

Madison Foursquare

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As I predicted in my August issue, the last two months have been a busy time for me. Right now I'm facing a *Turbo* deadline as well as a work deadline this week. So, I'm going to punt on *Turbo*, with the expectation of catching up on comments and other details next month. Sorry for putting y'all off for a bit.

I don't consider myself uniquely busy. I think this is a busy time of year for most people. Whether it be the start of the school year, the ramp up to the long Holiday season, or scrambling to get ready for winter to arrive, there are lots of reasons time feels short for many of us. At this time of year, I can always think of a million things I suddenly need to get done in an alarmingly short amount of time.

It has not helped that I have had an unusual amount of work-related travel this month. Last week I spent two days at the fairly lavish Osthoff Resort in Elkhart Lake, WI for the annual Prosecutors convention on OWI. We had to give an hour presentation on drunk driving-related issues that directly involve our section of DMV. I went with my section chief and a colleague, neither of whom had a very deep understanding of our work, so I did the bulk of the talking. We were scheduled to speak on the second day of the conference, but we went up for the whole conference because our lawyer was set to speak the first day and I needed to make sure he did not say anything that might end up blindsiding me the next day with questions I did not expect. Good thing we went early, he covered a lot of the same material I was going to cover, so I spent the night re-writing and rehearsing most of what I was going to say.

Wednesday this week I'm off to the Radisson Inn, Appleton, WI for another overnight trip to address municipal court clerks on issues related to our department. I'm taking two different colleagues who are there to speak briefly, and learn from me. I will be speaking for most of our one-hour presentation, plus three 35-minute breakout sessions. Much of this material I have not finished preparing, so I'm feeling a bit of deadline squeeze.

Finally, I will be part of a four-person group addressing circuit court judges this Friday, here in Madison. This time I will not be the primary speaker, but mostly on hand to cover a few issues and take technical questions. That should not be too bad, but I will be pooped after two weeks of the stress of talking in front of rooms full of people with a sometimes shifting agenda and unpredictable questions.

This sort of thing is not my normal work. This used to be something supervisors and managers did. Kind of a perk to get out of the office, stay in a hotel, eat out and hobnob with contacts established over the years. But now, supervisors and managers don't stay around long enough to learn our work remotely well enough to go out and talk to rooms full of professionals. So I have been going to a lot of these things a couple times a year, over the past 5 years or so. It was fun at first, less fun now. After a couple weeks like this, retirement seems very attractive.

—Scott

*WisCon 1 was forty years ago. I can no longer write a chronological narrative of what happened, who did what and who said what. But the concom asked me to write up my memories for their **WisCon 40x40** Blog. I'm frankly amazed that I actually recall or can find as much about that long-ago convention as I present to you here. But I have no doubt that I am forgetting what was the most important part of the convention to one or more WisCon 1 attendees, or that I am forgetting to mention people that I will be embarrassed to have neglected. Please forgive me and add your own memories! –Jeanne Gomoll*

<http://blog.wiscon.info/2015/09/40x40-wiscon-1/>



WisCon 1 was a winter convention, held on the weekend of February 11-12, 1977. It was actually scheduled for these risky dates ON PURPOSE, in order to avoid conflicting with the dates reserved by other established Midwest conventions. Weather was always a worry; we began saving money each year in a “blizzard fund,” for the likely event that weather would eventually force us to cancel. Luckily, we never had to cancel on account of weather or any other reason.



Before WisCon 1, most concom members had attended only one or two other conventions. We were total neos. The exceptions were Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell who were experienced and famous fans. (In years to come, Hank Luttrell would run the Dealers Room for more than 30 years, and has sold in the Dealers room for 40.) Hank and Lesleigh had run cons in St Louis, Missouri (including the 1969 Worldcon) before moving to Madison and were editors of the Hugo-nominated fanzine, *Starling*. Hank and Lesleigh joined the other founders of the Madison SF Group, Jan Bogstad, Philip Kaveny, and Thomas Murn and put an ad in *The Badger Herald*, a local student newspaper, which attracted me to the first weekly Wednesday meeting in 1975, along with John Bartelt and a few others. Hank and Lesleigh had to teach us about “zines,” and “LoCs” (Letters of Comment), and mimeography. Hank encouraged many of us to attend our first conventions – Minicon II and MidAmericon I (1976 Worldcon in Kansas City). In turn, the attendees of the first WisCon were mostly people who had read and enjoyed copies of *Janus* or *Starling*, or fans we met in St. Paul or Kansas City. There may never have been a zine called *Janus* or a convention called WisCon if Hank and Lesleigh hadn't taken under their tutelage a totally inexperienced group of (mostly) college students who loved science fiction but had no knowledge of the world of fans, fanzines and conventions.



In the mid 1970s, most members of the Madison group were students at UW-Madison and so we received assistance from the Wisconsin Student Association and from the University of Wisconsin-Extension. George Hartung of the UW-Extension generously offered his support and influence to help make the first WisCon happen. The UW-Extension provided program space at the Wisconsin Center on Langdon Street, (now known as the Pyle Center). In addition, attendees booked very affordable rooms at Lowell Hall, a UW-Extension dorm facility one block away from the Wisconsin Center.



WisCon 1 honored two women as Guests of Honor – Katherine MacLean and Amanda Bankier. MacLean is best known for short fiction published in 1950s pulp magazines like *Analog*, *Astounding SF*, and *Galaxy*. Bankier was currently editing a wonderful fanzine, *The Witch and the Chameleon*, the first and only feminist SF fanzine other than the Madison group's *Janus*. *TWatC*'s contributors included Joanna Russ, Racoon Sheldon (aka, Alice Sheldon and James Tiptree, Jr.) Marion Zimmer Bradley and Vonda N. McIntyre. Their speeches were inspiring and were the first of many GoH speeches that have always been WisCon highlights for me.



Janice Bogstad and Douglas Price co-chaired the first WisCon. In a record that has never been beaten by any other WisCon chair, Jan went on to chair the next three WisCons for a total of four consecutive years! A mere 16 additional concom members are listed for WisCon 1. Planning meetings happened once a week at Nick's Bar on State Street as part of our group's weekly meetings. Milwaukee fandom turned out en masse, filling the need for gophers that, as first time con-runners, we hadn't clearly anticipated. If a time traveler had joined us at one of those weekly meetings and revealed our future, we would never have believed how large WisCon and its concom would grow!



The Madison Science Fiction Group was committed to a quarterly publishing schedule for its feminist SF-focused fanzine, *Janus* (6 issues were published between 1975-1976; *Janus* would be nominated for a Hugo three times, 1978, 1979, and 1980). But time got tight when the group added con-running to its to-do list, and it didn't seem possible to meet the Spring deadline in addition to making WisCon happen, so we had a brainstorm: *Janus 7* was assigned double duty as both fanzine and WisCon program book. Besides articles and bibliographies on the GoHs, the zine included book, fanzine and film reviews related to the Guests' work.



Both Jeanne Gomoll and Janice Bogstad had been impressed by an event that happened during the previous year's worldcon (MidAmericon I). Susan Wood had struggled and succeeded in getting a single "Women and SF" panel scheduled, though the concom frankly didn't expect many people to actually attend and therefore placed it in a tiny, out-of-the-way room. As it turned out, there was a rather huge number of people interested in it, and the 100 or so folks who had managed to squeeze into the room, or who had stood around outside the room trying to hear what was being said inside, stuck around in the lounge outside the panel room for several hours afterwards, talking with one another and networking. Victoria Vayne proposed *A Women's Apa* during that extended conversation. And Jeanne and Jan began to talk about a convention where there would be more than a single "women and SF" panel. WisCon I programming got kickstarted in that lounge and many women left it intent on making new kinds of cons, publications and networks.



Everyone on the first WisCon concom contributed program ideas. In fact, in the early years, there was no separate department that managed programming. Many panels were inspired by articles written for *Janus*, and/or rehearsed in the group's monthly public meetings. The group met weekly at Nick's Bar on State Street; in addition, the group produced a monthly program at UW's Union South, advertised in the campus press. Members volunteered to present (For example: "Your First Time...Reading SF," and "Will the Real James Tiptree, Jr. Please Stand Up!"); I designed flyers for these events and they were posted on campus kiosks. Many group members found one another through these events and eventually joined the concom. The best of those monthly presentations were turned into WisCon programs. For many years, the task of creating programming was shared by everyone on the committee. Most planning meetings devoted significant time to brainstorming and refining program ideas. Although I love the crowd-sourcing process used by WisCon nowadays, I sometimes miss the camaraderie of those early meetings when it felt as though we were inventing WisCon.



The WisCon I panel I remember working hardest on was "**Alice Through the Looking Glass of Science Fiction**" with Amanda Bankier, Katherine MacLean, Mary Bedami, Janice Bogstad, and me. Our idea was to try to cover various fields of knowledge and describe how changes within these fields had resulted from feminist awareness, and could be applied to the writing of science fiction. I talked about patriarchy theories being developed within

anthropology. Mary Badami touched on the relationship between sexism and racism. Jan Bogstad focused on linguistics and talked about how the words we use can support or degrade an egalitarian society. Amanda Bankier pointed out that traditional psychological societies equated mental health with typical male behavior, and women's behavior with neurosis. Katherine MacLean spoke last, throwing out dozens of ideas impressing everyone with her wide-ranging and wildly imaginative mind.



Katherine MacLean had a marvelous time talking with everyone at the convention. Her passionate debate with Thomas Murn at his panel, "Contemporary Science Fiction," in which she championed the notion that IDEA was the most important part of an SF story, was one of many discussions that spilled over into the Center's lobby and continued long after the panel had ended.



Amanda Bankier was and, I expect, still is a very private person, and she was less comfortable than Katie with diving into conversations and debates with people she'd never met. But she belonged at WisCon. Her ideas and her contributions to the conversations were invaluable.



There were many panels and no doubt there were substantially more panels than we absolutely needed for a small, 200-person convention. But the concom had imprinted on worldcon programming and assumed there were supposed to be too many programs for any one person to actually attend. And thus began WisCon's tradition of packing in as many programs into a weekend as possible. Programs that year included: Doug Price's "Can Fans Still be Fannish with Frostbitten Noses?," Philip Kaveny's "H.G.Wells: a Multi-Media Presentation," Diane Martin's "Religion & SF," Richard West's "The Literary Pleasures and Possibilities of Heroic Fantasy," Greg Rihn's "A Fantasy Upon the Theme of Education," and Jan Bogstad's "Political Issues in SF." John Bartelt invited UW Physics professor, Dr. Robert March, to give a talk on quarks, "The Things that the Things that Atoms are Made of are Made of." There was also an art show, a dealers' room, and a masquerade.



In spite of its multi-track schedule, WisCon I (and the next few WisCons) often felt to attendees as if panels consisted of one continuing and evolving conversation. Topics that began at one panel were built upon in the next and developed in conversations in the lounge among folks who had attended other panels that intersected with similar ideas.



Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell, Philip Kaveny, and Demmie McGinley (director) created an elaborate play, *Galactic Banana Dealer*, for opening ceremonies. Thus began WisCon's frequent thespian aspirations in opening ceremonies for decades to come ... some good, some not so good!



Richard S. Russell ran the registration table, greeting everyone with a happy smile. He would continue in this role for 38 years. In addition, Richard's and Diane Martin's thematic film review column ran within the combination program book/*Janus 7*. Eventually Richard's annual film review moved from print to presentation and became a regular part of WisCon programming, each year examining a common theme running through the year's crop of SF/Fantasy films.



The convention was a mass of "firsts" for nearly everyone on the concom. James Cox ran his first art auction at WisCon 1. It was the first of many: Jim became a familiar figure at Midwest art show auctions.



The first WisCon hospitality suite occupied two connecting rooms in the UW-Extension dorm, Lowell Hall. I don't remember how we got around the fact that entry to each floor required a room key for a room on that floor, but we did. I also recall a problem with the unfortunately excellent sound-conducting properties of Lowell Hall's steel walls, but no police were involved and we decided to do WisCon 2 before the first had even ended, so things must have turned out all right. The con's total attendance (around 200) was small enough that there may not have been any other parties than the one held in the consuite. I do not recall. I do remember riffing on the elaborate maps I'd seen published in worldcon program books: I drew a map of the party suite, showing the location of the trash can, TV, and other individual pieces of furniture.



Perri Corrick-West insisted that we show *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* as part of the film program – this was well before the movie had acquired a cult following. There was no audience participation at WisCon's showing; the audience laughed and clapped, but did not sing along or dress in costume as would soon happen at weekly midnight showings at local art houses.



People didn't own videotape machines in 1977, so conventions' film programs offered welcome opportunities to see older movies. Besides *Rocky Horror*, that year's film program included *Metropolis*, *Nosferatu*, *Siegfried*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Night of the Living Dead*, and *Island of Lost Souls*.



WisCon and *Janus* were, for me at that time, about discovering and examining the connection between science fiction and feminism. About erasing the embarrassment I had felt with feminist friends when I admitted that I read SF. About being proud of being a feminist among SF fans who did not think feminism should be part of the field. That connection turned from a dotted line to a fully functional and permanent bridge by the time WisCon 1 had ended. The folks I worked with on the concom, the many people I met for the first time who attended WisCon, became lifetime and lifework family, who changed my life, and I think, the science fiction community, too.



Unwilling to go home when the convention had finally ended, the whole concom, both guests of honor, and many attendees strolled over to the theater at University Square to see *Wizards*, which had premiered over the weekend.



Because we paid attention to political ideas, especially feminism, and because we supported women, lesbians and gays in our program, WisCon gained a derogatory nickname from some Midwest fans. They called us "PervertCon" for a couple years. We thought the label was quite hilarious and considered using it in our advertising for WisCon 2.



I wrote a con report about WisCon 1; here is part of what I wrote: "Having once seen a convention from the peculiar vantage point of one of the con committee members, I don't think I'll ever go to another convention with quite the same, uh, innocence as I did before WisCon. It's sort of like a small child who sees the world as both a very complex place (in terms of their lack of understanding of it) and, at the same time, an almost magically, effortlessly mechanized machine. Now I know about the incredible concoms who pour sweat and adrenalin into the machine of conventions and make them work. Now I'll always be aware of the stage crew."

–Jeanne