and the story was very powerful. I was very happy they did the original *Doll's House* and *Part 2* in the same season. A great end to a very good season.

Thanks for dropping off some cookies after Cookie Baking. We were ready for a visit. The cookies are all gone now, but enjoyed.

[JG] And thank you for including two cookies of each type! I would have been at a decided disadvantage if I'd had to fight for them with Scott.

I like your description of *Doll's House, Part 2* as being fanfic. I guess so! I was less enthusiastic about *For Peter Pan on Her 70th Birthday* than you were. I found some of the acting sort of wooden and unconvincing and I didn't get caught by the ideas of the play.

I get to keep Union Street Design, yes. I did not want to have to change my email address and Tingals didn't need the name. I am not doing business under that name, but have been using "Union Street Press" as the imprint name for publications.

Lisa Freitag

[SC] Very lovely worldcon report! I heard so many stories about how expensive it was going to be, it was good to see that you and Greg got such a good deal on hotel accommodations. It sounds like squeezing into the events you wanted to see was an aggravating problem. Jeanne and I managed to get into George's Hugo Losers party in Kansas City, which was a lavish affair, but it turned out that we did not really know a lot of people, so we mostly listened to the band. Looking forward to part two of your trip, maybe some pictures?

Re your comment to me, I fractured my right clavicle. I think a broken arm would have been a lot more painful and a lot harder to deal with where I was. I knew something was wrong, but I convinced myself that it couldn't be a broken bone because I assumed I would be in much more pain (this was my first broken bone experience.) I feared that I'd dislocated my shoulder (which probably would have been worse, too.) All in all, I was pretty lucky.

[JG] Great con report. Thanks Lisa.

Hope Kiefer & Karl Hailman

[SC] The good news was that I was delighted to see your zine, the bad news was it was so sad to read about your late father, Hope. It was a shame you did not get to spend as much time with him as you would have liked. I'm very sorry for your loss.

Karl, new porch in the spring? Cool! We still have a list of projects for our place that we will resume chipping away at once our car is paid for.

[JG] I'm so sorry to hear about your dad's death, Hope.

Hope, remember this—?

From the Archives...

PONGO!

By Jeanne Gomoll, originally published in *Whimsey* 6, 1987

This was the story: The aliens had arrived. Or maybe they'd been here all along. [Hope Kiefer](#) and I hadn't exactly decided about that when we began making the movie. But anyway, the aliens were here.

The aliens had this weird ray, that could make things and people revert to their primeval, archetypal essence, you see. And they were going to turn this ray thingee on everybody and everything on earth. Maybe they just wanted to find out what would happen, or maybe they figured that it would be an original way to take over the planet. We hadn't worked out the aliens' motivations yet.

It didn't matter, anyway. Hope's budget was slightly undersize, too small anyway to afford an extended mini-series about an alien invasion. It had been done already, anyway, by that TV series, *V*, and we all know how that turned out. We just concentrated on one little episode in the nightmarish confrontation between humans and aliens.

We would have liked Sigourney Weaver and Dustin Hoffman as the protagonists, but Hope's budget came up a little short for that too. Actually, she couldn't even afford [Andy Hooper](#) and Bill the Cat, so we had to resort to playdough, which they don't even call playdough anymore; they call it "Pongo."

This stuff comes in strips of colored clay, about 1" x 6" x 1/2". If you want more red Pongo, for instance, you have to buy a whole new package of Pongo, of which red is only one

strip's-worth. Pongo is so stiff and hard to manipulate, at first, that you've got to knead it until your fingers cramp up in spasms. But once it's soft and you've molded it into something, it tends toward over-enthusiastic plasticity, droops wherever you'd rather it didn't, and melts under hot spotlights. Rather like real life, I guess. Anyway, by the end of the filming, both Hope and I had discovered how that word could be molded into wonderful epitaphs.

"Pongo this stuff," we would say.

Or, "What a load of Pongo!"

So, of course, the cast was made of Pongo. Gracie was constructed of flesh colored clay and wore a grey, clay robe, and blue, cute, rabbit slippers of clay, and yellow, clay hair. Herbert, who was a slightly balding, handsome sort of guy, wore blue clay jeans (a subtle reference to Ursula Le Guin's novel, *Always Coming Home*) and an orange, turtleneck, clay shirt. They slouch upon a couch stuffing bits of clay popcorn into their mouths, and slurp Clayca-Cola.

Assisting us were Harlan and Gwen, two real, non-clay grade-school kids, sometimes in residence at Blear House (the site of the so-called studio where we shot our film, better known as "Hope's bedroom"). In fact, Harlan and Gwen spent most of a whole day building clay furniture and spreading clay onto the set walls with us.

"I didn't know that grownups knew how to have fun," Gwen said.

"Yeah, amazing, isn't it?" agreed Harlie.

Another member of the household wasn't as pleased with Hope's and my activities as were Gwen and Harlie that weekend. Hope's three housemates didn't mind much. **Andy Hooper** wandered through with **Carrie Root** once or twice, rather glad that we'd involved Carrie's kids in our project. They had errands to run. Carrie bought us chocolate. I never even saw Kim Koenigsburg; her only contact with the film production crew was after it was all over. She found Herbert's clay head stuck onto the bulletin board the morning after we'd finished, a gruesome relic. Hope's cat, Diva, was the one that resented our activities. Diva was accustomed to having the run of the house, and especially of Hope's bedroom. It tended to be the warmest room of the house anyway, and with the spot-light we'd hooked up to illuminate the set, Hope's bedroom had been converted into the warmest spot in Wisconsin. Diva wanted in, but if we'd let it in, it would no doubt have wanted to sit inside the set, squashing Herbert and Gracie. So we shut Hope's bedroom door firmly (which raised the temperature another 10 degrees or so), and endured the cat's off-key serenade throughout the filming.

It was probably just as well that the cat was exiled—not only for the sake of a non-cat-proof set, but simply for the sake of leg-room, which mostly didn't exist. Hope's bedroom has been described as a closet with an attached closet. Since the little room in which she hangs her clothes is a rather large room for a closet, one is never sure which way to interpret

that description. Suffice to say, however, Hope's bedroom was small. It was almost impossible to move from the side of the set, around the spotlight on its tripod base, and over to the camera behind which Hope worked, without causing the lamp to wobble and tip precariously. I perspired and sat on a chair beside the set of Gracie's and Herbert's living room, with a corrugated cardboard tray on my lap, on which I constructed clay leaves and vines, and manipulated Gracie and Herbert whenever necessary. Close on all sides were Hope's bed, dresser and TV set. Paints, cups of water, and paint brushes littered the so-called floor space. (We painted the clay television on the set between frames to create the illusion of movement on its screen.) At times, it seemed to take a lot of energy just to maintain friendly relations with one another, but Hope was unsinkable; she kept calling me her "talent" and asking if there was anything she could do for me. I had the impression, at times, that she was afraid I was about to scream, "That's it, that's it! I can't stand it anymore. I quit! Do you hear me? I quit! I quit!"

I'm sure that both of us were quite close to that a couple times, though mercifully, I've forgotten those moments now. My back ached from scrunching up and peering down into Gracie's and Herbert's living room, adding leaf after leaf to the houseplant vines. Hope must have been weary from the tedium of shooting a film two frames at a time, from trying to plan out complex movements, translating frame-by-frame speed into real time. We were both hot, and cranky at times, from lack of sleep. We worked all day Friday and all day Saturday and well into Sunday afternoon. I took the bus home to sleep in between filming sessions, and returned to continue working on the movie.

Unless you know about animated films, you will probably be as shocked as I still am sometimes, to learn that with all that work, we managed to make a film that lasts only for one, single, solitary minute. (It does, that is, if you count the credits, which Hope and I indefinitely do.)

The film was projected to last two minutes. Hope figured that out and said that meant we'd have to shoot about 1700+ frames of film. I forget the exact number, which my normal lack of numerical retention might explain, but may also have something to do with an understandable reluctance to think about what exactly that number meant in terms of the weekend, sleeping, and the possibility of getting anything at all done beside the movie during the next 32 hours. Hope was doing the film for a school course in film-making. This was the very last film she had to complete in order to graduate from the University two weeks later.

In a fit of foolish energy several months before, I'd said to Hope, "Hope...? Why don't we do a Claymation film for one of your school projects? I'd love to learn how to do Claymation." The deadline was approaching now; we were both committed, and either we finished this movie that weekend or Hope wouldn't graduate.

At the beginning, we had big plans. "It'll be about the end of civilization as we know it." I mused. "Buildings will crumble as the camera looks out the window. A man walking past the window will turn into a cockroach scrawling across the window sill."

Instead, civilization crumbled by this device: Books disappeared off the bookshelf. The Monets metamorphosed into childish drawings of landscapes with suns pressed into the upper right-hand comers. And the houseplants took over.

Actually, the plants' takeover, which had started out as only a minor idea, became the major plot device when we discovered that even with the hot lights focusing their heat upon Gracie and Herbert's bodies, that our clay protagonists' limbs never got very supple.

"You've got feet of clay!" we would tell Herbert.

"You've got fingers of clay!" I would shout at Gracie, when one of them dropped off as she lifted a can of cola to her lips.

"What a pair of Pongos!" Hope would sneer.

Major moves on Herbert's or Gracie's parts—beyond reaching for popcorn or sipping their sodas—like gross metamorphoses, would have taken weeks and weeks to animate. We would have had to sculpt several versions of Gracie and Herbert, perhaps even several sizes. Now, after having seen the film, Claymation Festival at a local theater, I realize that this aspect of Claymation would have been considerably easier if we'd built the figures around metal, hinged skeletons. But Hope's wallet wasn't up to the task of purchasing the necessary Pongo for duplicate Gracies and Herberts, much less for steel skeletons, and her hopes for graduation and mine for a normal work-week hinged upon producing the film by the end of the weekend.

So we abandoned our plans for Herb and Gracie's gradual metamorphoses and let the plants evolve instead.

Every time Herbert clicked the remote control, several vines would snake out of each of the planters, and in the interim before Herbie clicked again, the vines would fill out with leaves, thousands and thousands of little, green, clay leaves. Herbert would click the remote control and vines would crawl, books would disappear from the bookshelf, and a Monet would turn into a Harlie or a Gwen.

Herbert and Gracie passively stared at the TV screen through all this fecundity. They gulped soda. They chewed their popcorn. They seemed to drown in a sea of twitching, green plant life. They became tangled in a vortex of legumes.

When we ran out of green Pongo, and when we ran out of blue and yellow pongo to mix together, and when Hope refused to run out and buy any more Pongo, we cursed, "Pongo!" and then decided to let the plants start to sprout flowers. Pink flowers, red flowers, orange flowers. They popped out one after another, one per frame.

And it was very very late Saturday night.

And we were only 30 or 40 seconds into the movie.

It occurred to us then that the plants' takeover was going to appear a tad explosive when viewed at motion picture speed.

"Pongo!"

Sunday we filmed the punch line. Remember the aliens? Well, finally, Herbert clicks his remote control for the last time, and the television screen suddenly crashes open, and slowly, slowly (well you had to be there, I guess. Actually, it looks more like, "Instantaneously...") a big hand and arm, wearing a shirt and jacket sleeve, burst out from the television set. The hand is holding a giant remote control of its own and it is aiming the device directly at poor Herbert and Gracie.

A giant finger presses a button on the giant remote control, Hope overexposes the film for six counts, and when we see the set again in normal light, Herbert and Gracie have been horribly transformed into two, red, cooking potatoes, their clay arms still recognizable and attached to the spuds, waving wildly in the air.

That's the end, unless you count the credits as I said you really should, because that way, we can say that the film lasts a whole minute.

Herbert and Gracie have turned into couch potatoes, and the title crawls across the frame again: "Remote Control." You see, it's a film with many meanings—an alien invasion film, perhaps. Or, as Hope really intended—an ironic comment on the insidious influence of TV in modern culture.

But you'd have to watch our movie three or four times before you'd have the time to think of multiple interpretations. You might even think it was some sort of weird, horticultural documentary after only one viewing.

Lucky for the aliens, their rays would probably not operate on a frame-by-frame speed, or else they might never attempt an invasion.

After filming the movie, Pongo Horror "Remote Control," Hope Kiefer fled to England, where she lives, temporarily, to this day. I'm sure there's no connection.

She will probably correct me on a few minor points when I see her in Brighton this August. "I only exaggerated a little bit, Hope," I will protest. "Maybe you've forgotten that part." I will plead.

In any case, I herewith publicly offer you the chance to rebut or embellish, Hope, whichever you prefer...

—Scott Custis & Jeanne Gomoll, December 2019



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