

Madison four square

48



Ivy celebrating autumn, MATC building downtown Madison

Elizabeth Matson

[SC] Welcome to Turbo! What a lovely first zine, and so beautifully written. I think you will fit right in. I love the photo of you on the first page. It reminds me of a line from a story we saw you tell years ago that has since become one of my favorite phrases, “Be bold! Be bold! But not TOO bold.”

I enjoyed the story of your acquisition of your first cat, but I’m glad now that you have come over to the dog side. Nick may be a lazy aristocrat, but who could resist those big brown eyes?

I’m glad to hear that Janesville has good bike trails. Biking has become a favorite form of exercise to me since I won’t risk the gym, and Madison is an accommodating place for biking. I also used to run way back in my twenties, and I loved it, but forty years have gone by and I fear that getting back into running at my age will be too hard on my joints. I go for elliptical machines and stationary bikes at the gym

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]

October 2020 for *Turbo-Charged Party Animal* #412.

instead. During the plague it will probably be walking for as long as I can stand it outside when winter comes and biking is over.

[JG] What a gorgeous, beautifully designed zine, Elizabeth! I was so glad when you moved back to Wisconsin and we were able to renew our friendship in person. Now that you attend the *SF Without Borders* book club Zoom meetings and have joined *Turboapa*, I think we may be interacting more than we did when you lived in our neighborhood. A nice switch to be able to write something like that *this* year.

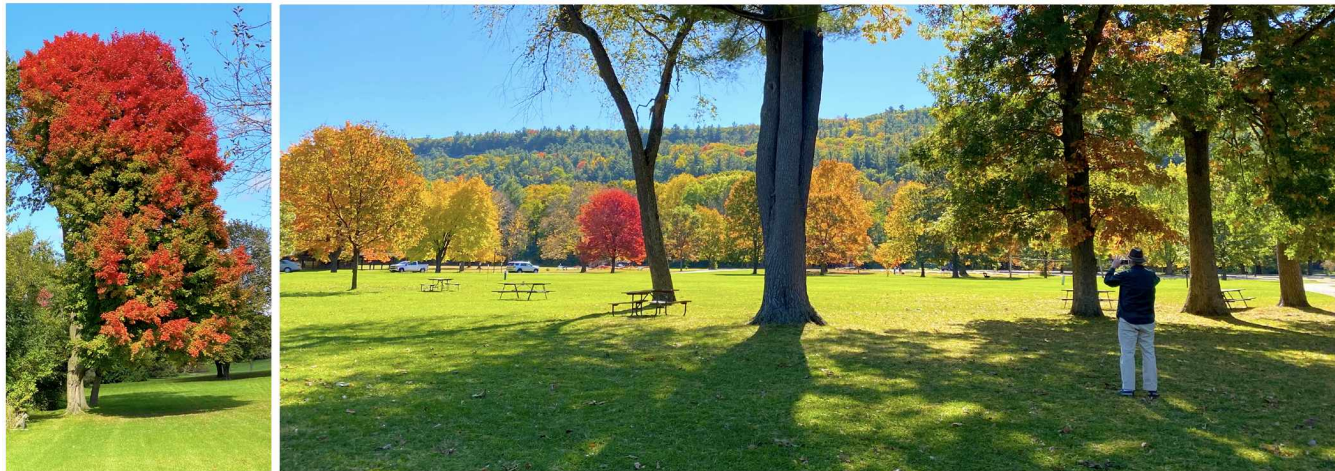
Loved the soulful photo of Nick and your very successful library seed plantings. But best of all, of course, was the fabulous picture of story-telling Elizabeth on page 1. Kids must LOVE hearing you tell stories at the library (or virtually). Do you get special requests from them?

Greg Rihn

[SC] Thank you for your response to my question about museums. This is something we may look more closely into after the winter settles in.

[JG] Your description of the shot-live film of *Newsies!* and, of course, the shot-live version of *Hamilton*, makes me wish that more Broadway plays would be released this way, at least before they are revised and transposed to film. I recall some other shot-live shows I’ve seen and enjoyed—*Sweeney Todd* and a few other Sondheim shows, I think. Though I sometimes like how movies “open up” a play to scenes set in outside and multiple locations, and also focus on minutia and close-ups in a way that can’t be done on stage, I know I’m missing so much of what made the Broadway version exciting and am grateful whenever I get the chance to see what the original production was like. We do wish *The West Wing* HBO, TV-episode-to-play had been made available like *The Princess Bride*. I hope it becomes available eventually outside the HBO pay wall.

I just finished Robinson’s newest novel, *The Ministry for the Future*; I will not review it in detail here, though



Scott snapping a photo at Devil's Lake State Park

I will probably mention it several times in the course of this zine. I do recommend it to anyone that enjoys Stan's particular style of fiction. (And, **Georgie**, it's as if Stan overheard your discussion about how sometimes violence might be necessary for big changes: that's a major theme in *Ministry*.) Your response to my comment on creative solutions reminded me of a passage from *Ministry*. As humanity steps closer and closer to the dire cliff edge of total annihilation, and with each climate-related Kim Stanley Robinson novel, the tools he proposes that might save us, grow in scale and probable expense. One of the characters muses on the necessity for a Plan B, i.e., detailed ideas of what to do *after* the revolution succeeds. That's where I think (and maybe Stan thinks too) that SF writers and readers can best contribute. As an example of what happens when there is no Plan B, one of the novel's characters cites Grexit (Greece defying the EU). The Greek population's vote overwhelmingly defied EU demands for austerity. Nonetheless, the Greek party in power, Syriza, promptly accepted the EU's leash, because they had no Plan B. Things are falling apart right now for us, mid-COVID and ecological crises; many institutions may have to undergo major changes. It would be helpful to consider new ideas for a better way to organize government, research, and society when and if various parts of our infrastructure collapse, rather than just trying to prop up behaviors that are no longer effective.

So I find myself frequently thinking about institutions and services and architecture in ways that I seldom have before: what is it for, what is its purpose? If it's necessary, is there an alternate way to do the same thing?

Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] I liked the elegant way you wrote about your memory. I have gotten to the point where I hardly trust myself to remember things. I write down notes all the time. Even a grocery list of more than two or three

items must be written down. I don't know whether this problem is actually my memory getting poorer or whether I am so much more easily distracted than I used to be and the things I try to remember are just skipped over in favor of some new thing. Jeanne and I have often been stopped mid-sentence by the loss of a name or other noun that we each suspect would not have fled from us a few years ago. Thank God for iPhones and Google.

[JG] I think the only time I have ever felt in tune with a machine is with computers. Macintosh computers to be specific. It feels to me that my nearly 40-year reliance on computers has attuned me to computer grammar and syntax. Language shapes what and how you think about things; I feel very strongly that when I switch from computer to human syntax, that I see reality in a different way. So, to figure out how to create something using computer tools, I switch languages in my mind and stand in a different place to work out the problem.

Re memory: *Scientific American* published a really interesting article several years ago entitled, "Why Walking through a Doorway Makes You Forget." (Google is such a wonderful thing. I Googled "memory doorway" and the first thing that popped up was that December 2011 *Scientific American* article that I only vaguely remembered reading.)

"The doorway effect suggests that there's more to the remembering than just what you paid attention to, when it happened, and how hard you tried. Instead, some forms of memory seem to be optimized to keep information ready-to-hand until its shelf life expires, and then purge that information in favor of new stuff. Radvansky and colleagues call this sort of memory representation an "event model," and propose that walking through a doorway is a good time to purge your event models because whatever happened in the old room is likely to become less relevant now that you have changed venues. That thing in the box? Oh, that's from what I was doing before I got here; we can forget all about that. Other



Fallen leaves

changes may induce a purge as well: A friend knocks on the door, you finish the task you were working on, or your computer battery runs down and you have to plug in to recharge."

This absolutely happens to me. Every once in a while it helps to warn myself that I may forget what I was about when I walk through the door ... so, I say out loud what I want to do as I walk through it. Mostly I forget to do that. Damn door.

I agree with you about early Madstf culture not doing the cancel thing. I can't remember ever wanting or talking about any sort of feminist purity tests. The closest thing I recall is when Jan Bogstad and I committed to one another to make sure that *Janus* and WisCon would always contain significant feminist content: to us, that meant that WE were committing *PERSONALLY* to create or encourage that content, not that we would consider censoring anyone for failing to make a similar commitment.

J.J. Brutsman & Tom Havighurst

[SC] Thank you for more park adventures, and lovely pictures. Does Tom have enough flexibility in his work schedule to go on walks with you during the week? For several years now, Jeanne and I routinely drive out to APT in Spring Green by taking Hwy 19 because much of it is a beautiful, winding drive. We always pass Indian Lake County Park but we have never stopped and checked it out. Now we will have to.

I tend to take a dim view of wine snobs, but I have to admit that I have enjoyed some mighty fine wine thanks to the wine snobs in my life. So I can hardly disapprove of J.J.'s judgy-ness about the beer choices other people make, even though she no longer drinks beer herself. If, in the end, you support good beer over crap beer, that is a good attitude to have, in my opinion.

[JG] Making interesting meals and desserts have been major highlights in our life too. We also eat restaurant meals once a week—outdoor dining when weather permits, take-out when it doesn't. We have found some restaurants that allow enough space between tables to make us feel safe. I expect that there won't be too many opportunities for outdoor dining pretty soon; it will be a long winter. Which makes creative home menus all the more important. We subscribe to e-versions of both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, and both of those newspapers have huge recipe archives and send out daily emails with cooking/baking suggestions based on seasonal availability of ingredients. Most weeks I make at least one and usually several dishes I've never made before, and like you I have gotten fairly nonchalant about tweaking recipes. In the last month or so here are some of the more successful dishes I've made:

- 🍃 Roasted Cauliflower with Pancetta, Olives and Crisp Parmesan
- 🍃 Creamy Corn Pasta with Basil
- 🍃 Double-Stacked Shrimp and Cheese Tacos
- 🍃 *Tres Leches* Cake
- 🍃 Mississippi Roast in slow cooker
- 🍃 Pork chops in Lemon-Caper Sauce
- 🍃 Fried Egg Quesadilla
- 🍃 Lamb Medallions with Black Olive Wine Sauce
- 🍃 Sheet-Pan Sausages and Brussels Sprouts with Honey Mustard



...and some favorites too, like this apple pie



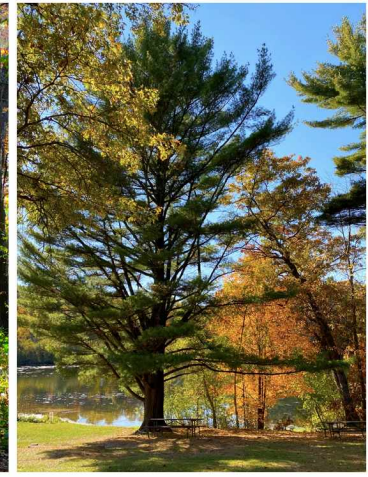
Devil's Lake State Park



Devil's Lake State Park



Mirror Lake State Park



Mirror Lake State Park

I've had both my hips replaced (the right one was replaced twice), so I have way too much info about it all. Knee surgery was far more difficult for me to recover from, but the pain of a bad hip was much worse than bad-knee pain. I never tried massage though I wish now that I had tried it. However, after the first time I had a hip (left) replaced and realized how completely and absolutely my pain was banished by the operation, I became a big fan of get-in-get-it-done-now. Everything changes though in these days of COVID....

Walter Freitag

[SC] A treatable Lyme disease is better than a potentially fatal Covid-19, but still no holiday. I hope the treatment works well and the Lyme doesn't linger with you.

Regarding summer, with the west coast on fire, the southern U.S. getting drowned and battered by hurricanes and other parts of the country experiencing heat and drought, I'm a little reluctant to report that I think we here in Madison have enjoyed one of the loveliest spring, summer and fall seasons in recent years. The weather here has been mostly mild and neither particularly dry nor wet. Severe storms have largely missed us. I have probably spent more time at home outdoors this year than I have in a many years. I feel sort of odd that so much of the rest of the country is having such a rough time.

[JG] I do like your idea that timeless art is about love; I think your insight applies particularly well to Stan Robinson's books, which frequently end with a lyrical appreciation of beauty and love despite the fact that his novels so often concern themselves with imminent ecological collapse. Since I just finished reading his novel, *The Ministry for the Future*, I am still swimming in the spell of it. In this passage, one of the main characters muses:

"...That there is no other home for us than here. That we will cope no matter how stupid things get. That all couples are odd couples. That the only catastrophe that can't be undone is extinction. That we can make a good place. That people can take their fate in their hands. That there is no such thing as fate."

Catie Pfeifer

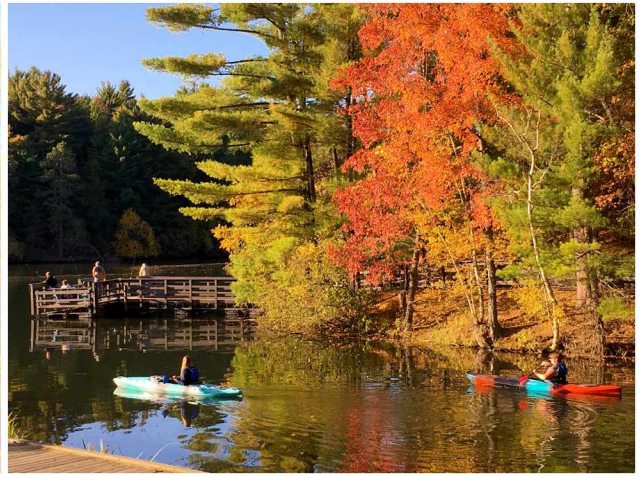
[SC] Your trip up north to the U.P. sounds perfectly relaxing. We have been through the U.P. several times either going to Canada or coming back from Michigan proper. On one trip up to Sault Sainte Marie years ago we drove through the Tahquamenon Falls State Park on a beautiful day and found a brew pub right in the middle of the park! I was delighted. We stopped for beer (for me) and lunch. I still have the hat.

Jeanne and I have most often fled to Door County in September for many of the same reasons you chose to go in the fall. Whereas the U.P. works wonderfully if you are seeking quiet and isolation, we go to Door County to do mostly the opposite. We look forward to going to art galleries, shows, restaurants, tours, shopping and boat excursions as well as quiet hikes and being near nature. Being retired, we can isolate pretty well at home. We decided not to go to Door County this year because they are not encouraging tourists and there would not be many things open or safe to distract us.

In our house the second Baru Cormorant book is sitting on a bookshelf unopened. Before I could start reading it I heard the series was going to extend beyond a trilogy, which annoyed me. I also heard the 2nd book ends on a cliff-hanger, so I never started it. Now Tor is saying the series will end with the fourth book, so perhaps I will buy the 3rd one but wait until the last one comes out before actually reading any further. I like the first book a lot, and your comments have encouraged me to carry on.



Mirror Lake State Park



Mirror Lake State Park

[JG] Your U.P. vacation sounds lovely. By next summer, if there is no very effective vaccine widely available, I might be willing to investigate some isolated Airbnb cabins, somewhere to safely get away from home.

Marilyn Holt

[SC] Regarding your comment to us about our license plate replacement. The reason it went so well is because, after 21 years working there, I speak state D.O.T. lingo pretty well. Jeanne speaks state D.N.R. (Department of Natural Resources) well after her long employment with them. If we ever have an issue with a park sticker, it will be her job to call them. I suppose if we ever need to call the department of agriculture we will have to flip a coin.

Your poem was intriguing.

[JG] What an interesting course! When I was learning to do graphics on a computer I took a bunch of classes and the most valuable ones were taught by professional graphic artists (not necessarily trained as teachers). As a professional graphic designer I found the lessons incredibly useful because, usually, upon learning a new technique, I immediately thought about how it could be useful for a specific project I was currently working on. It seems that you are seeing the same kind of immediate use, learning to use tools for current projects.

Andy Hooper

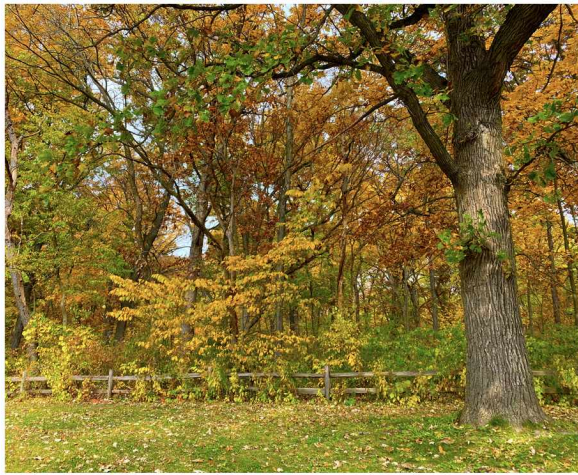
[SC] Your “Horror Host of the Month” column has turned out completely differently than I expected. Instead of a parade of washed-up losers and alcoholics on their last legs, these guys mostly seem to be creative and well-meaning professionals having a good time putting on a fun show with no budget. It’s been fun reading about them and bringing back memories of what TV was like when I was a kid.

My sister, Bonnie, who is ten years older than me, used to baby sit for me when I was a kid. She always enjoyed watching scary crap on TV with her charges. First me, then her own daughters and now (I expect) her grand-kids. She was typically involved with the movies I saw on TV that ended up giving me nightmares. I think my earliest nightmares were about a big tree that grabbed people up in its branches and (I think) ate them or crushed them. I think it was inspired by a movie I saw when I was little. I have no idea what movie it was or whether the image in my head was actually all mine and there was no movie. Those dreams were so vivid, I can still vaguely conjure up that big old tree. One early movie that I know gave me nightmares was *Mr. Sardonicus*, which I saw on TV with my notorious sister. For years the old movie *Journey to the Center of the Earth* was broadcast once a year and Bonnie would always sit me down with her to try to watch it. I could never get past about the middle. Descending down into caves and tunnels when I knew monsters were coming gave me the willies. I realize now that I have never actually seen the last half of that old 1959 film. I will have to finally watch it.

Regarding your comment to me, I remember *Bozo the Clown* from when I was very young, but I do not think I ever saw *Gravesend Manor* or the *Son of Gravesend Manor*. I did often see a show on WQAD in the Quad Cities, and later KCRG in Cedar Rapids, in the early ‘70’s called the *Acri Creature Feature*. I saw that show frequently through high school.

Thanks for the reprint of the lovely Randy Byers piece. He was a very fine writer.

[JG] *Twilight Zone* and *Outer Limits* shows (none with late show hosts that I recall) are the ones that stick in my memory and nightmares. I think of one story in particular every single night when I flip the light switch in the stairwell (which certainly reinforces the memory). I think it was an *Outer Limits* story about



Heritage Nature Sanctuary



Rare, subtle Fall color



Voting in the park

an opening to another dimension that someone finds when they try to switch on a hall light. The room is dark and rather than finding the wall, their hand moves through the now insubstantial wall into another world. I think they or their child ends up falling through it, but all I remember is the idea of reaching out in the dark and moving past and through what should be a solid wall.

I agree! I also don't understand why la Fayette was never made into a movie hero. It's an obvious idea. I look forward to reading your take on our unfairly ignored national hero.

You have discovered my insidious plan to solicit letters of comment. Your move.

I loved Randy's story. What a beautiful day.

Carrie Root

[SC] Regarding your comment to me, I can scarcely imagine the multitude of Andy-isms there must be. I used to spout a fair number of my father's favorite phrases for Jeanne's amusement or to elicit the occasional eye-roll (ex. "It's colder than a well-digger's asshole!") But he's been gone over a decade now and I think I'm losing them. They don't pop out of my mouth like they once did ("That bastard's lower than a snake's belly in a wagon track!"). Only when I get together with my brother do we tend to spark each other off on some of Dad's old chestnuts. Next time maybe I'll think to write more of them down.

[JG] I think about your suggestion that I try hiking poles every time Scott and I go out for a walk. I bet I would like them since every once in a while, when leaning too much on my cane, I develop a stitch in my side. I know some people who have hiking poles and I WILL remember to ask to borrow a set one of these days, to see how I like using them. The walking therapy is definitely helping my knee, side stitch or not. We've (very) gradually lengthening the distance for our walks.

I am always in a great mood afterward and I definitely feel stronger than I did before we began walking daily.

Steven Vincent Johnson

[SC] It's good news and a great relief that Darlene did not come down with Covid 19. It is distressing that you ended up struggling with anxiety, but understandable in light of your history and the crazy times we live in. I hope you find the help that you need.

[JG] I'm so sorry to hear about what a hard month you've had. I hope it helps some to be able to write about your feelings here.

Jim Hudson & Diane Martin

[SC] I was a little sad to read that *Live From Here* was cancelled. Since the end of *Prairie Home Companion* we have lost the habit of tuning in every weekend, but I have heard Thile's show occasionally and I will miss the music Thile, and Keillor before him, tended to feature.

Thanks for the detailed comments on your walks. I am taking careful note of them (as well as **J.J.** and **Tom's**). As I have mentioned earlier, I have favored biking around Madison as my exercise of choice most of the summer, but as we move into cooler weather, I expect to be doing more walking. When I have struck out on my own for a 4-5 mile walk, I have tended to stay in the same general area. After all, I know where all the coffee shops are and a post-walk coffee is always required. But walking more often will make expanding my horizons more desirable.

Weirdly, the coffee shop business in our neck of the woods has actually been expanding during the plague. Someone has spent all summer extensively remodeling an old building on Winnebago St. to become, I'm told, a new coffee place opening "soon". And the Monona Bank (that's the big bank right in the middle of



Halloween decor



Mirror Lake State Park

Schenk's Corners) has recently decided their building was bigger than they needed, so they remodeled the former main lobby (that once held something like eighteen tellers and opens out onto the Schenk's Corners intersection) into a swanky coffee shop—"The Rotunda Café." I have not been in there yet, but it's high on my list to check out. All this in addition to the Barriques, Café Brittoli, and The Victory that are already in business and spaced out about a block apart along Atwood Ave. At this rate there may soon be as many coffee places in the neighborhood as bars, and in Wisconsin that's impressive.

Many fine pictures, but that shot of Olivia and her cake is a classic.

Jeanne and I have been caught up lately in the three seasons of the Danish political drama *Borgen*. They gave us the option of seeing it dubbed or with subtitles. We chose both because there is really too much dialog for subtitles alone to keep up with. We've noticed that the dubbed translation of what is being said is often very different from the subtitles' translation, which can be amusing and illuminating. Of course we are also watching the new season of *Fargo*, as always it's violent, profane, darkly funny and plain weird.

[JG] As Scott mentioned, we are watching *Borgen*; the sometimes funny thing about that show is how it recalls the olden days of politics when a politician who lied or did something underhanded found themselves enmeshed in a career-ending scandal. Other than that, there is a lot of overlap in our viewing preferences with yours: the APT zoom plays (though we watched the Shaw play and missed *Cymbeline* and Chekhov) and the Forward Theater zoom plays and readings (loved *Lifespan of a Fact!* The first Forward Theater reading *The True*, was splendidly set in the familiar but very long-ago world of the Democratic Machine; really excellent acting. It did not feel like a mere reading.). Also: *The Princess Bride*, *Granchester* (though we

like the actor James Norton as the Reverend Sidney Chambers, much better than his replacement Tom Brittney), *Endeavor* (which makes us all the more interested in finally seeing the series, *Inspector Morse*), and *Van der Valk*. For a while, before I finally remembered the title, *Borgen*, we distinguished *van der Valk* from *Borgen* as the Dutch vs. the Danish show. Taking you very seriously, Diane, Scott demanded to see *Blues Brothers* just a week after you issued the ultimatum. Much fun. We still haven't gotten around to listening to the Serial Box sequel to *Orphan Black*, but intend to; thanks for the reminder. And I've read interesting things about *Lucifer* too, so that's also on the list.

We're enjoying the new Masterpiece Theater show, *Flesh and Blood* and looking forward to seeing the fourth season of *The Crown*. We haven't gotten around to watching it yet. And we're still watching *The Walking Dead* and *Fear the Walking Dead*, though we have decided to stop there and will skip the newest edition to the *Walking Dead* empire: *World Beyond*. Apparently the original show has reached the end of the source comic book plotline and the producers are branching out. Some of the Apple+ series we enjoyed last year are coming around again with second seasons and they look great.

We've seen a few small, non-blockbuster films that we either missed when they originally appeared in theaters or that never made it to Madison in the first place: 1) *The Bookshop* with Emily Mortimer, Patrica Clarkson and Bill Nighy, 2) *The Reader* with Kate Winslet, Ralph Fiennes and David Kross, 3) *Sometimes, Always, Never* (the title of which refers to the three buttons on a man's suit and when to button them; though that has very little to do with the actual plot!), and 4) *A Little Chaos* with Kate Winslet and Alan Rickman. All beautifully done; no snakes. You might like any or all of them.

There are dozens of other series and movies I'm interested in seeing, which surprised me since I figured I'd be starved for new stuff by this point since COVID was making it difficult to produce movies and TV shows. I mentioned my surprise to Scott the other day, saying it didn't feel at all like we were "running out" of interesting stuff to watch. Scott laughed and pointed out that since we tend to watch TV only in the evenings, and that we devote two hours out of every weeknight to *Rachel Maddow's* and Chris Hayes' news shows. So it isn't all that surprising.

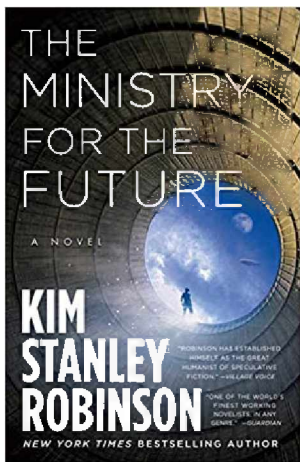
Lovely garden flower photos, Diane.

We were wondering about that Airstream trailer parked on your street! My guess was that a relative or friend was visiting safely, bringing their own bed and bathroom with them.

What's New

The Ministry for the Future, by Kim Stanley Robinson

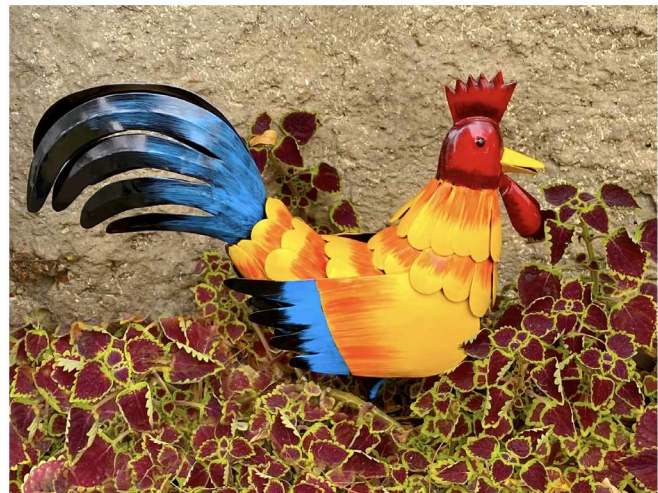
[JG] I mentioned this book several times in comments. *The Ministry for the Future* is one of those books, for me, that hovers close to my consciousness, always relevant to whatever I'm thinking or doing. *Ministry* is not apocalypse-porn, though apocalyptic events occur (a heat wave in India that kill millions, a flood that wipes out the entire Los Angeles basin) and the possibility for the ultimate apocalypse (human extinction) is ever-present in the novel. I think I've read all of Stan's novels and most of his short fiction. I am noticing that like feminist SF, his fiction has been gradually shifting from wipe-the-slate-clean futures (wow—this is what it would be like if human beings populated most of the solar system!) to how-can-we-actually-get-there futures. His ideas of how humanity might be able to survive ecological collapse have been getting more detailed and, at the same time, more harrowing, with each novel. All of of Stan's ecological fiction (*Three Californias*, *Mars Trilogy*, *Science in the Capital*/*Green Earth*, *New York 2140*, *Red Moon*) considers how humanity might survive, and then improves on the ones before it. For instance, Stan seems to have concluded that the massive sea-level rise that



created the world in *New York 2140* is not one in which humanity can survive. When I began reading *Ministry*, I assumed that just as *New York 2140* and *Red Moon* co-exist in the same timeline, so too would *Ministry*. Not so. Stan crumpled up the drafts of those particular future blueprints and started over. I know that many people do not like his style of writing—interspersing science and philosophy with plot. I love it. If you have enjoyed Stan's other fiction, I highly recommend *Ministry*. I especially recommend it if you, like me, sometimes feel that COVID isolation tends to make one focus on the minutia of everyday life. This novel will definitely give you a different perspective.

Rooster

[JG] Speaking of the minutia of everyday life, let me introduce you to Rooster. We plan to set Rooster up among some new Hosta plantings in our yard, next Spring.



Getting Out

[JG] Many of the pictures (taken by both Scott and me) of colorful trees and Halloween decor in this month's *Madison Foursquare* were taken while out on walks, during a couple outings to Burrows Park (Madison Eastside park) and one to the State Parks, Devil's Lake and Mirror Lake, during peak color week, or while delivering our ballots to city officials in the park. (All non-captioned photos were taken in Madison neighborhoods.) Sadly, I did NOT take photos of the folks setting up a wedding in Burrows Park while Scott and I sat in our lawn chairs, reading, enjoying the sun and sparkling lake view. Slowly, a group of friends erected an arch and braided it with flowers, and set up a dozen chairs in preparation for the ceremony. Then the guests began to arrive and we realized that the



No dog in earsight



Mother Fools mural: VOTE!

wedding theme must be plaid flannel. Everyone was wearing plaid flannel shirts or dresses. Very amusing. The week before Scott and I got together for a rather chilly, socially distanced get-together with my brothers and niece at the Burrows Park shelter; it was great to see them. While we talked, we nixed the idea of our traditional Thanksgiving, sadly, but really we don't see a choice. Scott and I are coming to like Burrows park a lot; it is close-by (between Lake Mendota and the former, lamented Manna's Café), it has a nice lake view, a lovely shelter, and a expansive lawn. There have seldom been more than a 6 or 7 people there when we dropped by.

Next SF w/o Borders book discussion

[JG] November 17, 6:30 pm central time: We will be talking about *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel. Let me know if you want to join us and I will make sure you get a zoom invitation.



"Storm's comin', Clara. Better get my absentee ballot in."

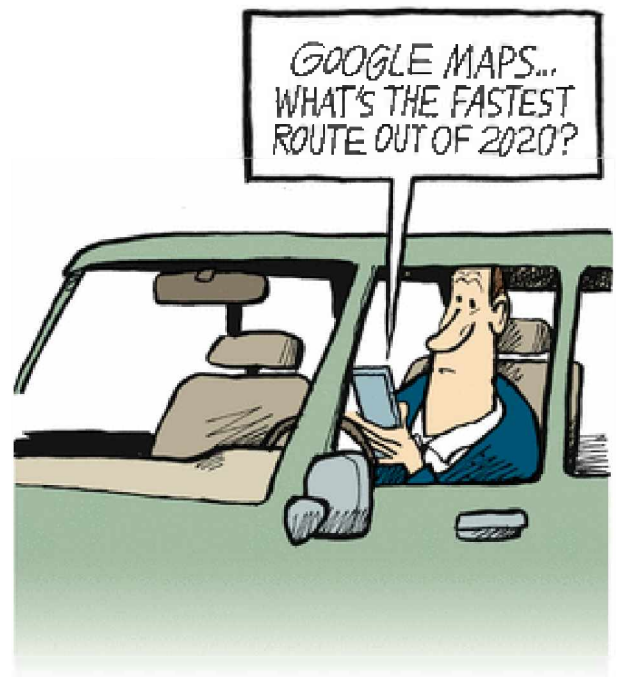


I am including a story from the Vault this month because **J.J. and Tom's** mentions of mushroom hunting reminded me of my favorite mushroom-hunting story.

See you all in November, by which time, I hope, the future will look more hopeful. Till then, it's going to be eating out...on the porch. —Jeanne & Scott, 10/2020



Sunday brunch chez Union St.



By Jeanne Gomoll, *Whimsey* 3, 1985

George Knudsen is a big man. When he retired two years ago from the Department of Natural Resources and his position as Wisconsin's Chief Naturalist, I drew a caricature of him as Paul Bunyan, and some people didn't notice that it was a caricature. There's an old photo of a much younger George, before he got to be the Chief Naturalist and moved to an office in Madison, when he was in charge of a Black Bear survey up in the north woods. The photo shows George from the point of view of the bear upon which his foot rests. George's arms are folded proudly over his enormous chest, that hasn't shrunk even now, but just looked rather silly, all cramped and tucked into the chair behind his desk at the DNR. He's just tossed a shock of the black hair off his forehead in the photo (that's no problem now: it's white and too thin to fall into his eyes); and he looks big. He is very powerful-looking even now.

George is also one of the most knowledgeable people I have ever met. He knows the common and the Latin name for every blade of grass, every tree, every flower, every reptile, every insect, and every animal you can find in North America. I think he knows almost everything there is to know about surviving alone in

the wilderness and has made his own home practically self-sufficient. Madison Gas & Electric pays him for electricity. And besides that, he's just about one of the most entertaining people I know. I could listen to him for hours talking about anything he wanted to talk about. Most of his conversation is a mixture of nature lore and tall tales.... George resembles Paul Bunyan in more ways than just physically.

He's got several big sons (of course) that he talks about quite a lot, who do things like extinguish big oil-derrick fires, chop down giant trees, and live alone in log cabins out in the middle of the big prairie out west. "Big" is one of George's favorite words. One time George was telling me about one of his sons, Jeff, who lives in a log cabin, and how Jeff had killed a buck out on the prairie about ten miles away from home. Jeff was on foot and the deer was a big one (of course) and so Jeff had to cut the carcass apart, right there on the prairie, and *carry it back home in pieces*. While he was doing that, some guys rode past on their horses, took in Jeff's dilemma and offered to help him transport the deer on their horses. Jeff considered the generous offer, but refused, saying that he'd rather do the job himself. In telling the story, George huffed a little about Jeff's stubbornness but I could tell that he was pretty proud of his big son. And he chuckled as he said that Jeff took a long time to do the job, but that he got that whole big buck back to his place in several trips by cutting it into pieces. Once home, he cured the meat and stored it away, all on his own.

George was telling me this story in between bits of advice on morel-spotting. In payment for a drawing I'd done for him, George was taking me morel hunting, an outing that everyone at the DNR envied me, I'm sure, because George, like all morel fanciers, guards his knowledge of morels carefully. And George's morel secrets were apt to be more valuable than those of the ordinary morel lovers' secrets. Morels can't be cultivated. George reminded me. No one has ever discovered a way to raise these delectable mushrooms that taste like steak when sautéed in butter. No one can even predict for sure where they will be found from season to

George Knudsen

IS RETIRING

AFTER

33 YEARS!!



season. Oh, they're *generally* found around the trunks of elm trees that have been dead for three to four years, but not always, and hardly ever will a place, fruitful one year, be the place to look next year.

It was pouring rain out. We'd only been out a half hour and I was wearing good rain gear, but already my clothing was soaked. But there was no postponing morel hunting for another weekend. Morels only grow for a period of a few weeks in the early spring—at the same time as wild asparagus—and we were already approaching the end of the season. It was now or never. We were climbing a steep ridge and George had already found three small morels that I hadn't noticed, but George thought he'd taught me enough so that we should split up and try to cover more territory.

"OK, George," I said. And I climbed off to the left, eventually grabbing hold of a fern plant as my foot started to slide down the muddy, slippery incline. I caught myself as I fell to my knees (getting even wetter and muddier than I'd been before) and there, right in front of my eyes, on the path I was trying to reach, was an *enormous* morel, about nine inches long and four inches across. It was lying across the path as if someone had carefully laid it there. "George!" I called, exasperated that he had set me up this way so that I could "find" a morel. I had no doubts that he'd put it there. Off to my right I could hear George approaching. But then I saw the *rest* of the morels. "George!" I yelled, this time not at all irritated, just excited. "Look at this!"

By the time George got there I was counting the number of morels growing in a *ring* around of all things, a healthy Burr Oak tree. There were a dozen morels and they were all enormous, some of them having fallen over like the first one I saw, from their own weight. I felt as though I'd walked into one of George's tall tales. We cut them down and laid them carefully in the wicker basket strapped onto George's back and he told me how very unusual it was to find morels in a ring, and how impossible it was to find them around a Burr Oak tree. About a half hour later we found the second ring of giant Burr Oak morels, and several minutes after those were collected, we found a third ring of Burr Oak morels. We collected almost 14 pounds of morels that morning and George had another anecdote of **big** proportions with which to regale friends and family.

But since we'd been so successful so early on in the day, and since the weather was starting to clear up, George suggested a sequel for our field trip. He wanted to collect a rattlesnake to use as part of a talk and demonstration he was going to present in a week. So

we drove off to a ridge he knew that overlooks the Wisconsin River. By the time we'd struggled to the top of the very steep ridge, with me holding on to George's belt at times, it had begun drizzling. But the view over the river was wonderful. The river ran about a mile beyond the ridge and several hundred feet below us, and the mists were tumbling over its surface, while the sky was turning several shades of pink and purple as the sun set behind the clouds.

"Pay attention, Jeanne," George suddenly barked. "There are rattlesnakes up here."

"I don't see any," I said.

"There's one right there." George nodded vaguely ahead of him.

I stood very still and peered in that direction but couldn't see anything. "Where?"

"Right....there," George said, pointing. I still couldn't see anything, and George slowly stooped until his finger pointed only a few feet from the coiled (and sleepy) snake. It being a cold and wet day, the snake was pretty groggy. We were lucky to even find a rattler that wasn't in its den. But I suddenly saw it and gasped at how easily I could have been fooled by its coloration and perhaps, would have stepped on it, had it not been for George's warning.

"That one's too small," George said and started to detour around the snoozing rattlesnake. "Stay behind me, Jeanne."

"I'm right behind you, George." And, boy, was I.

When George found the second snake, he again had to point it out to me, and I stood stock still as he caught its head with a pair of metal tongs and then transfers the hold to his hand (the snake's head gently and carefully held between thumb and forefinger, its tail thrashing back and forth below), and lowered it in to a canvas sack. We were done. I thought. George had his snake. And my heart stopped hammering in my ears.

But as we started to retrace our steps, another rattler announced its presence ahead of us and *this* snake turned out to be a granddaddy of a rattler, a really big one. I don't think I could have compassed its largest girth with my hand, and I've got an piano-octave-spanning hand size. Anyway, George threw out the first snake and went after this one, and had a little more difficulty this time because this snake was so much stronger. After he'd gotten a good hold on its head and was holding it so that its tail didn't touch the ground—having to hold it at eye level to do so, George said he needed help getting the thing into the sack and asked me to hold the sack open.



I started to tell him that I couldn't do that, but discovered that I no longer had a voice available to me. And by the way he was holding the bag out to me, I realized that he was expecting me to hop to it. And so without thinking much more about it, I grabbed the sack, closed my eyes, turned away and held the thing

open for George. A few seconds later the snake was inside and George had grabbed the bag from my hands. And I started breathing again. Like the cathartic climax of a bad movie, it thundered and the rain started to come down hard.

George put the carefully tied-up canvas sack into his wicker backpack and we started walking slowly down the treacherous slope, holding on to trees and saplings at each stage, trying to prevent our feet from sliding out from under us. At one point George almost lost it. He grabbed a tree and I grabbed him and we just managed to save him from falling on his back onto the basket and the snake.

I grinned after the crisis was over. I was finally going to get the punchline on George out of this one.

"George..." I said.

"Yes, Jeanne?"

"George, if you had fallen down and hurt yourself up here, you know I'd have had to cut you up and carry you home in pieces!"

We laughed all the way back down to the car.

