

Madison foursquare

55



Scott biking (with a little Photoshop help)

Cover, Kim & Kathi Nash

[SC] Nice cover art! It naturally reminds me of how many different masks we ended up with around our house. A couple of inexpensive handmade masks we acquired early on all ended up with Jeanne when it turned out my wimpy ears couldn't hold them up. I bought a couple pairs that tied around my head and used those for much of last year until I finally found some masks online made by a fancy shirt maker that had elastic that stretched around my head and were comfortable, easy to clean and much quicker to put on and remove than the hand-tied ones. When double

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masking was recommended we bought a box of KN95 masks (lighter and much easier on my ears than those original handmade cloth ones) that we used in addition to the cloth ones we were already using. I will be happy to see them all go.

[JG] Dr. Fauci predicts that we will continue to wear masks seasonally as new variations of COVID, as well as common flu, are detected. So I suppose we will need to keep them. It's nice to feel safe about not wearing masks outside now. But yeah, nice cover that works well as a sort abstract, colorful collage!

Greg Rihn

[SC] The New York Times recently ran an article about how experts are moving away from the idea of ever reaching herd immunity and are aiming more toward a "manageable" COVID. It may always be with us, but will not cause nearly the carnage it does now. We seem to have missed the boat on eradication, now we have to get to the point where outbreaks are localized and manageable, hospital and death rates are low and mostly younger and healthier people come down with it. Vaccination will remain important, but the reality today is that we are not going to get enough people vaccinated fast enough to actually stop it. I think we will be getting annual COVID booster shots, like we do for the flu, for the foreseeable future.

[JG] I share your opinion that much modern fiction and film qualifies as fantasy. Not all of the categorizations are chosen because critics find it difficult to use "fantasy" and "literature" in the same sentence. I think the first time I thought about how so-called "mainstream" stories were actually fantasy or straight-up SF was when we saw the 1997 movie, *Face/Off*, in which a character undergoes face transplant surgery to assume the identity of a criminal mastermind. As technology and scientific advances have accelerated in our lifetime, people have gotten used to the idea that *some* people—powerful or rich or both—have access to technologies that are hidden from the general public.



Crabapple trees in the UW Arboretum



Tulips on the Capitol Square

I guess that's another way of saying that "technology sufficiently advanced is indistinguishable from magic." So...*Face/Off* passed as mainstream fiction, not SF, but not for any claims as to its literary importance. As for magical realism, I think it's a case of a categorization solution for a non-existent problem.

Interesting notes on casein-containing Elmer's Glue. Thanks.

Georgie Schnobrich

[JG] I am glad to hear that there was an explanation and cure for your pain. Your worry that you would never get rid of the pain and that it would become a permanent condition resonated with me. That's the first and main worry I am afflicted with whenever something goes wrong with my health. I imagine that it will never improve. I can see how that (and Covid) has led you to consider "unfinished business." I have also been there; am there still, in fact.

I read and enjoyed *Notorious Silk Ribbon*. My initial thoughts were that (1) the portraits were amazingly and helpfully interactive with character descriptions in the text, and (2) that your story fits nicely into the (new?) Weird West subgenre. I've only read one example of Weird West, though I think Bill Bodden has a story in a Weird West anthology. I don't know if that subgenre is an up-and-coming or no-longer-cutting-edge one. Scott doesn't think the story is set in the American West, so I

will be interested to hear from you whether the setting was purely fantastical or was based on a real, non-magical place and time. From your comments about *Notorious Silk Ribbon* in your zines, I was expecting a series of vignettes, each one telling a different character's story, and only slightly connected with the others. But your novelette (?) had a well-developed plot that caught me in the first pages and carried me through enjoyably to the end. I can imagine it as the first one or two episodes of a TV series. I'd watch it, and would gladly read more stories set in this world! Thanks so much for sending us a copy!

I wonder if there are other examples of fiction inspired by drawings?

[SC] Thanks for sending us *Notorious Silk Ribbon*. To reflect back to you from your enclosed note, I had the time and I was amused. I think the story works well because your characters were so engaging, and, literally, sharply drawn. Jeanne and I did not agree on what time period this was set in. I thought it was earlier than a classic American Western time period because *Silk Ribbon's* flintlock pistol seemed too old. The clothing in your illustrations suggested an earlier period to me, too. I particularly liked how you ended the story with the verbal jousting between Pagat and Merlu but, because I never accepted the idea that Caltrigg would give up on taking revenge on Bell simply because Bell went to prison for a few years, I felt at the end that your story was just the beginning of



Crabapple trees in the UW Arboretum



Tulips on the Capitol Square

a longer story. Were you aiming for a clear end, or are you thinking of going on? Your characters seemed rich enough to me to support a full novel.

Congratulations on your successful surgery and continuing recovery. I'm very glad you did not have to leave us during your recuperation. And thank you for a copy of *Notorious Silk Ribbon*.

Lisa Freitag

[SC] Regarding your comment to **Ruth** and **Jim** for #416, Jeanne and I have started to get bolder when it comes to going out since getting fully vaccinated. We have eaten inside at several restaurants here in Madison that were complying with the city's rules on masking, social distancing and capacity limits. It went fine. We also went to a movie at a theater. We went to see *Nomadland* on a big screen at Marcus Point. The theater had limited, socially distanced seating when we bought our tickets online. It was a matinee show, so the theater and lobby were not busy, everyone was masked and everything was scrupulously wiped down. We got a pop at the concession and plopped into our seats. The theater was empty except for us until just before show time when two other couples showed up and sat far away from us. It was all fine. We would have done it several more times since then, but there isn't much showing at the theaters we want to see right now. We have continued to do a daily walk around the State Capitol Square, these days without masks. There are usually other people, but it's not crowded so we don't worry about it. Fine again, so far. **Jim** and **Diane's** apacollation party was the first real social event (party!) we have attended in about a year, and that turned out well.

We will be here in town over Memorial Day for certain because we have an American Players Theater show to attend on Sunday evening. Hope to see you then.

[JG] People often cite the availability in their hometown restaurants serving a myriad of cuisines from around the world as one of the things they value about living in an interconnected, modern world. I like your description of the sources of Kenji Kawai's music, from all over the world and history, for the same reason. I found some of Kenji's music on YouTube and listed to it a bit. I can understand why you find it interesting!

Re your comment to **Greg Rihn**: I don't agree with you that our congresspeople and senators necessarily vote in a way that represents their electorate (at the impeachment trials or anything else for that matter). Donors' opinions and demands loom much larger in our representatives' behavior. And if the current Republican strategy of disabling the ballot is successful, they won't care at all what the electorate needs or thinks.

As for the reproduction problem not addressed by my *Entwives* solution...I figured that there were many *Entwives* and some of them must have been pregnant when they left Fangorn Forest. No DNA manipulation necessary.

There will be neither a physical nor virtual WisCon this year. Initially I think the concomm was talking about doing an in-person writers' workshop, but that seems to have been dropped. What they ARE planning to do is some virtual hangouts and parties, with maybe an impromptu virtual panel or two, or maybe not. However, there WILL be a virtual *Otherwise* auction. Pat Murphy contacted me a few weeks ago and asked me which on-line software I used when last I did an on-line auction. (It was 32Auctions.com) In any case,



May eating adventures:
Strawberry Rhubarb Pie
for Scott's BD and
Morels cooking in butter!



none of that will have any impact on yours and Greg's stay at the Concourse over Memorial Day weekend.

Elizabeth Matson

[SC] Thank you for the Plymouth project update and pictures! So sorry our guy, Rick, did not work out, but a long-distance project like that seemed to me to be impractical for him. Glad he was still helpful. Shipping around the world has been delayed with the Suez Canal crisis last month, so maybe it's not so surprising your yurt has not shown up yet. I love your project, it's a dream-come-true thing you're doing unlike anything I've ever done.

We will miss you at the SF Without Borders book discussion meetings, but at least you are very busy with cool activities! We will try to keep you informed about any especially good stuff we read. Right away I'd recommend that, at some point, you make time to read our book for May, *The Vanished Birds*, a first novel by Simon Jimenez. It's the best book we have read so far this year. Easily the best thing since *Station Eleven*.

Okay, what is the story of the pelicans in Janesville? I have never seen one in Madison (not saying we have never had them, but they are not common here.) How come you guys get the pelicans? Oh, and the pictures of them are lovely.

I'll trade you some wild turkeys for some pelicans. I recently had a stare-down with a wild turkey gobbler. I was biking through the Arboretum and was near the visitor center when I came across one standing on the centerline of the road. Although I did not see any females around, they may have been hidden nearby in the lilac garden. His feathers were fully puffed out and he only had eyes for me. I'd gotten rather close

to him before I realized he was not going to move. I was a little concerned about going around him because he could have easily leapt at me and knocked me off my bike. When I started to take a step back he took a step toward me. A moment later he started shaking at me, which struck me as very similar to how a cow or sheep will stamp a foot in warning. The stalemate was broken when a car came up behind me. Even the angry turkey knew he was no match for a car, so as the car slowly eased past him, I went with it.

[JG] I am intrigued by the dilemma you describe: who is indigenous? I guess I've always thought the word meant, among those still surviving, the ones who were there first. If indigenous is a synonym for the word "native," then perhaps it means anyone born in the place ... although the definition of "native" also includes the notion that many generations must have first been born in that place. (I am a native Wisconsinite, but many people would object if I called myself a native American. There are obviously a couple meanings tangled up here.) But that doesn't seem to be what you are talking about when you ask who gets to tell stories about a place. I guess I think that a place might inspire a story, but the place is not the author; the story is created by the person or persons drawing upon



their life experiences in that place. When we re-tell the stories of other people who have lived in our home land, that can suggest a few things: firstly that we are paying homage to the storytellers with whom we share a home. It can also mean, to some folks, a sort of theft and erasure of the original storytellers. As you point out, things get confusing for folks whose families have moved great distances in their own lifetimes and thus have no first-person familiarity with the places their ancestors told stories about. I guess we're all in the business of creating new stories for ourselves, maybe containing fragments of our parents' stories and the stories we learn about the place we live, combined with our own personal stories. But it's no doubt a tricky balancing act for a storyteller like you. Keep writing about this Elizabeth; I look forward to seeing how your work develops as you wrestle with these ideas.

And I share Scott's confusion: where are your pelicans coming from?!

Jim Hudson & Diane Martin

[SC] We decided to watch the Oscars again this year, the big challenge being to see some of the films up for awards before the show. We were lucky to catch *Nomadland* in an actual movie theater, it's a great movie to see on the big screen as it's, essentially, a road movie. The film's vast, cold mid-western landscapes alternating with desert and mountain locations benefit greatly from the big screen. Most of the rest we ended up renting, sometimes paying as

much as \$20.00, figuring that we saved a lot from not going to movies hardly at all last year, so we splurged. I loved *Soul* and I thought *Promising Young Woman* was awesome. *Minari* is a bit off-beat until Grandma shows up and then the movie gets more interesting. She did not win Best Supporting Actress for nothing. *Judas and the Black Messiah* is sad and frustrating, but important and brilliantly performed. *The Father* is far better than any other movie I have yet seen about an older person's experience of dementia.

The Oscar ceremony itself was fun to watch, I thought. The part I liked the best was the setting in L.A.'s Union Station, which was gorgeous. I realized later that it was built in 1939, so I must have been there at least twice when I was very young and travelling by train with my mother to L.A. to visit mom's family. I remember us getting on the train in Iowa and parts of the train rides, but I don't remember L.A. Union Station at all. Jeanne and I have been lucky to visit some beautiful Union Stations in other cities (Kansas City, Denver, Chicago) and will have to look for this one the next time we are in L.A.

[JG] For the first time I read through your list of TV shows that you are watching and found NO overlap with our own list. There must actually be quite a lot of good stuff on TV for this to happen—since the four of us have some significant overlap in entertainment preferences and nevertheless watched entirely different shows during the last month. We are enjoying the series, *Unforgotten* (on Prime), an English police procedural dealing with crimes committed one or two generations in the past. So far we've seen the first two seasons. We like the latest Masterpiece Theater series, *Atlantic Crossing* (on PBS), quite a bit: It's a historical drama set in Norway and the US during WWII and featuring the close friendship between Princess Martha of Norway and President Franklin Roosevelt, during the time she fled to the US as a refugee from



the Nazi invasion of her country. Movies streamed (in addition to those Scott mentioned above): *Let Him Go* (Kevin Costner and Diane Lane), *Six Minutes to Midnight* (Eddie Izzard and Judi Dench), *The Courier* (Benedict Cumberbatch). Of the three I recommend *The Courier* strongly.

I would go further than your verdict on Forward Theater's plays *Lewiston/Clarkston*—that you didn't like either. I actively disliked both and I have begun to wonder if I will continue to be disappointed by Forward Theater's artistic choices. I like the idea of a repertory troupe—seeing familiar actors take different roles from play to play—but the writing and content is often most important to me personally, I want to see plays and stories that I can connect with...and that has definitely not been happening in the last two plays performed by Forward Theater. We streamed the newest Forward Theater play, *46 Plays for America's First Ladies* and liked it, though some of the plays were more successful than others. I enjoyed it more than the Presidential version simply because the first ladies' stories more often surprised me. I am sooo looking forward to APT's season! Thanks for doing the logistics and waiting-on-line to get us tickets Jim!

Steven Vincent Johnson

[SC] I hope you are right that you're making progress in recovering from your current anxiety, and, in that context, it's encouraging to see you writing again about your orbital mechanics project and Brilliant Light Power. Perhaps it's also helpful that the Trumpsauris is no longer bellowing in all our faces every single day.

Walter Freitag

[SC] Another wonderfully thoughtful zine. You are fortunate to be located where you can observe so many great birds, and even interact with them when they need your help. I have considered putting up some bird feeders in our postage-stamp back yard, but our neighborhood is full of squirrels (and I think raccoons are common at night) so I would be entering the endless war to keep the bulk of the seed from going to them instead of the birds. Not sure I'm ready to go down that road yet.

Best of luck with the beekeeping, I think it's very cool. Please keep us informed how it goes. I think beekeeping is interesting and have been tempted to

do more reading about it. Recently Jeanne and I saw a video of a young woman beekeeper who was called in to move a hive out of an old shed in Texas. We watched in awe as she carefully pulled up boards, found the queen and then gently scooped up honey combs and handfuls of bees without gloves or hat or any other special protection I could see. I don't know how she did it, but it was amazing.

[JG] What a great image—you kayaking beneath the cormorant line, strategically stopping just short of their "bombing" range. Very funny!

F. J. Bergmann

[SC] *Horse Heaven* turned out to be every inch the Spring treat I was looking forward to. I loved it. I care about Thoroughbreds only about as much as I care about any other animal and racetracks have never been a big interest for me, but Jane Smiley makes it all fascinating and fun. Even though the book was 560 pages, I found myself savoring it like a fine chocolate and, at times, limiting myself to a couple chapters a day to make it last. I even read a couple sections of it aloud to Jeanne. Great book.

I have another Smiley on my bookshelf that looks to be completely different. I'm looking forward to it anyway because you know how it is with a writer you trust, you're willing to let them take you anywhere.

[JG] Loved "Chrono-Man." I know all about him and Quicksand, for sure.

Carrie Root

[SC] Regarding your comment to **Jim** and **Ruth** about enjoying that quiet time before having to be verbal, back when I had a longer driving commute to work (back when I first met Jeanne) I used to look forward to that time in the car listening to music. I still most like to listen to music when I'm driving. I had a lot of co-workers at my office at DOT who drove in from far-flung little towns and it always amazed me what they most often chose to listen to on the drive to and from work, the news (my God) or (even worse) those idiotic, chuckle-headed "drive time" morning hosts on the radio. I only ever wanted coffee and music, or just quiet, in my morning drive.

[JG] One of the most frustrating things about streaming TV shows and movies through the various entities (Prime, Netflix, CBS All Access, Apple TV Plus and all the

others) is keeping straight the different locations of their settings' menus. I agree, you really *need* subtitles when viewing *The Expanse*. I could tell you how to access the subtitle settings, but we see it via the Prime app on Apple TV Plus, which may be different than the way you are viewing it. (Just in case: slide your thumb downward from the top of the touch screen and the settings menu will appear. You can turn on subtitles there.)

Thanks for printing the picture of my old Earth Year t-shirt. I'd all but forgotten about that artwork, one of the very first projects I ever did on a Mac at the DNR.

Marilyn Holt

[SC] Of your favorite books listed I have read *The Road*, *The Shipping News* (which I loved), and *Frankenstein* (read twice and probably will read again.) Jeanne has read the Jemison novel and spoken highly of it, so I will get to it too, eventually. Coming up with my own list would take a while to select, would probably change again over time and would not be overwhelmingly male authors. Since I took no Literature classes in college, I'm deficient in the "classics" and have been slowly choosing a few things I always felt I should have read. Lately I've been looking at a couple of Hemmingway books in light of the recent Ken Burns documentary, at the same time I have not forgotten that **Hooper** inspired me to read some Raymond Chandler, too. Time to continue to come a little farther out of my COVID shell and contact the library.

[JG] I've always resisted making a list of my favorite books. Doing so for one year (when judging an award, for example) is hard enough. Doing so for a lifetime seems impossible. Well, I'd probably have to list books that I've re-read several times—everything by Jane Austin, Heller's *Catch-22*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, everything by Joanna Russ, several/most of Le Guin's works, Charnas's *Holdfast* series. and a few books that I read when I was very young and left permanent impressions on me, like L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*. But other than those, my list would tend to focus more on books I've read recently and that I'm still thinking about. I'm definitely still thinking about Jemison's *The City We Became*. I'm glad to see that it has been nominated for a Hugo this year and looking forward to reading the next in her *Great Cities* series. Speaking of Hugo nominations, I was surprised to see that I've already read several of the nominees: *The City We Became*, of course, but also Muir's *Harrow*

the Ninth (whose audio version I recommend highly, simply because the narrator, Moira Quirk, is brilliant.), Wells' *Network Effect* (Wow, I love Murderbot stories! We just read her latest novella, *Fugitive Telemetry*, which is much fun), and Kowal's *The Relentless Moon* (which weirdly, keeps getting tangled in my mind with bits from the Apple TV series *For All Mankind*). There are only two Hugo nominated novels I haven't read: Roanhorse's *Black Sun*, and Clarke's *Piranesi*. Any good things to say, anyone, about those two books? Perhaps I will attempt to be a completist this year.

Andy Hooper

[SC] Thanks for the absorbing piece that introduced me to French filmmaker René Clair. I do not think I have seen a single one of the movies he made, but his story was fascinating and I'm curious now to see some of his work.

I laughed at Jerry Kaufman's utterly sensible approach to choosing a favorite gin by deciding that it tasted good and it also reminded him of a happy tour of the distillery, so why not make it his favorite? Beats the hassle and expense of sampling 50 gins before selecting one.

Crime Cat Crusader was a hoot! Andy, you don't need that pyramid belching fire for a memorial, you're in the comics! I have always enjoyed D. West's biting humor, but that's pretty easy for me to say since I was never a target of his.

[JG] Thanks so much for telling us about René Clair. What a fascinating career he had! I saw *I Married a Witch*; I must have. The plot is very familiar. That was the kind of movie I most loved watching on TV movie channels, like *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*—romantic movies with a dollop of fantasy in their plots. I guess I had something in common with "the old ladies who go to the cinema twice per year" that Truffaut scorned. I recognized the plot of *It Happened Tomorrow's* plot from the TV show, *Early Edition*, starring Kyle Chandler, right away. I think I saw most of the episodes. It's hard to believe that it wasn't a re-make of *It Happened Tomorrow*. There was a significant difference though: the newspaper in *Early Edition* showed up outside Hobson's apartment each morning, not hand-delivered by a ghost as in *It Happened Tomorrow*. I remember resisting the suggestion that Hobson had been chosen by God or angels to save people. If I recall correctly, there was no attempt to investigate any other explanation for the magically-appearing newspaper.

Re your comment to Lloyd Penney about how few people you know have never watched a horror broadcast, I number among them.

So, WHO is "Braxton Wells," really??

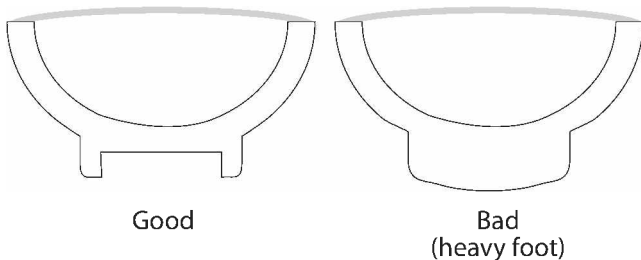
Loved the D. West comic. Thanks!

Cathy Gilligan

[SC] Regarding your comment to **Andy** about reading more than one book at a time, upon retirement I had a grand plan to juggle two books at a time. I thought I could alternate between a fiction and non-fiction book simultaneously. That has not worked out. The closest I have come to doing two books at once is to read a book on my own while Jeanne and I devote a period of time each day (usually before dinner) taking turns reading a book aloud (most often our latest book discussion assignment.) Now and then we use the time to listen to an audio book together (this usually happens when we start an audio book together on a trip, particularly car trips.) I find that if I'm doing a good job of picking books for myself, I will resent spending time away from it on some other book unless I have a compelling reason like being ready in time for the next book discussion or listening to something while driving when I can't read my book anyway.

[JG] Well, "lightness" is a relative term. When used to refer to pottery, it means that the potter was skilled enough to be able to pull up or trim off excess clay, especially around the footing. It is very common, especially for beginning potters to construct pots with very thick walls and feet. After a while, you can pick up a bowl or mug and tell immediately by its weight whether the piece was well-made or not.

Cross sections of a small pottery bowl



Joe Adams Leslie

[SC] Franklin Field, is that where the Goodman Pool is today? What did you do there?

I was very sad when the Barriques on the corner of Park and Fish Hatchery closed. It was convenient to me as I biked either from the Arboretum or when riding around Monona Bay to/from Brittingham Park. Now that the Lakeside Coffee House is open again, perhaps I will stop there for a break, and a little caffeine boost, on my way home.

I was biking down Erin St. the other day on my way home from a ride through the Arboretum. I came up to Park St., pulled in to my correct lane to cross (because there was a helpful bike graphic on the pavement) to wait for the light to change. Erin St. is one of those intersections where the light has to be activated by a car to change. There was a car pulling up next to me to turn right so I was not concerned. Then I noticed a new little blue light mounted on the street light across the intersection from me. I looked at it closer after I crossed the street and it said "BICYCLE DETECTED WHEN ILLUMINATED." Later I found out that Madison started a pilot program on Erin St. in 2019 with these new lights so a biker in the street can tell that the traffic light has detected him if there is no car, so the biker knows the light will change. In the past, if I was at the intersection and no car showed up, I'd



(left) "BICYCLE DETECTED WHEN ILLUMINATED" light and (below) the pavement marker for the sensor registering a biker at the intersection.



have to pull over to the pedestrian crosswalk to hit the button. The new blue light was accidentally activated by me when I rode over that helpful bicycle graphic painted on the street where the sensor was located. Later that same day, I noticed another set of these lights at the intersection of First St. and E. Johnson. So now I have started to look for them elsewhere around town.

Hope Kiefer and Karl Hailman

[SC] I enjoyed your road trip to Florida zine, thanks. Loved the photos! I was bemused by the Superman statue in Metropolis. My hometown of Anamosa has, for a couple years, been desperately raising money to try to get a similarly sized statue, that was once on loan to the town, back permanently. The statue is of Grant Wood's American Gothic couple. I think Metropolis has the cooler statue. Maybe my town should go for broke and change its name to Gotham City and see what happens.

It required a bit of adjustment for me to get my head around the need for sunscreen for a trip to the beach in March (or December.) All just part of the strangeness of being in the South during winter. Jeanne and I were once in Austin, TX at Christmas time and I thought it was comically weird driving around town with the windows down looking at Christmas decorations in t-shirts and shorts.

[JG] I'm glad to hear that you all have received your vaccinations. It seems like most of us here in the apa are also good to go.

Excellent trip report!

Scott has a Wisconsin State Trail pass which extends possibilities for bike riding, and recently I sent in for a Wisconsin Parks sticker. I had to laugh: last Fall we bought a \$13 day pass when we visited Devils Lake State Park. We decided against paying for a whole year's sticker because we thought it was unlikely that we were going to visit many, if any, other parks in 2020. Well, this year we decided to buy an annual sticker. And it turns out that for folks over 65 years of age the annual pass costs \$13. Funny. You'd think I would have remembered this from my previous employment by DNR.

What's New

[JG] A glimpse into the life of mutually supportive couple during the pandemic

Later in the day, after I'd received my second Moderna Covid vaccine I said, "No side effects yet. I'm feeling fine."

Scott replied: "Maybe it's not working. Maybe if you're lucky, you'll feel like shit tomorrow morning."

And indeed, the next morning I woke up feeling incredibly exhausted, as if I hadn't slept in days.

A few weeks later, after Scott had received his one-and-done Johnson & Johnson vaccine, I punched him in the arm right where he'd just been jabbed and said, "Good for you, sweetie!"

Bathroom update

[JG] Things are moving much slower than we would like, much slower than did our kitchen remodel work in 2015 when some work happened almost every day. The delays are not due to shipping slowdowns; the fixtures and cabinetry are all on hand. The main problem seems to be ... not enough people available to work, a continued effect of the general pandemic slowdown.

First the HVAC guys arrive and connect our heating and air conditioning ducts to the bathroom and my office. Both of those rooms occupy a one-story addition on the back of our house that till now had been heated with electric wall heaters. We would have had this work done a long time ago if we had known how little it cost.

A week passes.

It is demo day: workers arrive to do "demo," which is short for demolish—a term, for some reason, that contractors tend not to want to use with customers. The drywall gets torn down, tiles get ripped out, shower pan and surround taken out, and linoleum is removed. The toilet and sink cabinet are detached and carted away. Happily we have a second bathroom upstairs because we will be without this bathroom for much longer than we expected.

A week passes.

The electrician arrives to install the wiring for the new fixtures and devices. He installs the new ceiling fan and...oops...discovers that the old ceiling fan was never vented to the outside, and was instead vented to a crawlspace above the bathroom. Gotta fix that.

A week passes.

Workers arrive to properly vent the ceiling fan to the outside.

A week passes.

The carpenter installs 2x4 braces to bear the eventual weight of shower hardware, grab bars, towel holders, and wall cabinets. He scribbles notes on the exposed studs for the dry waller who is scheduled to arrive, of course, next week.

A week passes. But at this point things speed up a bit.

Dry wall is screwed into the joists covering the gaping holes that expose studs and insulation.

Two days pass.

Drywaller arrives to mud the walls, tape the joints and then re-mud. And in the same week (!) the plumber arrives to install the pipes for the shower equipment.

Four days pass and we experience several dizzying days of progress.

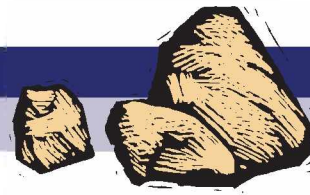
Dry wall is sanded and primed. Ceiling is painted. Walls are painted. We are so happy now that we are on the other side of the “demo” stage. Now, with each change, the room looks better.

There’s still a lot that will have to be done before we have a working bathroom: Slate tiles installed on the bathroom floor and shower floor. Shower surround and glass door installed. Window replaced. Cabinetry, lights, switches, toilet, sink installed. And finally, the final touch: the art mirror will be hung. We are looking forward to the end but expect that the work may stretch at least into late May and probably early June. Ah well. It will be worth the wait.

From the Vault

Gifts of the Glacier

By Jeanne Gomoll, Grayscale #1, Intercourse, September 1996



Like most of Wisconsin, except for the southwest corner of the state, our neighborhood’s topmost geological features were laid down by a passing glacier about 10,000 years ago. Huge, mile-high walls of ice bulldozed over the land, plowing sand, gravel and rock ahead of it. Where the glaciers stopped, we now have hilly moraines, pocked with kettle lakes and kames. Where the glacier passed over, there are more kettle lakes, drumlins, and eskers. But mostly there is a thick frosting of rich soil, sand, gravel, and rocks released by the ice as it melted, all arranged in gentle swells and swales over the landscape. The process is similar to the one that produced the rocky soil of New England, except that southern Wisconsin supported prairies for many thousands of years after the glaciers left, and developed a rich, black topsoil on top of the glacial till.

My parents bought several acres of land in “Greenfield Acres” in the early 1960s, and my dad and a handful of male relatives and friends built a house on it. Dad undertook the landscaping of the 1 1/2 acres himself, thereby discovering the true meaning of glacial geology. After many days of backbreaking labor, dad decided to build a wall with all the boulders he found poking up above ground level, which needed to be excavated in order to level the yard. It turned out he dug up enough rocks and boulders to build two walls, with which he terraced half the length of the lot.

I was 9 years old. Dad promised my younger brothers and me a reward if we would help him carry what

poetic geologists call, “gifts of the glacier” (or “more damn rocks” as dad named them), to the wall site. When we rounded up some friends from the neighborhood, dad extended the promise to all the kids, about a dozen of us. Help him, he said, and he would take us all to a local drive-in custard stand and we could order anything we wanted from the menu. Well, we filled up the wheel barrow repeatedly and rolled and dragged rocks for the whole day and still didn’t manage to finish, but dad took us to the custard stand anyway and each of us ordered the most exotic thing on the menu. Twelve little kids, twelve banana splits. Dad didn’t bother ordering anything for himself, just grinned and settled back and waited for the inevitable moment when we admitted that we couldn’t finish a whole dessert all by ourselves.

Three big boulders remain where dad dug them up because they are too big to move without heavy equipment. Dad finally got rid of one huge boulder a few years ago, when the repeated winter freezes and thaws caused it to crack apart into several moveable pieces. But that same seasonal temperature variation also tends to slowly push more rocks up from the depths, and every once in a while a new rock has to be excavated to save lawn mower blades. When you start digging, you never know just how big a rock will be uncovered; it might be small enough for one person to carry. It might turn out to be a granite iceberg that has to be broken apart by pick ax.