

Madison foursquare

47

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]

September 2020 for *Turbo-Charged Party Animal* #411.

Covers

[SC] These cover cartoons are a real treat for the apa, Andy. Thanks for sharing them with us. Both are very impressive, but I was particularly drawn to the front cover piece. Fletcher seemed to capture character expressions and postures that strike me as very realistic, and the fantastic elements are just alterations to a real scene.

[JG] I've always liked Ken's work. For a while, at some of the early WisCons, Ken drew some art making fun of various Madison/WisCon foibles. I cannot find, but remember fondly his drawing of Madstf members "discovering" mimeo printing. He showed us wielding a mimeo like a very heavy chunk of linoleum as a sort

of block print machine. Well maybe you have to see it to find the humor. It must be around here somewhere. What I HAVE found is this Ken Fletcher cartoon celebrating Dead Cat Fandom...

Kim and Kathi Nash

[SC] What a frustrating story about Frugal and their struggle with Amazon. Of course it's probably impractical to try suing Amazon, so their only choice is to give up and move on. How sad.

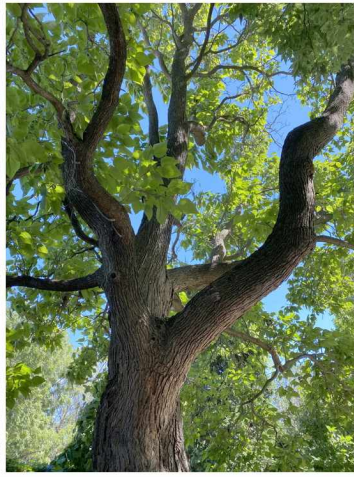
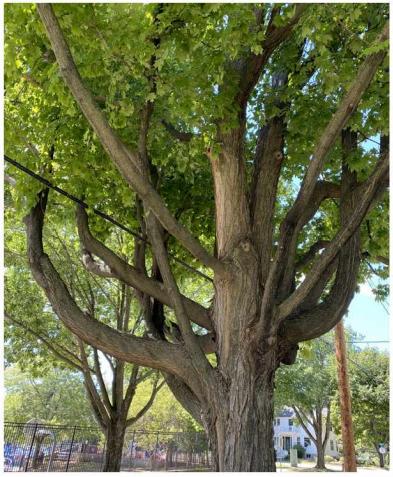
Regarding pretty house gardens, Jeanne and I have noticed much the same thing. We also assume it has a lot to do with the extra time people are spending at home during the plague, but we can't say for sure because this is the first year we have spent time nearly every day walking around in neighborhoods all over town and really looking at front yards. We have also noticed how common it has become for people to garden the space between the sidewalk and the street in front of their houses. It's sometimes amazing what people manage to stuff into that space. We are already talking about stealing a few ideas for ourselves for next year from these walks, but I know I'm not ambitious enough to do anything with the verge in front of our house. I need the space to pile brush from our lilac bushes for brush pick-up.

[JG] I've heard stories about Amazon and Facebook like this before: people are told they've violated a rule but not told any more than that. Would it be so difficult for these huge companies to simply include a link to the offending post and to site the rule that was broken? I don't understand.

Steven Vincent Johnson

[SC] I rather liked your description of entropy as the surface of a gray painted canvas in order to motivate us to innovate. I like the implication that creativity is not just limited to those of us who have talent or have a drive to create. All of us should make an effort to be





Walking beneath the trees

creative simply because it's a part of who we all are.

[JG] I was thinking about a mandala or one of **Georgie's** cakes as a perfect example of entropic artwork. Interesting idea Steve!

Greg Rihn

[SC] Thanks for your notes on the *Fifty Years of Comics* exhibit at Saint Kate Arts Hotel. I noticed an ad for it in one of our local papers. I'm looking forward to your description of the larger MOWA exhibit at West Bend. I'd like to see it too, but can't see how we can take the risk of visiting a museum under the current circumstances. I'll have to be content to let you take the risk and tell us how it was.

Regarding your comment to **Carrie** regarding a Covid 19 vaccine, I don't have any problem taking a vaccine. My concern is going to be that the Trump Administration will rush something out that has not been rigorously tested and it will contain some flaw that could seriously harm a significant subset of patients. We all know that Trump does not care about hurting or killing people if he can score an electoral boost by announcing that a vaccine is finally available, especially if it comes out prior to election day. I think we would have to take a wait and see attitude in that situation. I have read that Dr. Fauci has put the most optimistic estimate for a reliable vaccine to appear around January.

[JG] Thanks for your snippets of anti-Trump screeds. I agree. I like listening to Steve Schmidt's articulate rages.

Georgie Schnobrich

[JG] Thanks for sending us recordings of your women's Suffrage lecture. Very entertaining and enlightening. I admired how well you organized the material.

[Comment to **Jim & Diane** too:] I think I've succeeded in replicating Manna's recipe for rugelach! I will miss Manna's café muchly, but at least we haven't lost my favorite item from their menu.



Lisa Freitag

[JG] We tried to watch William's rooftop concert and gave up fairly early because of the sound issues. Thanks for letting us know what happened. It looked like they were all having a good time.

With regards to the confusing nature of COVID symptoms, it's necessary to add another layer to the mix: the politics of repressing the seriousness of the pandemic. Scott's sister Bonnie had herself admitted to the hospital last week because of severe nausea and diarrhea, and was told that she would not be given a COVID test because she did not exhibit the correct symptoms. Scott and I were both livid when we heard this. Of course we hope that Bonnie would not test positive if tested, but we certainly think she should have been given the test. She would have received the test here in Wisconsin, and many other states I think, but Iowa's governor, Kim Reynolds, is a big Trump supporter. Among other things, Reynolds is insisting on all schools opening and the Iowa supreme court has rejected local school districts' attempts to act otherwise. And Iowa



hospitals are under orders to test only those people who exhibit a narrow range of symptoms. Nevertheless I have seen nausea and diarrhea on a couple lists of COVID symptoms. Bonnie is back home now and has recovered from whatever ailment she had, but I am still angry that she wasn't allowed to be tested.

Thanks for the information you gave us among the corrections to **Greg's** Doom statistics.

Jim Hudson and Diane Martin

[SC] Though you describe it stoically, Jim, your summer of teeth sounded pretty rough to me. I'm glad you made it through okay.

As we look to our possible travel plans in 2021, we have none really. We will be visiting family in Iowa and the Milwaukee area, of course. Beyond that, it's pretty vague. A trip to Door County will probably happen. A long-overdue driving adventure somewhere? "Maybe" is the best answer I can give you. We hope to be able to move forward with a bathroom remodel next year, so that will suck up a chunk of our spare funds. Frankly, I find it very hard to image what life might be like in either a post-Trump America or in the grip of another Trump Administration. Before we know the outcome of the fall election and the arrival of a safe and reliable Covid 19 vaccine, can we even make plans?

Diane, thanks for the history of the Madison Parade of Cats, which I believe WAS history by the time I attended my first WisCon, which was #9. Although I have long been mostly indifferent to cats, I love the sense of humor you bring to writing about them.

[JG] (This Comment is for **Marilyn** Holt, too.) Scott and I just finished watching the two seasons of *The Umbrella Academy* and though we enjoyed it for the most part, I found some of it a bit irritating. I didn't think much of its portrayal of time travel, for example—it was used in the plot as a way to transport our

characters to a different place and "when" and new potential apocalypse, but there wasn't much effort expended in dealing with paradox. The problems caused by time travel were easily unraveled. But my main problem was a growing discomfort with the powers of the two women, Vanya and Allison. Unlike the men—Luther, Diego, Klaus, and Number 5—the plot showed Vanya and Allison as constantly worried about, even feeling guilty about, their powers. Those around Vanya and Allison also seemed to agree that the women's power needed to be curbed: Hargreeves suppressed Vanya's powers; Luther imprisoned her because of them. Everyone who loves Allison distrusts her on some level, suspecting that she uses her power to manipulate them. None of the men have to deal with the question of whether their powers are morally good or bad; their powers are just who they are.

Carrie Root

[SC] I have had ambitions to have a fiction and non-fiction book in progress at the same time and just switch back and forth as the spirit moves me, but I have not been able to actually pull that off. The closest I get to reading more than one book at a time is when Jeanne and I are listening to, or reading aloud, a book together (most often the next book discussion assignment) I will often be reading another book on my own, too. Since we finished the July book group book I finished *The System of the World*, book 3 of Neil Stephenson's *Baroque Cycle*, which I loved and think is the best thing I have ever read of his. I will certainly read this trilogy again someday. Also, Max Barry's excellent SF novel *Providence* (Jeanne and I read this aloud together between book group books), Tea Obreht's unusual but beautiful Western novel *Inland*, Patricia Limerick's scholarly study *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* and another excellent SF novel *Autonomous* by Annalee Newitz that Jeanne mentioned last month.



Walking among flowers

[JG] This is what I expect to witness: the 100%-woke-or-nothing-expectation will be co-opted by other groups. I expect and hope that climate change is about to dominate our politics and when it does, I expect that some people who are currently at the forefront of the various social political movements will discover that their current bona fides will be called into question by environmental standards that have yet to be defined. We are going to have to figure out how to work with each other despite our differing commitments to a long list of important causes.

I'm sorry you haven't seen *Hamilton* yet. The way we justified paying for a single month of Disney+ in order to see *Hamilton*, was that the cost of that single month (\$6.99) was less than the cost of a pair of movie tickets, something we haven't purchased in many months. I miss going to movie theaters, but while that's not possible, I have no problem renting a streaming production here and there.

Clifford R. Wind

[SC] It's sad that you are struggling a bit with Snowy. I have to wonder if you will have to do some re-training to get him to respond better to your calls, at least. "Propertarianism" sounds like an offshoot of Libertarianism to me. Your ballot candidate must have been a disciple of Doolittle. This is the first I have heard of this group, but there are several other candidates on your ballot with similarly odd affiliations, Fifth Republic? Standup America? New Liberty? Good luck figuring them all out.

[JG] I admire your work in doing the research on the candidates on your ballot, but oh my, what a rabbit hole you descended in educating yourself on the "Propertarianism." I find it so unnerving that people like Doolittle are able to attract any followers at all. Yuck.

Marilyn Holt

[SC] I have also been receptive to guaranteed minimum income proposals. \$60,000 a year seems like a lot, but the cost of living on the coasts is higher than it is here in the Midwest. I'm more excited about proposals for single-payer health care that covers everyone from birth to death, free long-term or nursing home care for old people and free or vastly subsidized post-high school tuition. Those three things alone would be a terrific boost to working people, giving them the freedom to pursue opportunities with so much less risk than desperately holding on to that one awful job just because it provides hard-to-find "benefits."

[JG] We also loved *Good Omens*. We watched it when it was first released, and then watched it again just last week. Yeah, I can see dipping into it every once in a while when one needs to be cheered up! We've watched several seasons of *Foyle's War* whenever they showed up on public television. I think the actor who plays DCS Foyle, Michael Kitchen, is wonderful.

Andy Hooper

[SC] A pleasing assortment, indeed. I enjoyed it all. Ron Sweed/The Ghoul appears to have been a great guy. I think I would have been annoyed at his decision to insert rude noises into his featured movies (truly bad movies don't need anyone's help being funny), but most of the rest of his antics sound like a hoot.

A perfect example of a dense section of probably useless, yet still absorbing and entertaining, information was your history of "Lydia the Tattooed Lady." Who knew there was so much to it and why? And look at what I learned (particularly in the Notes) about "The Wreck of the Hesperus," the Mazurka, "Mendel" Picasso, Grover Whalen and the Trilon. What am I going to do with that knowledge? Nothing.



Walking in Olbrich Gardens. Note the "Captain Kirk Hosta" plant (far right).

But I could not have been more delighted to learn about it anyway.

As I write this I'm about halfway through Sarah Vowell's *Lafayette in the Somewhat United States* that I had coincidentally started reading to clear out the last of her books off my to-read shelf. I should be ready for your piece on Lafayette next month. Looking forward to it.

Also, three cheers for the Robert Bloch reprint. Very funny and sharp.

[JG] I liked your annotated "Lydia the Tattooed Lady." What fun. I kept thinking, though, that I recognized the title from somewhere...that I've heard it in the lyrics of a different song. An Elton John song? Maybe I will be able to track down this transient memory before this zine goes to press.

Well I'm intrigued that you categorized the games I like to play as "nonrepresentational games." In my mind the common denominator among the games I have liked to play is that they engage the players in making art. I think of games in somewhat the same way as I think of meetings: I'm happiest when work actually gets done in the course of a meeting or when the game players create something new in the process of playing with one another.

I think you are right in your suspicion that the film societies' \$1 ticket price kept the cost of theatrical movie tickets lower compared to other places. I remember going out to see a movie at the Esquire Theater on E. Mifflin Street with **Kim Nash** and **Steve Johnson** in 1980, when film societies were still active in Madison. (Do you remember this, Kim and Steve?) I went because this movie starred Malcolm McDowell who I'd recently seen and loved in *O Lucky Man!* But the movie at the Esquire was something quite different. Have you seen or heard of the movie *Caligula*? We had heard nothing about it before deciding to see the movie, but it turned out that half of *Caligula* was a very bad pseudo-historical movie and the other half was

X-Rated, over-the-top violent pornography. *Caligula* made *A Clockwork Orange* look tame. But the first shocking thing about it was the cost of the tickets. Kim and Steve and I were aghast at the price, \$8 each!! I think this price would not have been considered at all outrageous in most other cities at the time. But in Madison, I seem to recall first-run movie tickets still cost about \$3-4. We almost turned away from the box office because of such an outrageous price, and awhile later, I'm sure I wished that we had. What a grotesque, horrible movie! As we left the theater, we warned the people who were standing in line for the next showing what the movie was like and most of them walked away without buying tickets. McDowell's movie, *Time After Time*, that riffed on H.G. Wells' novel, *The Time Machine*, came out the same year, and I remember loving that, so it may have refurbished my opinion of McDowell a bit.

You got free tickets from your friend at University Square Theater. Well, Scott and I also benefited from a free-ticket deal for most of 2016 at the Sundance Theater at Hilldale. Sundance used to punch a card for each movie ticket purchased; when your card had enough punches you were awarded a free movie. That program shifted to an on-line version; you could check your points balance on line. And then THAT system was revised and in the process of the change, a bunch of our points were lost. We saw a LOT of movies at Sundance—just a couple blocks away from Scott's office—almost every Friday night after Scott got off work. I was determined not to lose all our points. I had documentation and asked the Sundance manager to retrieve our missing points. But the guy sadly shook his head and told me that, under the new management, he no longer had admin powers to help me and that I would need to consult the national office. As you might imagine, my efforts didn't get me anywhere. So I went back to the Sundance manager who sighed and, perhaps realizing that I was not going to give up on my mission, took my info and said, "let me see what I

can do.” He tapped on his computer for quite a while and when he came back to me he said he thought he’d fixed the problem. Indeed he HAD fixed the problem. All our points had been restored ... and the best part was this: thereafter, our points never went away. When we used points to get a free movie, our points balance persisted. I didn’t actually realize what was happening for a while, but after several weeks of free movies and a point total number that began to look familiar despite my normal number blindness, I figured it out. We took advantage of our special status for another couple weeks, but then guilt wore away at me and I decided to talk to the Sundance manager. I told him that I thought something was wrong with our account. I started to tell him what was going on, but he really didn’t want to hear it. “Did you get your points back?” he asked. “Oh yeah,” I said. “Well, then the system is working.” he said and turned to the next customer. So, for almost a year we enjoyed a whole bunch of free movies. Finally, though, the system was revised again because a new owner had decided to run its ticket sales through a different web site, and the good times ended. It was nice while it lasted.

Loved the Robert Bloch piece. It would be fun to update it with a current list of TV rules.

J.J. Brutsman and Tom Havighurst

[SC] Welcome back! I was thrilled when y’all said yes to our invitation to return to *Turbo*. We never get to hang out together nearly enough, something I think that comes up whenever we run into each other. *Turbo* is not like actually getting together of course, but under the circumstances it’s something.

Thanks for the handy tour of nature preserves and parks around Madison. A fine project whether there’s a plague or not. This will be very useful as I have been

thinking of expanding my walking destinations beyond my neighborhood this fall. Plus there are beautiful photos!

I have been biking on Madison bike routes most of the spring and summer. Depending on the weather, I go out once to three times a week but never on weekends (too crowded). The bike path you described near MATC is a favorite of mine, at least until I have to make the hump down Anderson St. to International Drive to cross Packers Ave. That is less charming. Another favorite is the South West Bike Path starting from near the intersection of Regent and Monroe all the way out to the bike bridge over the Beltline next to Odana Hills Golf Course. Nearly that entire ride is paved, flat, often shady and beautiful.

[JG] Tell me more about your interest in mushroom hunting. I love cooking with and eating mushrooms, but other than the fairly easy-to-identify morels, I have never considered hunting wild mushrooms. How did you get into it and do you use reference books to help you identify safe mushrooms?

Loved your hike descriptions and photos. Thank you! We recently hiked in the Aldo Leopold Nature Center trails and noticed the path connecting to the Edna Taylor Conservation Park. We’ve hiked the boardwalk in the Lower Yahara River Trail too. Lovely places. I did some map work for the Pheasant Branch Conservancy in 2005 or 2006. My maps were supposed to be printed as large format signs and placed in several locations along the trail, but they ran out of funds to do the actual installation.

Actually the chicken pot pie in the photo I included in the last issue had just the top crust. In serving, I cut the crust in half, putting half on each our plates, and then spoon the filling next to/on top of the crust. Pot pies are a great way to use left-over meat.



Scott enjoying a brew on Paisan's Terrace



Jeanne posing with coleus plants at Olbrich Gardens

Cathy Gilligan

[SC] I smiled at your comment to me on car mileage. Industry standard is around 15,000 miles per year so you are not doing a “typical” amount of driving. That is certainly extending the life of your car by a lot, so that’s a big plus. I was counting on putting a fairly large number of miles on our new car in the early years and slacking off as we got older and felt less comfortable making long cross-country drives. Time is catching up with us and I might as well grapple with the fact that I will not feel like taking our chances out on the open road forever. Since it seems unlikely to me that American mass transportation infrastructure will improve much in my lifetime (to something like the availability, reliability, comfort and reasonable cost of, say, Europe or parts of Asia) I guess we better travel by car while we can.

Jae Adams

[JG] Rather than keeping my mask in my pocket (as you suggest, not everyone always has a pocket available), I keep my mask hooked onto a lanyard. (Fans often have a collection of lanyards!) When I leave the house I loop the lanyard + mask around my neck where it stays clean but easily accessible when I need to cover my face. An additional advantage of displaying my mask on a lanyard is that folks I see along the way know I’m carrying the mask and not flaunting public safety. Well maybe that last advantage says more about my paranoia than that it’s a real thing.

Socializing with strangers encountered while out walking is an interesting thing. I keep being reminded of the days after 9/11 when it seemed that we all felt a bond to strangers we passed in the street because we knew we were all feeling something similar about what was going down around us. It feels like that now. We pass another couple on the sidewalk—us or them looping out onto the street to make space between us—and we smile at one another, communicating a message that says thank you/be well. People working in their front yard wave at us or shout a greeting even though none of us have ever met. It’s all so very neighborly; it’s heart-warming, really. However, I have considered a few times that my particular experience is an example of white privilege. The other day we got out of our car in the neighborhood designated for our day’s walk and saw some

folks working in their yard looked at us curiously—possibly wondering if they were expecting visitors but not recognizing us. I smiled and said, “We’re here to take a walk in your neighborhood!” The guy responded “...and a lovely day for it. This is a great neighborhood to walk in. Watch for the cranes in the park down the street!” We said thank you and urged one another to have a good day.

Ruth and Jim Nichols

[SC] Ruth, a lot of us have been writing about feeling depressed lately. We should not be surprised, what with the seemingly endless plague combined with the daily drumbeat of the Trump saga. In addition you have had to contend with Jim’s worrisome trip to the hospital. Small wonder you are feeling down. I liked how you wrote about it. I liked the little graphics you used, too.

Jim, I liked “News Blob.” Good news that you are home safe and recovering. Good news that you are retiring in January. Good news that you have apparently mastered piloting Nevenah’s electric wheelchair. Bad news that Trump appears to be mentally impaired, but after watching him the last 4 years, it’s also old news.

[JG] I thought your piece this month was beautifully written, Ruth. Thank you so much.

Congratulations on making your wills and working with a financial advisor. I agree that checking these things off the list helps to suppress that floundering feeling.... We finally acquired a financial advisor the year I was laid off/retired from my state job at the DNR in 2003. I

had to do something with the lump sum sabbatical and vacation money. This turned out to be a really good thing to do. I’d have been in a very precarious situation now if we hadn’t committed to a financial plan for our retirement, even if I had continued working at the DNR. We did our wills about the same time.

I am absolutely with you on the feeling that weeks are zooming by. I don’t quite understand the connection, but it feels like the days



Masked bear spied while out walking

go faster for me because we are settled into a weekly routine now, with certain chores and entertainments done on specific days of the week. Each Sunday morning when I re-fill my pill box it seems as though it was just a couple days ago, not a week ago, when I refilled it last. On the other hand, the time since March when Everything Changed, seems to have dragged on forever. The months stretching into 2021 look endless. I guess the fact that our routines are connected to days of the week, not days in a month, somehow creates this mirage of both speed and stagnation.

My onions also went bad a couple times this summer. I think I have solved the problem by washing the onion basket in hot soapy water and lining it with a new paper bag.

What's New

Cover art of Turbo 411

The artwork for *The Turbo-Charged Party Animal in the Attic* book, used on this issue's apa cover, was actually inspired by a scary moment I experienced late one night when I got out of bed to use the bathroom. I walked past the open door to our attic (which we sometimes leave open on hot nights to encourage warm air to exit upward) and I thought I saw something move on the stairway. I couldn't get the image out of my head and the next morning I took a photo and started playing with it on the computer. One thing led to another.

BEIZER is dead; long live BEZIER

[JG] So the Wisconsin Department of Transportation replaced the license plate they'd misspelled with a corrected version and all is well. One thing though: we now have a set of very official plates, which, if looked up in the DOT database would give a cop no information about the owner. There is, after all, no listing for BEIZER at the DOT. Perhaps if we ever decide to experiment with an extra-legal lifestyle and need a get-away car, the bogus plates might come in handy.



The Princess Bride cast now

The Princess Bride

[JG] We both loved seeing the virtual cast reunion and reading of *The Princess Bride*. The event was a fundraiser for the Democratic Party of Wisconsin; to gain access to the broadcast, attendees had to make a donation to the political organization.) Like so many events these days, the three-hour broadcast was a cavalcade of accidentally muted microphones, glitchy video, and other technical difficulties, but the reunited cast managed to recapture much of the weird, over-the-top magic of the film. Reiner announced at the beginning that every member of the cast who was *not dead*, had joined the production. (This turned out not to be exactly true. Fred Savage, who played the unnamed grandson in the film was absent. People online asked whether Savage was dead or Republican.) Cary Elwes is still handsome and suave; Wallace Shawn still a sputtering megalomaniac, Chris Sarandon and Christopher Guest still smarmy and evil; Billy Crystal still a wise-cracking and ad-libbing wizard; Carol Kane perfect as his shrieking wife. Even though this reading revealed how little Princes Buttercup did (other than look beautiful), Robin White fully committed to the role. Josh Gad did a beautiful job reproducing the late André the Giant's performance. But for me, Mandy Patinkin's performance as Inigo Montoya stood out, partly because the character has more depth and intensity than any other character in the story. When, at last, Inigo finds the man who murdered his father in front of him, his single-minded dedication to revenge propels him to triumph. The film ends with its heroes, Buttercup and Westley, sharing a passionate kiss, but it's the preceding scene which really brings the plot to a close: "I have been in the revenge business so long. Now that it's over, I don't know what to do with the rest of my life," Montoya says to Westley, just before they jump out a window to ride off on snow-white horses in the

direction of happily ever after. Patinkin threw himself totally into his performance in the reading. Scott and I decided to actually watch the movie immediately after the reading and I noticed that Patinkin had reproduced line deliveries and expressions almost exactly from his film performance, not to mention bringing along the actual prop sword from the film. I was impressed. I hear that Patinkin does a video blog that is getting a lot of attention. I will have to check it out.

A little *amuse bouche*: Elwes, when Westley is asked why he wears a mask, delivered his response—"They're terribly comfortable. I think everyone will be wearing them in the future" — with a disposable surgical mask over his nose and mouth.

More than 100,000 people paid to watch the performance. It was a good fund-raising night for the Wisconsin Dems.

Voting in the Parks

[JG] I am so impressed by this part of Madison's voting plan. For two days, poll workers will be stationed in what looks like ALL city parks (200 sites!) and be available to register voters and accept delivery of absentee ballots, serving as witnesses if needed. Wow! Scott's and my poll station is a short 4-block walk from our house, but we will have the choice of two little neighborhood parks, both CLOSER to our house than our polling station, where we will be able to drop off our ballots. No problems with crowds or in-door facilities. This may turn out to be one of those changes made to accommodate COVID that are improvements on the way we used to do things. If you are a Madison resident, you can go here to find a list of participating parks where you can drop off your ballot:

<https://tinyurl.com/ParkVoting>



And now here's another story from the vault,

From the Vault Catchphrases

Ey Jeanne Gomoll, Excerpted from my parents' "roast," performed by my siblings in honor of Mom and Dad's 40th anniversary, 1987

Mom and Dad's original plan was for three kids with a daughter first—to be designated as in-house babysitter—at least that's how I remember the plan described. But one afternoon twenty-five years ago, dad called us all into the living room for what he announced would be a "**family conference**." This was fairly weird, since we'd never had a family conference, not being what you would call a democratically governed household. We all tramped into the living room to see what was up, Rick, Steve, and me. Mom was already sitting in there looking a little nervous, but happy, and when we'd scattered ourselves on the floor and sofa, dad announced that mom was pregnant. We talked about the changes the new baby would cause in our house, mostly economic as I recall. Dad got very serious as he warned us that things would be a little crowded. Thus I hoped for a boy so he would have to share Rick and Steve's room; Rick and Steve were in favor of a girl for the opposite reason. Eventually we got down to talking about naming the new kid, and sabotaged several names that mom and dad

had been thinking of by demonstrating how easily they could be made fun of by other, meaner, less sensitive children.

For seven years we had no more family conferences, until early in 1969, when dad once again called us all into the living room for a family conference. "**Family conference**," he shouted. "Everyone into the living room!" Once again, with the addition of Julie, we all tramped into the living room. None of us suspected that there was any possibility whatsoever that dad would once again announce a new family member. We all assumed that Julie had been the one and only "surprise." So I was only joking when I stopped at mom's chair and grinned at her, and said with fake exasperation, "Not again, mom!?"

Mom wasn't very amused. In October of that year, Dan was born.

Dad hasn't called another **family conference** since then.



Another phrase that has taken on many layers of meaning in our family is "**Dad's shortcuts**." Dad has a usually incredible ability to navigate in strange cities and is more adept than most people I know when it comes to driving into a new city and striking out blindly in the direction he assumes is downtown, or a good restaurant, or the airport. Most of the time his guesses are correct.

I still have a fond memory of dad imparting Arcane Suburban Survival Lore to me while he taught me to drive. He demonstrated the secret method of finding the way out of suburb street mazes by examining the pattern of gravel tracks at intersections.

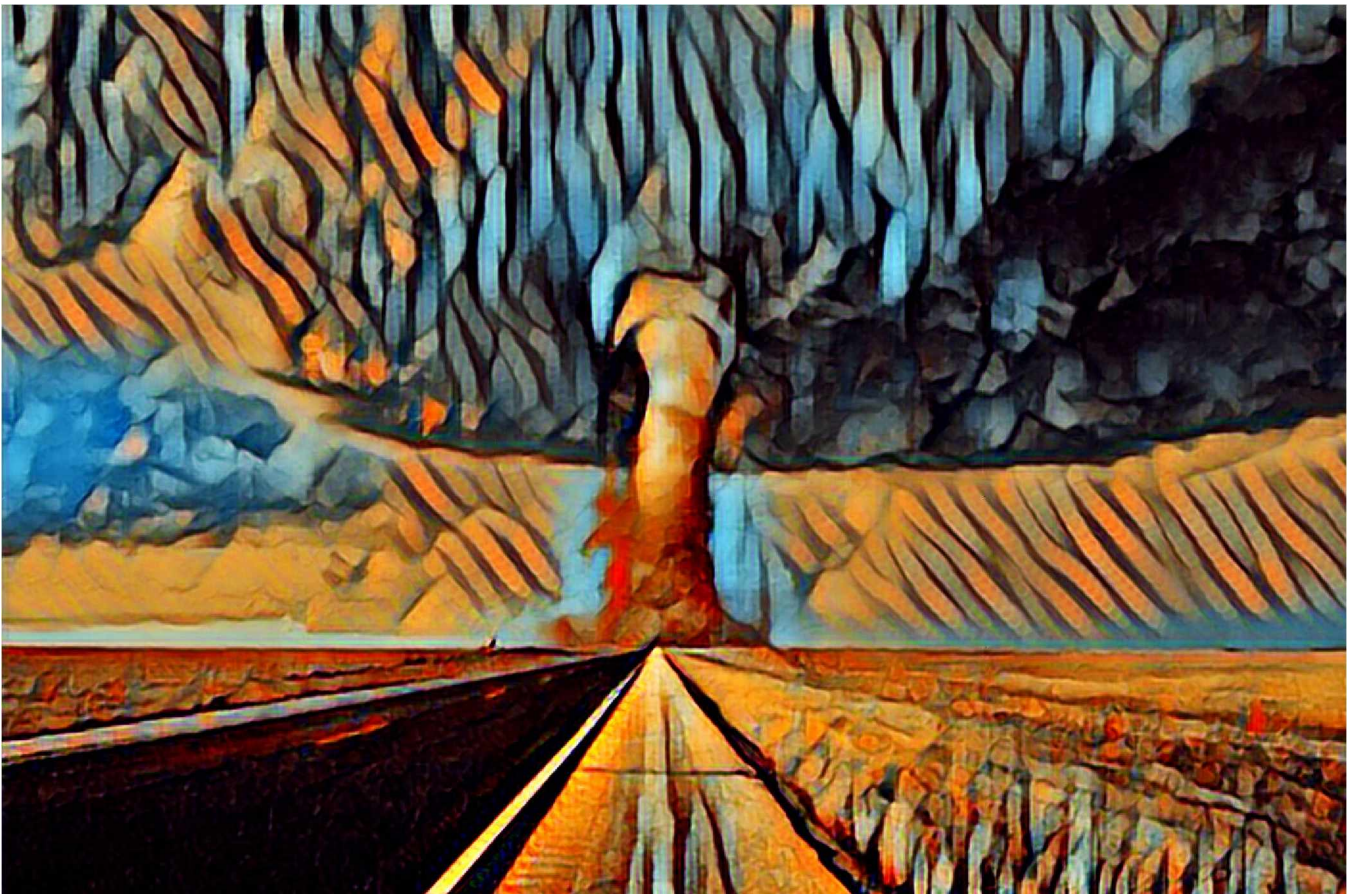
In the summer of 1968, our family took a trip to Washington D.C. Two factors contributed to the choice of that city for our vacation, Rick's and my interest in US history, and a suggestion mom made the winter before, no doubt when we kids had been getting on her nerves in those days when severe winters used to keep kids indoors. Rick and I yearned to receive mail (fans in the making, I guess)—and mom suggested that we write to state tourism boards and ask for information about their states. We did. We were inundated with stuff that I'd now call junk mail, but which in those days was simply wonderful *mail*, addressed to us, and very exciting. Rick and I proposed that the family travel to Washington, D.C. for a vacation and when to our surprise, our parents agreed, we wrote even more letters asking for information about the Capital. We wrote to tourism agencies; we wrote to the tourist attractions themselves; we wrote to congressional representatives, and by the time we were through collecting information and scheduling our week's time

in Washington, D.C., we'd filled every moment of every waking hour of the trip. Mom and dad were pretty good about it though and went along with all our plans.

We rented a camper which attached to the back of the car and reserved space at a private campground outside of the city in Maryland. It was a warm, sunny day when we arrived, and mom kept us driving around the campground until we had located the perfect tree to park under. It was an enormous tree, and provided plenty of shade. I remember mom being very picky about the exact placement of the camper beneath the tree to take advantage of the most shade to keep the interior of the camper cool during the day.

Dad found Washington a challenging city in which to drive. Once he asked a cop to direct him and the officer led him in a clearly illegal but sanctioned U-Turn in the middle of a boulevard. But the biggest wrong turn came at the end of the trip.

It was the last day of a very, very, hot week, made even hotter by the fact that we'd spent most of it with the sun reflecting onto us off big, white stone buildings. Without too much argument, mom convinced the rest of us to abandon the last scheduled stop on our itinerary—the Jefferson Memorial—and return to the campground for a swim and some laying around. We



Not a picture of the tornado that hit my family's camper trailer. I just got a little too enthusiastic in my drawing... —JG

piled in the car and dad took out the map to check out an idea.

"I think I know how we can get back to the campground faster," he said. "I think I see a *shortcut*." We rolled our eyes but kept quiet. Dad was in full-blown explore mode.

"We can get on the Dulles Airport Freeway *here*," he said, and stabbed the much folded DC map, "and then get off on the very next exit and we miss having to go all the way around *here!*" With a flourish, he stuffed the map back into the glove compartment and we were off.

Only later, when it was too late, did we look at that map again. But dad swears to this day that there was nothing on that map that indicated that Dulles Airport Freeway doesn't have any exits on the Dulles-bound half of the freeway. Apparently it was constructed to provide efficient service for airport users in a way that didn't encourage its use and clogging by other travelers. In any case, once we drove up the on-ramp we found ourselves committed to an unexpectedly long drive—about 20 miles out of our way. The urban planners responsible for the Dulles freeway would have been gratified to know that the traffic was quite light.

While we drove out to the airport, we noticed a storm brewing to the north of us. It looked like quite a violent thunderstorm and the sky darkened rapidly. A huge squall line advanced toward us and we realized that it was probably raining on our campground while we drove. And drove...

As it turned out, more than rain had hit the campground. Violent winds had wrecked havoc among the trees and tents, and most of the people had run for high ground during the storm and were huddled up in the shelter building on top of a hill. We saw a huge tree that had fallen down and crushed a camper. The tree creased the vehicle lengthwise, utterly destroying it. "Oh, those poor people!" we moaned as dad cruised the shambles left by what some people told us had been a tornado.

But then we couldn't find our campsite. We couldn't find that tree that mom had so carefully chosen as the place to park our camper. And we realized suddenly that the downed tree had been *our* tree and the creased camper was *our* camper.

Dad's proposals of *shortcuts* still provoke rolled eyeballs, but we don't complain at all. Who knows what disaster this shortcut might be saving us from?



The book for October's Zoomed SF Without Borders book discussion (10/20/20, 6:30 pm) is *The Lady from the Black Lagoon: Hollywood Monsters and the Lost Legacy of Millicent Patrick* by Mallory O'Meara. Let me know if you want to join us, That's it for this month. See you all in October. Make sure you vote!

—Jeanne & Scott, September 2020