

# Madison Foursquare

39

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

Scott@unionstreetdesign.com

Jeanne@unionstreetdesign.com

This is *Madison Foursquare* #39, created using a Mac Pro with InDesign, Illustrator and Photoshop, all CC 2020, and printed on a Ricoh Aficio CL7200 color printer.

All contents ©2020 by

Scott Custis [SC] and Jeanne Gomoll [JG]

January 2020 for *Turbo-Charged Party Animal* #403.

## Covers

[SC] Beautiful job with the covers **Carrie** and **Andy**, inside as well as outside, this month.

[JG] Loved the artwork. Hans Bok must have influenced many fan artists, directly or indirectly. The front cover art, especially, seems so perfectly fannish. Thanks!

## Greg Rihn

[SC] An interesting mix of activities as always. Thanks especially for the TeslaCon 10 report. So often on FB, people post pictures from TeslaCon but say little else about what goes on there. You told us about program items that sounded great, especially the items you and **Georgie** were presenting. The only movie you mentioned that we have also seen was *Knives Out*, which we also enjoyed. I have to say that I thought Daniel Craig's southern accent was awful, and not because he's British but, I suspect, because he wanted it to be annoying. On the other hand, all of the actors looked like they were having a great time chewing up the scenery. Thanks also for the excellent photos. They turned out really well. So well I had my magnifying glass out for several of them.

[JG] Fascinating program items at TeslaCon! I'm so impressed by all the work that goes into that convention—by both runners and attendees.

I'm looking forward to seeing *The Good Liar*, but I think we may have missed our chance seeing it in the theaters during my post-surgical convalescence. Well, streaming has certainly made it easier to "catch up"! As we will also be doing, probably in the next couple days, with *Parasite*, one of the few films on the Oscar's best picture list that we haven't seen yet. Well, we haven't seen *Joker* yet either, but I won't be too upset if we miss that one.

The Greg in "One Night at Nick's" was not you of course. It was Greg Wood. I did a drawing of Greg W once, showing him wearing a unicorn horn and cupping his hands around his mouth, so apparently unicorn calls was something he did, though I now have no recollection of it.



Greg Wood

Great photos!

## Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] I liked your comments on your TeslaCon activities as well as your suggestion that maybe it would be nice to have a market for amateur stories, but I gave a little cheer for your response to the annoying justify-your-existence question, "Why does the world need your book?" Well said, Georgie.

[JG] You and I are feeling the same urge, I think, to go through past work and put some of it in a format that will make it accessible after we are gone. I'm glad to hear that you are planning to ignore your social filter and want to say/write/draw things that seem worthwhile to yourself, without reference to other people's judgment. I loved the women as pizza essay!

As for the following essay on human edibility...I have wondered occasionally if people who say things like "She's sweet enough to eat!" have a touch of synesthesia, or maybe if we all do. I have sometimes suspected that modern humans are taught to segregate their sense of taste to an unnaturally narrow range of subjects, basically food only, and ignore it in other cases. However, I've noticed that I occasionally experience what I can only call a taste while reading especially beautifully written texts. Like the cleanest, most fresh water you can imagine. I remember reading Toni Morrison's *Beloved* out loud to myself because I couldn't bear to speed-read it; her writing was so beautiful. In addition to the pleasant rhythm (hearing), pathos (touch) and gorgeous images (vision) in my brain as I read, I swear I also tasted something, as if the perfectly chosen words had caused a sensory cascade that spilled over from the usual receptors. I've experienced this with Ursula Le Guin's writing too, and a few others.

Re your comment to **Jim** about past Tiptree winners and possible "taint": The motherboard is encouraging winners to claim to be either or both Tiptree and Otherwise Award winners. It will be interesting to see how many, if any, choose to renounce the former Award name.

## Jim Hudson and Diane Martin

[SC] We are definitely living in the land of friends/relatives with acute health problems and death is a regular topic of conversation. We are currently mourning the passing of the very talented artist and all around good guy, Steve Stiles.

At the same time I got notice a couple weeks ago that my 77 year old cousin Bob ended up in IC unit of Mercy Hospital in Iowa City from severe dehydration. He lived alone and was not taking good care of himself. After making significant improvement, to the point of being almost ready to move to a rehab facility, he suddenly died a few days ago, possibly of a heart attack. We were unable to attend his funeral in Iowa City due to bad weather.

I think your decision to get a bidet toilet seat is very inspired. I'm still unsure what I think of it, but as happy as you guys seem to be about it, I have to admit to being intrigued.

[JG] I envy you that you were able to go to the Four Seasons version of *All Is Calm*. Weather prevented us from seeing it in 2018 and the musical was scheduled too soon after my knee surgery for us to see it in 2019. I am crossing my fingers, hoping the show will return in 2020. Four Seasons does such wonderful musicals!

Next time we visit I'd like a bidet tour please!

## **Marilyn Holt and Clifford Wind**

[SC] I enjoyed your holiday letter. Our old house is coming up on 100 years old. We were able to update our wiring over the course of upgrading the house in stages. We still have a few projects left, like upgrading our downstairs bathroom, fixing up our driveway and garage and maybe some landscaping. It's a race to see if we will finish it before we have to sell it and move to something better suited to old people.

[JG] Reading Scott's comment to you, I pondered all the work we've done on our old house over the last 33 years. What's funny is that when we moved in I thought we might be able to get most of it done within a couple years. Ho ho. Actually, I didn't realize half of what was going to be necessary. For instance we didn't realize then that "hidden" work—like electrical and insulation—would have to be done first, before anything else could be done, before any renovations would actually be visible. Here's a list of the work we have done on our house, from top to bottom, not chronologically: ATTIC: Foam insulation, brick chimney structure removed, electrical outlets, new windows; SECOND FLOOR: knob and tube wiring removed and updated, loose fill insulation blown in, plaster walls repaired and repainted, new windows, hardwood floors sanded and refinished, bathroom completely renovated with new fixtures, doors with crackled paint bathed in acid and repainted, porch door replaced; FIRST FLOOR: knob and tube wiring removed and updated, loose fill insulation blown in, plaster walls repaired and repainted, new windows, hardwood floors sanded and refinished, chimney bricks exposed and cleaned, carpeting in my office, kitchen completely torn down and renovated with new cabinets, appliances, smart waiter, walls, floor and butcher block island; FRONT PORCH: leveled and stabilized with new concrete blocks, new windows, hardwood floors sanded and refinished, cabinets for recycling bins installed,

electrical outlets, new front door; BASEMENT: new windows, new furnace, new water heater (2), new water softener, insulation; OUTSIDE: new house roof, new garage roof, replace and enlarge front concrete porch, replace sidewalk and stairs to public sidewalk. And we still have a "To Do" list, as Scott mentions. This home ownership stuff never ends. I've decided to think about it as a life-long art project.

## **Steve Johnson**

[SC] Thanks for the update on your recovery, Steve. The news on the cancer front appears to be good. I think prioritizing is a good idea for everyone. I have been giving a lot of thought to how I want to spend the productive years I have left.

[JG] Unlike you, I have tended to avoid learning the details of any of my surgeries. I remember when I had my tubes cut (40 years ago!), the doctor was required by state law to show me a video of the operation beforehand. He agreed with me that it was an offensive law, no doubt motivated by right wing desires to discourage me from exiting the baby-making role. He showed me into the room with the TV and turned it on, but then left, saying that he wasn't required to make sure that I actually watched the video. I did not watch it. My reasons were only partially based on political distaste for this tactic, because in subsequent years, I decided that I didn't want to know the details of how my hips or knees were replaced either. The surgeon who did my first hip replacement referred to the procedure as "more carpentry" than anything else and I stopped him right there. I didn't think I needed to put such images into my brain. I have always been glad to be put under for whatever needed to be done, and wake up with no memory of what happened. I think I am in a minority among fans on this subject though. Geeky friends mostly seem fascinated by the technology and are eager to know as much as possible about their procedures. Like you, for instance.

I'm sorry to hear that your surgery was more complex than you had expected, but I'm sure you are glad to have it all taken care of in one session, rather than having to go back a couple times to deal with the bladder wall and intestines scarring at a later date. And I'm very glad to hear that all the adjacent material that was removed turned out to test negative for cancer. Whew!

It's impossible to avert one's attention from the need for and logistics of physical therapy, post surgery, of course. And I will probably contribute some thoughts on that matter later in this zine.

I'm sorry for not having looked earlier for the Douthat article and for not sending it to you right after we talked. And thanks for offering me some slack. Yes please.

## Andy Hooper

[SC] I thought your piece on your holiday family visit was charming and delightful. We have also had experience dealing with fussy kids' appetites. To be fair, I was once a rather fussy kid, too, so I'm inclined to be patient. What I find sad about it is how they are missing a chance to appreciate what good cooks you and Jeanne really are. Your choices of local things to see and, especially your games, were very cool. I think a *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* game that managed to avoid lots of fighting and killing could be very successful. Very good photos, too. I like Thea's hat on page 9.

Regarding your comment to me, had I known about ICON's reputation as a hangover factory, I would have looked closer at the parties on our floor. There were a couple each night and at least one featured flashing lights and loud music, so they may have been keeping up appearances. Jeanne and I were so cozy in our quiet corner room that we were unaware of any obnoxious behavior. Still, in the mornings as I circled the atrium for consuite coffee, I never noticed signs of passed out fans or vomit on the floor so maybe things have mellowed out.

[JG] Re Icon's reputation, we heard several concom members mention that their culture had radically changed in recent years. Certainly we noticed much LGBTQ content in programming. In addition, several concom members referred to the long-gone sexist jokes and references to "Rusty Hevelin days." Nevertheless, there was one program item devoted to Hevelin—or rather to his fanzine collection which resides at the University of Iowa.

Oh, no, I am reading your zines wrong! I generally read pages in order, and figure I will pick up the rest of the front page article when I get to it. But I was definitely nervous when I got to page 6, missed the brackets, and thought it said "continued from page 51" on the top. Oh, oh. This is going to be Andy's longest apazine ever.

I loved the Rebel Salvage game you invented. Very cool. What a great way to show kids how to invent their own fun. What a great visiting holiday you guys had!

I expected the punch line of Redd Boggs' story to be that Moby was a vampire cat, active only during the night. Ah well, probably funnier the way Boggs wrote it. You certainly chose the perfect story to reprint in this cat-obsessed apa!

## Kim and Kathi Nash

[SC] Sorry we missed the birthday bash this year. We expect to join you in future Nash bashes.

## Lisa Freitag

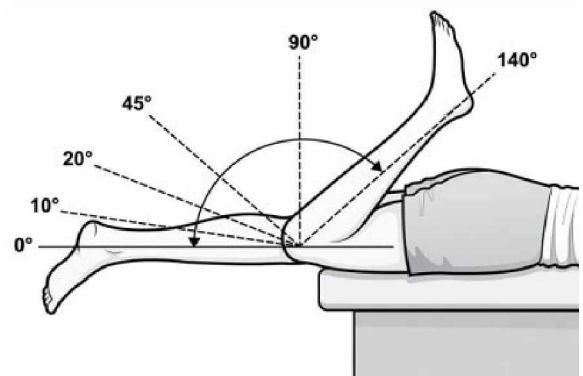
[SC] You gave us a very fine travel report in Ireland. It's too bad you had to deal with so much rain. Your pictures turned out very well. I read your report just after reading

a first draft of Jeanne's TAFF trip report from our trip in 1987, when we were briefly in Northern Ireland. We arrived in Ireland and departed through Belfast, stayed briefly with Walt and Madeleine Willis and managed to see Dunluce Castle and Giant's Causeway. Your zine and Jeanne's report have had me thinking about that long ago trip lately and reminded me that I wanted to go back for a longer visit and to see more.

## Catie Pfeifer

[SC] I'm sorry to read about your loss of Meera.

[JG] Thanks for asking about my recovery from knee replacement surgery. It's taking much longer to recover from this than from my fall in September, and longer than it took to recover from hip replacement surgery. Sometimes I feel a little down about how long it is taking. When sick or injured, I generally prefer to recover in private and not spend a lot of time talking about it with friends till I am mostly recovered. After all, talking about it prevents me from distracting myself from pain/discomfort. But it's difficult to avoid conversations when it takes as long as this recovery is taking. On the other hand, I have actually been enjoying my "Total Knee Replacement Classes" with other knee replacement veterans. It is useful to see how others are doing who are at the same stage or ahead of me (in time since their operations). It's amusing to laugh with them as we celebrate minor triumphs with one another: "90° knee bend! (that's THE crucial threshold)" "I pedaled all the way around!" "121° knee bend!" "I slept through the night!" "I slept on my side last night!" "I'm off the oxy! All I need now is Tylenol." "I don't need my walker anymore!" "I don't need my cane anymore!" "We went to a movie last night!" "We went to a party and stayed late!" The other day I slid off the leg press platform and my PT coach praised me for how much weight I was able to push. I laughed, even though his words had made me feel very good, and joked with my fellows that it reminded me of a little kid coming home from school, bragging that their teacher had called their leaf the best-colored leaf of the day. Positive reinforcement helps a lot, corny or not. Certainly my mood lifts every time I attend a class and I feel less down about how long it will probably take to get back to "normal" (3 months for most things; one year for other stuff). One of my classmates, a construction supervisor, recalled the time he



attached a gold star onto the helmet of one of his employees, as a joke, after a job well done. He had some stars in his pocket left over from one of his kids' projects. Unexpectedly, other workers asked when they would get *their* gold stars and it got to be a thing. Jerry had to go out and buy more adhesive gold stars.

I'm glad that I have a recumbent stationary bike at home. I think it's really helping me move faster through recovery. I can see improvements every day in my strength, flexibility and balance. And very soon they say I will be able to return to swimming laps. The incision has to be completely healed and sealed and I'm almost there. So I'm looking forward to that.

## Walter Freitag

[SC] I am truly impressed with your DIY zeal in dealing with a very vexing water problem in a crawlspace under your house in late autumn. Congratulations on a dirty job, well done. I thought your write up of the experience was completely absorbing.

[JG] What a fascinating article from "the fringes of respectable society." In case of zombie apocalypse or casting on *Survivor*, you are among the folks that will make it.

## Cathy Gilligan

[SC] Your zine looked great! Color! Pictures and graphics! Woo hoo! I liked the contrast of your lovely but downcast poem followed by the strikingly beautiful winter photo.

Regarding your comment to me, the "Lake Loop" as it's called now is a lot nicer than it was when I first started biking around town with Jeanne years ago. Jeanne and I used to get on busy Atwood Ave./Monona Drive at Olbrich Park, which didn't have a bike lane then, or else take our chances riding on the sidewalk, until we could get off onto Monona side streets. It was dangerous. Even with the narrow bike lane today, it's still too busy for me. I had to take it a few times when Buckeye Road was under construction, but not again if I can avoid it.

[JG] We both thought this comment of yours was very insightful: "Both of you say you read less, but it seems that it's the type of reading that is affected" It's true, I think. We are reading more news but fewer novels. I hadn't looked at things that way.

Sorry to hear about the eczema. Like all pains and irritants, it always seems to be worse at night, when there's nothing else to focus on or distract oneself with. Hope the medication continues to work.

Congratulations on the new computer gear, though you seem to be willing to do a whole lot more work integrating the parts than me. Apple equipment has spoiled me and I have no patience with things that don't just work after being plugged in.

## Movies seen in theaters in 2019

### SC & JG

<i>Mary Queen of Scots</i>	<i>Yesterday</i>
<i>Welcome to Marwen</i>	<i>Secret Life of Pets 2</i>
<i>The Mule</i>	<i>Once Upon a Time...in Hollywood</i>
<i>On the Basis of Sex</i>	<i>Blinded by the Light</i>
<i>Green Book</i>	<i>Where'd You Go Bernadette?</i>
<i>Glass</i>	<i>Don't Let Go</i>
<i>Cold Pursuit</i>	<i>Give Me Liberty</i>
<i>Apollo 11</i>	<i>Brittany Runs a Marathon</i>
<i>Captain Marvel</i>	<i>Ad Astra</i>
<i>Gloria Bell</i>	<i>Downton Abbey</i>
<i>Us</i>	<i>Judy</i>
<i>The Man Who Killed Don Quixote</i>	<i>Raise Hell: The Life and Times of Molly Ivins</i>
<i>Avengers: Endgame</i>	<i>Western Stars</i>
<i>Long Shot</i>	<i>Harriet</i>
<i>Late Night</i>	<i>JoJo Rabbit</i>
<i>Rocketman</i>	<i>Terminator: Dark Fate</i>
<i>The Dead Don't Die</i>	<i>Ford vs. Ferrari</i>
<i>Toy Story 4</i>	<i>Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker</i>
<i>The Taming of the Shrew (Royal Shakespeare Company production)</i>	<i>Little Women</i>

We saw fewer movies than last year, but we were gone a whole month in February to Hawaii and Hong Kong and Jeanne was recovering from surgery late November and most of December. We saw another 14 films on DVD/video/TV streaming. I won't list all of those other than to mention that some of them were Oscar contenders we missed at the theaters like *RBG*, *The Irishman*, and *Marriage Story* or were only available on video like *Roma* and *El Camino: A Breaking Bad Movie*.

Like last year, it would be easier to list the movies I liked the least, all sequels, *Avengers: Endgame*, *Terminator* and *Star Wars*. It's not that they were terrible, but they all felt too long and so much of the action either bored me or wore me out by the end. It's a very tough choice for my favorite this year, but the movie I'd say I enjoyed most all the way through was *Little Women*. It's also the only one we saw twice (second viewing in January.)

## Scott's Book List 2019

[SC] I read significantly fewer books this year than last year. I need to up my game in 2020. Jeanne discovered that she hasn't been keeping her list of books read up-to-date.

<i>The Traitor Baru Cormorant</i> , Seth Dickinson (2 <sup>nd</sup> reading)	<i>The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming</i> , David Wallace-Wells
<i>The Yiddish Policeman's Union</i> , Michael Chabon (2 <sup>nd</sup> reading)	* <i>A Big Ship at the End of the Universe</i> , Alex White
* <i>Witchmark</i> , C.L. Polk	<i>The Nix</i> , Nathan Hill
<i>Red Moon</i> , Kim Stanley Robinson (audio)	<i>Catch-22</i> , Joseph Heller (2 <sup>nd</sup> reading, audio)
* <i>The Only Harmless Great Thing</i> , Brooke Bolander	* <i>Gods, Monsters and the Lucky Peach</i> , Kelly Robson
* <i>Tiamat's Wrath</i> , James S.A. Corey	<i>The Wordy Shipmates</i> , Sarah Vowell
<i>The Honourable Schoolboy</i> , John LeCarre	<i>Noir</i> , Christopher Moore
* <i>Blackfish City</i> , Sam J. Miller	<i>The Institute</i> , Stephen King (audio)
<i>Motherless Brooklyn</i> , Jonathan Lethem	* <i>The Tiger Flu</i> , Larissa Lai
<i>Black Betty</i> , Walter Mosley	<i>Embassytown</i> , China Mieville
* <i>The Freeze-Frame Revolution</i> , Peter Watts (novella)	* <i>The Sol Majestic</i> , Ferrett Steinmetz
<i>The Fifth Risk</i> , Michael Lewis (audio)	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> , Margaret Atwood (audio)
	* <i>The Testaments</i> , Margaret Atwood (audio)

\* indicates SF Without Borders book club selections.

## What's New – Jeanne

### Official retirement from Tiptree/Otherwise Award.

This was my official retirement letter:

Up until 1991 it felt to me as though the efforts of the Madison SF Group, Janus and Aurora fanzines, and WisCon, to encourage and celebrate feminist science fiction were largely restricted to a single place and to those who came to this place and attended WisCon. Indeed, by the late 1980s, it felt to me as if our efforts to foster feminist SF were increasingly being met with opposition and might possibly have been in danger of flickering out, as the backlash to feminism in general and feminist SF in specific gained strength. Pat Murphy's 1991 announcement of the Tiptree Award thrilled me and gave me renewed strength. It was as if a small group of us, following a narrow, twisty path had merged with a much wider, well-traveled path. After the Tiptree Award began handing out annual awards and raising funds, and had sparked a massive juggernaut of community activism, I stopped worrying about the viability of the movement.

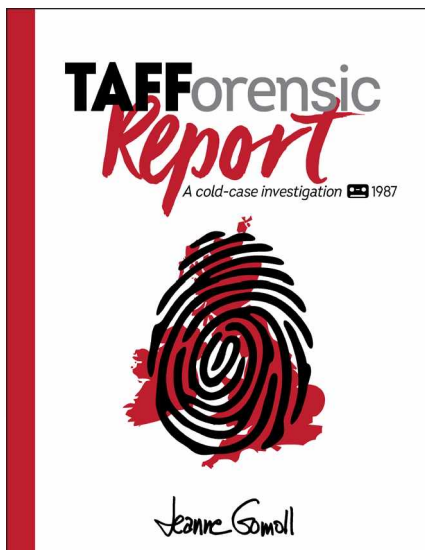
I will be forever grateful to the Tiptree Award and proud of my work on it. I chaired two Tiptree juries—one in 1993, which chose Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* as the winner; and the other in 2016, which presented the award to *When the Moon Was Ours*, by Anna-Marie McLemore. I served on the Motherboard

for 25 years, 1994–2019, and worked behind-the-scenes on most of the auctions during those years, and as an artist creating logos, publications, and Tiptree merchandise. I will be forever grateful to the Motherboard for the work we did together and the friendships we created along the way. I am awed by and very proud of the community of writers and readers who supported and were nurtured by the award, even as they guided the award further along the path toward greater diversity and scope.

The Tiptree Award, and now the Otherwise Award will always have my heartfelt support. But it is time for me to step back and make space for a new generation of activists. I want to thank my fellow motherboard founding mothers and members, past and present—Karen Joy Fowler, Pat Murphy, Jeff Smith, Alexis Lothian, Sumana Harihareswara, Gretchen True, Debbie Notkin, Ellen Klages, Delia Sherman—for all they have done and for their friendship, which I will value forever.

**Láadan Dictionary.** The end is in sight. Susanna Sturgis sent her copyediting notes back to us right after my surgery. It took a while before I felt capable of spending extended amounts of time at the computer, but when I did, I made the changes she suggested. Her work was quite remarkable. In the process of correcting the manuscript, Susanna basically learned Láadan and so her corrections didn't just point out typos or errors created during the OCR process or my mistakes when I was merging the original printed dictionary with on-line materials. Susanna's notes included advice like this: "that's the wrong word," or pointing out errors in syntax or number. In fact several of her questions are going to take some time for Diane and I to figure out. But I'm very glad that Susanna worked on this with us. There will be one more step to complete before going to press. A couple of scholars who continue to work on Láadan are looking at the manuscript now. I think they will suggest some updates and new vocabulary. So the current page count of 300 pages will no doubt increase somewhat before the book finally goes to press. But I think we will make my self-imposed deadline of getting the dictionary to print this spring. We will sell copies at WisCon and I will be sending press releases to constructed-language websites, and other fannish and SF social media sites. But I expect that most copies will be sold on-line via the print-on-demand store, Lulu.com (which makes books available to Amazon, etc.).





### *TAFForensic Report: A Cold Case Investigation.*

The end is in sight for this book too. Yes, I am calling it a book now. It's about 100 pages long and includes nearly 300 photographs from my 1987 TAFF trip. Spike and John D. Berry are proofreading for me (for which I am deeply, profoundly grateful), and I've sent copies to a few folks who feature in major roles in the story, Greg Pickersgill especially. I am very pleased with the title idea and cover art.

My report also includes a page of cartoons by fan artist Steve Stiles, who died last week. I didn't know him well, but we hung out together at a few conventions and enjoyed talking with one another about fandom and art. Scott and I joined Steve and his wife, Elaine, for several dinners at the 1987 worldcon in Brighton, and at a Corflu or two since then. Steve and I have drawn a few cartoons together and I've been in touch with him frequently this past year, trying to help him get a legal, up-to-date version of Adobe Creative Suite onto his computer. So it came as a shock last week when he announced on Facebook that his doctors had only given him a couple months to live. I was finishing up the final draft of my TAFF trip report and had just found a trove of his cartoons that he'd mailed to me in 1987 to include in my trip report. I'd completely forgotten about these drawings, but was writing a note to him, recalling our adventures in Brighton, and hoping to surprise him with the news that his cartoons would at long last see print. But before I could email the note to him, the news came that he had died. Damn.

Another person we met during my TAFF trip and visited in Edinburgh, Moira Shearman, died in May of this year. Moira was a lovely host and I really enjoyed talking with her and getting to meet others in the Edinburgh SF group through her. Damn.

Makes me wish I'd gotten around to writing my TAFF report much, much sooner.

I will be buying a bunch of copies from the print-on-demand publisher Lulu.com and bringing them down to Texas in March for Corflu. If you live in town and would like to buy a copy, let me know. Or you can buy a copy print (with black and white photos) or pdf (with color photos) on line from Lulu.com directly. After a year or so, the pdf will be available free of charge, but until then I will be donating all proceeds to TAFF.

\*\*\*

After these are done, I will return to the larger project of collecting stories, essays and artwork from my files and seeing what kind of memoir it makes. The following story comes from those files in "the vault." This time it's not a Madison fandom-related story.... Hope you like it.

## *From the Vault* *Corrugated Confessions*

*By Jeanne Gomoll, Science-Fiction Five Yearly #9, edited by Lee Hoffman, Jeff Schalles, and Geri Sullivan, September 1991*

The nuns and Mr. Waldschmidt organized an annual Spring Fair as a fund-raiser for the library when I attended seventh grade at St. Luke's Catholic Elementary School. That year, I teamed up with another kid to build the "Maze of Terror and Thrills" as our contribution to the extravaganza. Other seventh and eighth graders organized games of skill involving Goldfish bowls and ping pong balls, or they taped colored construction paper squares onto the floor, appointed a DJ to operate the phonograph player and signed up moms to bake desserts for a cake walk. A group of eighth-graders operated the highly-profitable "jail." But these were all fairly traditional highlights of your typical Catholic School Spring Fair. I was aiming for something a little more unconventional that year. My dad's occupation would provide the key ingredient, but I also needed an accomplice, someone who could handle masking tape, someone who owned a phonograph player. It may even have been required that we team up with a classmate for our Fair project, I don't recall. But in any case there were two of us, me and Frank.

Mr. Waldschmidt taught my seventh grade class, and for the most part, I liked him because he was not a nun. In fact, he was the only male teacher at St. Luke's, if you didn't count Father Mehan, who taught one religion class a week to us seventh and eighth graders. Anyway, I liked Mr. Waldschmidt, except for those times when he caught me reading library books during class and assigned me another portion of the Bill of Rights to memorize. At the time, I thought he was pretty tough. Knowing what I now understand about the chaotic potential of a roomful of seventh graders, I can sympathize with the principal, Sister Mary Rupert, who decided that St. Luke's needed a strong disciplinarian in that class. She herself taught the eighth graders and together, she and Mr. Waldschmidt, kept us prepubescent delinquents in line.

I doubt that St. Luke's teachers considered me a major discipline problem at that point. The demerits I received mainly concerned my inattentiveness. "Jeanne does not pay attention in class. She is a day-dreamer and needs to learn to apply herself." I spent a lot of time reading books that interested me rather than the stuff we were assigned. That, in the long run, turned out to be the wise choice, but at the time, teachers probably

considered me a less than dependable child especially for any large undertaking requiring organization and diligence.

"I want to build the "Maze of Terror and Thrills," I said, when it came time to declare a project to the two nuns who taught fourth graders and were in charge of organizing the Fair.

"Maze of Terror and Thrills?" Sister Mary Aloychious repeated with a worried tone to her voice. (All nuns of the Notre Dame order must take "Mary" as their middle name.) "Why not work on the cake walk with Edith and her team? I think they need one more person. Or maybe some sort of game. You know, we still have all those goldfish bowls from last year." She started to write "Goldfish Toss" down on the list next to my name and I had to interrupt her.

"No—my dad said he would help me do the maze." That stopped her. This wasn't just some silly, misguided kid idea that needed to be redirected. We were dealing with parents here, and a dad at that. In the mid-60s, dads didn't get involved in non-sports activities at St. Luke's very often. Dads volunteered to coach the baseball and basketball teams. Moms volunteered baked goods for cake walks and sewed costumes for the Nativity Play in December.

"Your father wants to help you with a booth at the fair?" She was incredulous. Maybe that's because I was also known to the St. Luke's faculty as someone who occasionally "stretched the truth" as they politely described it to my mom and dad on Parents Night. My folks had not been surprised at the accusation.

"No, not a booth—a maze—and dad said he'd help." I stood my ground. They could investigate if they wanted to; I wasn't making it up. It was a mere technicality that Dad hadn't specifically said he would help me with a maze. He had agreed to make the boxes for me. "Frank will be helping me." I waved behind me in Frank's direction, and Sister Mary Aloychious shrugged and carefully wrote "Maze of Terror and Thrills," next to Frank's and my names.

Before he retired in 1990, my dad designed and sold corrugated boxes for Mead Containers. My dad is the guy who invented the box design you see at toy stores all the time now—the box that looks kind of like an open stage. It's got a cut-out opening in front, through which a kid can touch the toy truck or a car, maybe honk the horn, or spin a wheel, but can't actually remove the toy. Dad's package was a revolutionary container at the time, because the manufacturer could produce one package that functioned as both a shipping container and a display container. Toy stores like it too, because they don't have to waste a toy as a "display model," and customers weren't opening packages to get a better look.

Except for a few summer vacation trips when dad made us all corrugated box suitcases in which to pack our belongings, and I experienced the terrible angst of a teenager embarrassed by a parent who cannot understand the importance of looking and acting like other people, I mostly thought that dad's career was pretty cool. I did hate that

cardboard luggage though. "Why can't we have real suitcases like normal people," I cried, no doubt disappointing and frustrating my dad who had spent a lot of time constructing the cute handles and choosing colored corrugated styles, a different one for each of us.

When my brothers and I were little kids, Dad used to design elaborate Halloween costumes for us out of corrugated cardboard. One year I asked him if he would make me a robot costume, and he went all out, installing little, battery-powered lights that blinked through little holes cut into a white cardboard box. Antennas, knobs, dials, and meters were cleverly attached to the outside of my "body," and a smaller box was attached inside, with a hole cut just above it, chest high, so that when we called out "Trick or Treat," I could point at the opening and candy could be tossed through the hole into my corrugated pouch.

Years later, Dad's profession came in handy frequently, whenever I moved. "Dad, I'm going to move and I need some boxes," I would say.

"How many?" he would say. "What color?" A few days later, he would drive into town with twice as many folded, pristine boxes as I had asked for, and several rolls of 3"-wide, reinforced tape to seal the box ends. The beneficiary of this unique advantage, I've learned the art of the Perfect Move. When I move, everything I own is sealed into closed boxes, and neatly stacked in one room by the time friends arrive to help me load the trucks. Every box is labeled as to its destination room. There are no paper bags. There are no loose odds and ends.

But when I was twelve and in the seventh grade, I considered the main advantage of my dad's corrugated box expertise to be the opportunity it afforded me to build a "Maze of Terror and Thrills" at St. Luke's Spring Festival. Dad delivered the boxes, as promised, dozens and dozens of huge, white, refrigerator-sized boxes, all pristine, unused, flat, and waiting to be folded into 3 dimensions. Dad also delivered many rolls of wide, reinforced tape that needed to be moistened with wet sponges and smoothed onto cardboard surfaces, where—because of the reinforcing wires—would provide virtually impregnable seals.

Rather than folding the ends of the boxes down onto themselves and taping them shut, Frank and I cut and taped boxes into one another. We became proficient in the use of matt knives, learning how to slice cleanly or score and fold the cardboard. The path of our maze would wind an intricate trail through the cloak room, just off the cafeteria (where the main body of the Festival would take place), and would then meander down the hallway, rise half-way up the stairway that led up to the classrooms and then come back down again, returning to the other side of the cloakroom. I spent several days drafting the path of the maze on blue-lined graph paper and, along the way being assigned another Amendment by Mr. Waldshmidt to memorize for using class time to work on my drawing. Frank and I constructed the

maze basically the way I drew it except for one change that Sister Mary Paul demanded when she noticed that we were building the hall section right in front of the girls' bathroom."

You can't block that door, Jeanne."

"Why not?"

"Jeanne!"

The nuns seemed nervous about the whole enterprise, but once began, they couldn't stop it. Building that maze provided my moment of fame at St. Luke's Elementary School. Kids from all grades, even the big kids in eighth grade, were excited about the "Maze of Terror and Thrills." We'd never had anything close to a "ride" at the Spring Fair and we were all a little tired of throwing ping-pong balls into goldfish bowls. But the nuns were nervous because they wouldn't be able to supervise activities within those boxes. In fact they couldn't even inspect the maze before we opened for business, not with those long black skirts and veils, they couldn't.

Frank and I were counting on that.

Our "Maze of Terror and Thrills" was more than just a string of boxes taped together. Crawling through a dark tunnel with no idea of when it will turn a corner or when it would end might provide a few thrills, but—as we saw it—very little terror. So, the day before the Festival, we added a few accessories to the entertainment.

- We cut several slots into the tops of some of the cloakroom section boxes, through which we dangled strips of damp terry cloth. We planned on refreshing these strips as necessary during the day. From other slots throughout the maze, we hung dozens of pieces of string, thin veils of cloth, and long pieces of wax paper. Then we sealed over the slots with duct tape so the openings didn't admit any light.
- We installed Frank's phonograph player on a hat rack shelf in the cloakroom and borrowed an album with creepy halloween-type music and sound effects from one of Frank's friends. Frank's phonograph could be set to play and replay the same record over and over again.
- We glued flattened-out orange peels and sponges to the cardboard covering the steps within the stairway section of the tunnel. We thought it was amazing and funny how pitch darkness confuses kids who can't see what they are feeling beneath their hands and knees.
- Throughout the maze we glued big cotton balls to the side walls. This was an afterthought in our plans, but later on, some kids told us that it was the scariest part of the maze. Few kids figured out what the stuff was unless they pulled some off the wall and examined it in the light.
- On the morning of the Fair, we replaced the working light bulbs in the cloakroom with old, burnt-out bulbs. The "light holes" Mr. Waldschmidt suggested we cut in the cloakroom section of the maze wouldn't admit much illumination if there wasn't any to start with.

Without a doubt, the "Maze of Terror and Thrills" turned out to be the most popular attraction at that Spring's Fair, and we almost sold more tickets than the Jail, which traditionally raised the most money at the Fair since it charged people to send their friends to jail AND to get out themselves when their friends took revenge. We would have sold the most tickets too, if only fifth-grader Marie Louise hadn't freaked out in the cloak room when she got licked in the face by a wet terry cloth strip and heard the wolf howl on Frank's record.

"Get me out of here!" she screamed. "The wolf is going to kill me!" was followed by incoherent screams and sobs and wild hiccups. Frank and I tried to talk her down, but Marie Louise just got more hysterical. We could hear her trying to claw the walls open, but the reinforced tape resisted all attempts. Marie Louise was trapped. We tried to convince her to crawl forward.

"The wet stuff is just a piece of a towel, Marie Louise, just crawl ahead and it won't touch you any more," Frank said. I scowled at him. We'd sworn not to tell anyone what materials we'd used inside the maze. However, I didn't press the point; Frank's strategy seemed to be working. Marie Louise's sobs lessened, though her hiccups were increasing in frequency and volume. It seemed to me that she was crawling slowly forward, but then an owl hooted and Marie Louise screamed again and we thought that maybe a murderer actually did lurk inside the corrugated tunnel. It was too bad that we couldn't manage to turn off the sound effects, but the phonograph was sitting in a corner on the other side of all the boxes.

"Something touched me! Something touched me! Get me oooooout!" And she was off again, screaming and crying. I looked over my shoulder. So far so good, no nuns had heard the commotion yet. There seemed to be an argument taking place outside the jail involving a bunch of kids and several nuns. So far they hadn't noticed Marie Louise's panicky screams. I said, "let's cut her out, Frank. We can tape up the hole later."

"Right," said Frank, and reached into his back pocket for a matt knife. I took the knife from Frank, but neither of us considered the potential effect on Marie Louise if the knife blade happened to slice her arm, and luckily we didn't find out. Just as I grabbed the knife from Frank, steadied the corrugated wall closest to Marie Louise's screams, and prepared to make the incision into cardboard, Mr. Waldschmidt's baritone voice thundered across the cloak room.

"Stop right now!" he yelled. He was aiming a flashlight in our direction, the beam focusing on my hand and the poised matt knife. Marie Louise snuffed suddenly with the sound of Mr. Waldschmidt's authoritative voice, and now she began crying out, "Help, help! Please get me out! Help!"

"What's going on here?" Mr. Waldschmidt growled, as he snapped the wall switch on and off without effect.



"The bulbs must be burnt out," I offered and knew immediately that I would be required to memorize the twelfth amendment—the long one about the Electoral College—that night. I sighed, and Frank took over. "Nothing," he said. "Nothing's wrong. Marie Louise's just stuck. We'll get her out."

"Put that knife down right now." Mr. Waldschmidt ordered. "I'll get her." And without warning, the tall seventh-grade teacher suddenly bent down and disappeared into the tunnel. Frank and I glanced at each other and could just make out each other's worried expressions in the dark. He had entered the exit, not the entrance and would crawl the whole length of the tunnel, which zig-zagged through the hallway, climbed up and down the stairs, and wound its way back into the cloakroom before he found Marie Louise.

"What the hell is this stuff?!" Mr. Waldschmidt bellowed just as Sister Mary Rupert materialized behind me. One moment no one was there and the next moment, there she was, her hand gripping my shoulder like an iron claw. Nuns are like that; you never know when they're going to show up.

"Mr. Waldschmidt, I will not tolerate language!" she thundered and suddenly the world was quiet. Marie Louise no longer sobbed and her hiccupping had been stifled. I imagined that she had drawn her legs up under her arms and had ducked her head onto her knees at the stern voice of St. Luke's principal. Mr. Waldschmidt crawled purposefully forward and entered the hallway segment of the maze. The combatants at the jail had negotiated a settlement, and several curious faces in the cafeteria now peeked through the open, lower, half-door of the cloakroom entrance. I slowly craned my head around and up to look at Sister Mary Rupert, whose fingernails still pierced through my shirt and into my flesh. Her face, framed in a white wimple, floated in blackness. The rest of her black habit disappeared amid the general blackness of the rest of the cloakroom. Her thin lips were pressed together and her eyes glared down at me.

"Give the knife to me, Jeanne." I clicked the blade down into its sheath and handed it up to her without argument. Her hand released its grip on my shoulder and the matt knife disappeared into the blackness of her billowing sleeve. We waited. I attempted to stop breathing altogether but my breath exploded outward in the next moment, before I'd become light-headed.

A thump, a baritone grunt, and a kid's shrill scream tore through the silence from the hallway. Crawling the wrong way through the maze, Mr. Waldschmidt had frightened a kid on his way out. I ducked and spun around and through Sister Mary Rupert's skirts before she could grab me again. She didn't realize that Mr. Waldschmidt no longer occupied the cloakroom and was momentarily confused. Marie Louise began sobbing pitifully. "Please, get me out of here..."



The light streaming through the glass doors in the hallway momentarily blinded me, but a few seconds later I noticed a section of corrugated tunnel swaying from side to side. Mr. Waldschmidt was pouring forth a stream of "language" and suddenly his head and shoulder burst through the top of the box. He stood up and extricated himself from the paper wreckage, a wad of cotton in his hand which he was examining curiously. Billy Bodus followed, slowly rising from inside the torn opening, looked around a little nervously before he ducked back inside the maze again and settled in until Marie Louise had been rescued and Sister Mary Rupert and Mr. Waldschmidt had finished their investigation of the situation.

Eventually, Sister Mary Rupert got Marie Louise calmed down, instructed her to sit still, and cut a small doorway into the cardboard wall a few feet away from the terrified little girl. Sister Mary Aloychious was given temporary custody of the damp child and the two of them detoured around the other side of the cafeteria to the girls' rest room. Mr. Waldschmidt closed and locked the door into the cloakroom, and Sister Mary Rupert, whose left hand was rattling the rosary beads clutched there, simply pointed at Frank and I, and then pointed upward, whether to heaven or her office it was all the same. She sailed off into the cafeteria, her skirts and veil billowing behind her, and Frank and I followed her slowly through a sea of sadistic on-lookers, my classmates.

The next year, my eighth grade year, Leslie Baseheart and I would operate the fish bowl coin toss booth. The nuns would be most happy to see our bored expressions. But I would always recall the "Maze of Terror and Thrills" as my shining hour at St. Luke's.

Jeanne Gomoll & Scott Custis  
January 2020