

# Madison foursquare

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Mock orange blossoms,  
our front yard

## Comments

### Cover

[SC] Beautiful postcard images for our covers this month. I'm always amazed at the ornateness of the Chicago World's Fair structures, knowing they were all built to be merely temporary.

[JG] Me too. **Scott's** comment about temporary architecture got me thinking about how interesting it would be to create a chart showing the lifespans of famous landmark buildings or even building types, arranged according to their expected vs. their actual lifespans. So many modern buildings seem to fall apart quickly and have sadly short life expectancies, while older structures have survived for hundreds of years. And some of the interesting outliers were built for one-time celebrations like world fairs and art created for special events. Of course, there are exceptions, but it makes me wonder if, as a culture, we don't really

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believe we will survive through another century and so we focus our attention and work on a shorter time frame.

## Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] I liked your opening poem.

I enjoyed your musings on listening to music vs. watching music. I agree they are very different experiences. Whenever I hear an audio-only recording of a live musical performance, I'm always a little disappointed by the lack of the critical visual element. It never seems quite right to me without it. For listening, I most often prefer studio-produced music to live performance recordings.

[JG] I agree with you about the difficult-to-qualify differences between music experienced aurally (only), or in-person (watching the musicians). I think I was finally able to learn to enjoy opera because I listened, rather than watched-and-listened. In the days before my mind clicked into opera-appreciation mode, I had always been put off by opera, mostly because I focused on the foreign words that felt like an insurmountable barrier to understanding or appreciation. But one Saturday afternoon, while I was sick in bed with a terrible flu and listening to the radio, the weekly Metropolitan Opera came on, and I felt too weak to get up and turn the station. So, after the announcer recounted the story of *Madame Butterfly*, the music washed over me. I listened to the MUSIC, heard the emotion, felt the story—rather than wasting time wrestling with the issue of a language I didn't understand. Here's *my* theory: I think—for me—the big difference between aural-only and in-person music is my visual imagination. Music used in movies always comes tagged in my memory with images from the movie. (frequently heard at our house: "Oh I remember that tune!—it's from *Days of Heaven*," or some other movie.) When I listen to music, my mind makes its own movies from the music, but when I hear music in person and watch the performers, my mind remembers the musicians, much less than my own imagined



Little Libraries  
along Scott's bike routes



images. I DO like your idea of “invisible music”! That category would include movie music, except for special cases like *Fantasia*.

### Greg Rihn

[SC] Thanks to you for your Milwaukee Film Festival movie reviews, they both sounded like great movies.

Regarding your comment to us on the dismal political situation, do you believe our current Democratic Party leadership (by this I mean Biden, Schumer, etc.) are up to the challenge posed by a fascist, insurrectionist, anti-democratic Republican Party?

[JG] Sadly, *Jackie & Oopjen* doesn't seem to be streaming anywhere, because I'd really like to see it. But I did watch the trailer on YouTube, and it looks great. I hope we get to see it someday.

### Lisa Freitag

[SC] It was great fun visiting with you and Greg here in Madison over the traditional “WisCon” weekend. Did you end up having any interactions with the WisCon program attendees who showed up on Saturday?

[JG] Thanks for the interesting essay on risk Lisa. I think you are correct in pointing out the probable low risk numbers involved in the pandemic these days,

and I certainly agree with you that we have to accept that we each, individually make our own decisions in this regard. I am irritated not by the fact that everyone makes their own decision about how much risk to take for their own health, but that so many folks ignore and ridicule the idea that their behavior might have any impact on other people. I get angry, when those same people make demands that *other* people stop wearing masks, or that *others* should not be allowed to require masks in their stores or airplanes, or that cities/health officials should be outlawed from acting according to their understanding of science.... We now hear about people willing to attack others with whom they disagree. And I don't see a way to feel “forgiving” towards them.

Like Scott, I was so pleased to see you over Memorial Day weekend. Not only was it nice to get together with you, it turned out to be rather a reunion for lots of us Madison people who hadn't seen each other at all in the past year.

### Steven Vincent Johnson

[SC] I hope the hernia surgery went as smoothly as possible and you are recovering now. You've certainly been through a rough year of medical challenges, let's hope this is the last visit to the hospital for further procedures for you for the foreseeable future.



The news has been full of anticipation for the Department of Defense UAP report to Congress. I don't have a lot of expectations wrapped up in this report, but I hope we learn something interesting we did not know before.

[JG] You have my sympathy, Steve, and hope that you're through the worst of it now and that better health for you is ahead.

### Walter Freitag

[SC] Your bee update was delightful and illuminating. So far your description of progress is all new information to me. I admit I would also have been a bit freaked out to find out that 3 lbs. of bees number about 10,000 insects. That's a lot of stingers. At first I concluded that you were already quite comfortable with them from the photo of your bare hand so close to all the bees, but your clarification of your effort to simply not annoy the bees made sense. Great stuff. Please keep us posted.

Regarding Covid-19 vaccination, our last local mask mandate in Dane County/Madison ended June 2 and organizations and businesses are now making individual decisions about requiring or requesting masking and social distancing. Madison has had a very good vaccination response and our Covid case load is down, but we are doing better than many other parts of the state. The Democratic governor's state mask mandate was overturned by our Supreme Court at the request of our Republican-dominated legislature, so the state was left with a patchwork of local mask/social



distancing orders. Dane County/Madison remained assertive in requiring masks and social distancing, so we have done well. Other areas of Wisconsin have not done as well. Travelling around the state may have its risks, though not so much for Jeanne and I as we are vaccinated. All the same, we are keeping our masks handy wherever we go.

[JG] I love your queen's name! "High King Mango the Destroyer." My grandfather also raised bees and I remember his advice to us kids when we were playing in his backyard, to move very slowly and deliberately around the hive boxes. He never wore gloves and I remember seeing bees resting on his hands while he was working (calmly and deliberately) with them. He did not, however, inspire me to take up the beekeeping hobby.

### Elizabeth Matson

[SC] Much as I am invested in our own bathroom project's progress (what's going to happen this week?) I am similarly hooked on your yurt project's progress. I hope you give us another update because the suspense formed by the timing of your yurt's arrival vs. the completion of your essential driveway has got me anticipating the next episode of *Elizabeth's Yurt*. What about the platform construction? When does that happen? Your fans want to know!

Great picture of Vasilisa and your brother. Does your brother expect to live in the U.A.E. for a long time, or will he eventually move?

Your summer sounds...busy. I guess I can see why you are concerned about the safety of the unvaccinated kids loose in an uncooperative public area, but as long as your staff are all vaccinated, what more can you do? You are safe from the kids and unvaccinated adults and they are safe from you, so the risks they are taking are from each other and they don't seem to care.

I have grown extremely picky about superhero movies. Thanks for the comments on *Wonder Woman 1984* which we have not seen. We also enjoyed the first *Wonder Woman* movie. I have been looking at *Black Widow* coming this summer. It's Scarlet Johansen and Elizabeth Pugh, what's not to like? Still, I have little patience for the whole Marvel Universe interconnectedness nonsense. I have no intention of watching dozens of films and TV shows just to keep up on all the continuing story elements, so unless *Widow* gets sensational reviews, I will probably vote to skip.

[JG] All of us (you, **Andy&Carrie**, and us) who are doing or planning work that requires contractors and the shipping of building supplies are suffering as a result of the post-pandemic less-supply-and-too-much-demand situation. After hearing about our bathroom-renovation woes (that have only increased in severity since the last issue of *Madison Foursquare*) my brother and sister-in-law decided to postpone their plans to renovate their downstairs rec room and bar and wait for the manufacturing and shipping industries to catch up. I hope your yurt arrives in time for you to do something with it this summer! I expect that we will write more about the state of our bathroom renovation later in this zine.

## Carrie Root

[SC] Thank you for the lovely comment on my dog-at-the-carwash story. It was fun to work on. When I was young, I used to dream about being a writer, but the 1st rule of writing is to write and I always found it hard to do and never had the discipline to try to do it frequently. Like you, I never got into the habit of doing a journal or diary. I never even kept a calendar book until I met Jeanne. Now I wish I'd at least done a calendar, as I'd like to have a better handle on what and when things happened in my life long ago. Not sure I'd care very much to read an old journal of mine from way back, but the practice of writing daily may have helped me to write better and given me more confidence. Your (and **Jeannie's**) positive feedback was appreciated.

Once all the parts arrive, I hope your kitchen remodel goes better than our bathroom remodel. As I write this (early June) I think we will be very lucky to be finally finished by the end of June, a project that started back in March. After two weeks of nothing happening, we have workers finally coming back this week.

Nice photos from the yard.

[JG] Thanks for printing my cartoon from long ago! And thanks even more for the explanation! I sort of remember drawing it, but I completely forgot why I drew a cartoon of you taking a nap in a culvert hammock.

Speaking of journals ... I never wrote a garden journal—no surprise there; it would be filled with notes like “Forgot to water the cactus again,” and “The cactus died.” But between 1972–1979 (my last two years of college through my early involvement with Madstf, *Janus*, etc.), I did keep a personal journal. I filled up five college notebooks (letter-sized, 300pp, ruled), though I must admit that I filled less than a third of the pages in the last book. It's been fascinating to read them. The books have been sitting in a file drawer all this time and I may never have decided to look at them if it weren't for my on-going project of reading old apazines in search of material to save for some sort of memoir. Indeed, for the last many years, I had been thinking that I should trash the journals in order to avoid the chance that someone would read them after I died. There's some fairly embarrassing material in them, though less of it than I had expected. But mostly the recorded musings and chronicles and philosophizing and gossip (and photos! And drawings!) have released a flood of memories in which I'm still swimming. So I'm taking notes and adding them to my collection of essays and stories.



## Clifford R. Wind

[SC] Memory is a funny thing. I have learned not to rely on it. Also, I have learned it's okay to “embellish” a memory to improve a story in some circumstances. Sometimes I feel like I could remember nearly everything in my life if I just had the right reminder prompt, and other times I have stared at a photo that I'm in, able to remember absolutely nothing about the moment in time the picture has captured. Of course, I'm also getting more concerned about my ability to remember things that matter to me as I grow older. Your idea of starting to write down some things is probably wise, even if the only person who ever reads them is myself someday in a nursing home having

progressively more difficulty remembering. Thanks for sharing some of your memories.

[JG] I love the idea of sending up a reminder marker within one's consciousness (your E=MC2). When I was in high school, I began sending up what I imagined as balloons marked with large Xs whenever I experienced a mysterious event that I hoped would be explained after I died. (That's what I wish would happen after we die, that we get to answer questions about our lives and "life and the universe and everything.") During the year I took an advance placement history class, my history notebook disappeared a couple days before every test. Whoosh, up went the balloon marked with an X: I wanted to know who was stealing my notebooks. Studying geography, I found out that for some unknown reason, glaciers had all avoided the southwest corner of Wisconsin. Whoosh, up went the balloon marked with an X: I wanted to know why. I've got hundreds of X-marked balloons to retrieve if the afterlife rules allow it.

The one time I said "I want to remember this," as you did with E=MC2, was while I was watching a Katherine Hepburn/Spencer Tracy movie (*Adam's Rib?*, *Pat and Mike?*, can't recall) in which a henchman was discovered to sleep with his eyes open. I know this must seem bizarre, but I found it so hilarious that I laughed until I hiccupped uncontrollably and tears ran down my face. I was a kid and it was the funniest thing I could imagine and so I said to myself that, from now on, whenever I heard the word "remember," that I would think of that scene with the guy who slept with his eyes open. And so, I have...aargh! Every time I say the word "remember," that's what goes through my mind. In retrospect, E=MC2 would have been a far more useful thing to have bookmarked.

I am also immersed in revisiting my past. I imagine this is something that all of us are tempted to do as we get older. I may very well get to the point of reconstructing stuff from the past that I never wrote about, but right now I am fully occupied with reviewing memories that I have recorded. It's quite a trip.

## Marilyn Holt

[SC] At a convention I blindly picked up a copy of Charles Stross's *The Revolution Trade*, which is actually made up of Volumes V and VI of the Merchant Princes series. It has been sitting on my to-read shelf for a couple years. I had no idea what I'd stumbled into. I see I have a lot of catching up to do, but I conclude from your comments that you rather like the

series. I initially found it a little peculiar that my book has a blurb on the cover, "Great fun!" from economist Paul Krugman, but your comments about the interesting economic theory in part of the series most likely explains that. I will have to consider starting from the beginning and seeing what I think. If I end up enjoying it, I will owe you a big thanks for finally getting me started.

[JG] Congratulations on getting your porch repaired! It sounds like your job wasn't affected by the labor shortage or supply problems, lucky you.

## Andy Hooper

[SC] Your horror host roundup was an impressive accomplishment and an entertaining read. Thanks for all the work. The pictures were interesting, too. Dr. Shock (Zawislak) and his daughter Bubbles was easily my favorite photo. The TV horror host phenomenon is not what I thought it would turn out to be. Since I have not watched much local TV in a long time, I would have guessed that shows like these were long gone. Since the deregulation of the industry, more and more small mom and pop stations have been vacuumed up by large corporations and, like radio, I figured they filled their non-news, non-network hours with canned-corporate produced programming created elsewhere for mass consumption. Or that remaining independent stations had choices of canned programming they could buy and run or they simply opted for local-interest feature shows that functioned primarily as delivery systems for local advertising. I thought the days of stations creating their own kiddie programming and horror shows was over. Evidently, not so, as a bunch of these "hosts" are still in business. Do you think there might be a future for locally produced TV shows like these, or is the curtain coming down on them?

[JG] The volume of my reading has also dramatically declined over the years. I too used to read many books every week, but as you suggest, it isn't just ebbing eye strength or lack of time that limits how many books I read, but more the amount of processing time I devote to digesting the books. I remember the so-called, one-sentence "book reviews" I wrote for grade school teachers who wanted us to chronicle all the books we read. I pretty much read everything simply for the plot and it's amazing to me that I am able to remember any of those plots at all. When I do re-read books I read when I was young, I invariably find a huge amount of

stuff I missed entirely, and my opinion of that book will more often change drastically. Nowadays, I end up thinking far more about what I read, connecting it to previous books, other stuff by the same author, and stitching their ideas into my consciousness. And that's a good thing in my opinion. But it sure does mean that I feel badly about the huge number of books I will never get to. But I do enjoy, very much, yours and Carrie's presence in the book discussion, and am very glad you are allotting some of your valuable reading time to books we can talk about together!

Loved your comment to **Elizabeth** about her group of 12-year-old fans, wondering if they eventually split into rival clubs. Perhaps she could suggest that they call themselves "First Fandom."

I look forward to seeing your zine in the front of the apa next month! I personally don't think that a zine's position, front or back, has much to do with the number or quality of mailing comments it attracts. Getting our zine in as early as we have been doing since **Jim** took over as OE happens mostly because Scott gets his zine done early so as to give me enough time to read it and talk about with him before deadline. So, I tend to get to work as soon as Scott hands the issue over to me. And at that point, my obsessive-compulsive nature takes over ("Let's get it done!" a phrase Scott has learned to dread) and we deliver it to Jim right away so I can check off that item from my to-do list.

## Jim Hudson & Diane Martin

[SC] We made our first trip to my Iowa hometown, Anamosa, on May 24, a full year since our last visit. Like the earlier trip, this time was a lightning run. We drove down in the morning, socialized through the afternoon and ate dinner and drove back to Madison that same evening. It's about a 5-hour drive, round trip. We spent the time at my brother's house visiting with Jon and his wife, Donna, still recovering from her second stroke and a bout of Covid-19 she suffered in the time since we last saw her. She is very lucky to be alive, I think. I was the most motivated to see Donna as soon as we could, even for just a day, as we have no idea how long she may be with us, although at present, she is recovering and doing well. My sister also joined us. She lost weight and changed her hair, which was a fun surprise, even though I have been talking to her weekly on the phone for months.

As a side note, Jeanne and I stayed for dinner and



the five of us chose to order out. I had a pulled pork sandwich, which was fine. All of my companions ordered Iowa styled pork tenderloin sandwiches, which, if you are unaware, is a source of great Iowa state pride. I grew up eating them. In theory they consist of a pork cutlet pounded flat, breaded and fried and placed on a bun. They can be tasty, but I have seen versions where the cutlet is pounded as flat as a cracker, heavily breaded, deep fried and delivered in a too-small bun such that it resembles a breading and bun flying saucer. The meat sometimes sticks out of the bun so far on all sides that you have to stretch your fingers to reach the bread to pick up the thing. You can't make a mistake choosing condiments, absolutely anything goes on it just fine. I often add nearly everything to mine that's available. For years when I traveled elsewhere and people talked about spending a lot of money for a cut of "tenderloin" I thought they were crazy. But actually, it was just me.

An experience I have not had in a while occurred during our drive back to Madison. It was getting dark and we were driving up Hwy 151 and I started to notice that we seemed to be killing a lot of bugs. Was this normal? My windshield was getting progressively littered with bug hits to the point where I was concerned that turning on the wipers would just result in a smooshed bug juice smear that would not easily clear off, so I kept going while looking for the next gas station. As we were driving, Jeanne said, "Is it raining?" I replied, "No." But in fact we were hitting so many bugs, they sounded like light rain against the windshield. I was finally able to pull over and use a wet squeegee to clear the bugs off the window. I realized the whole front of the car was covered, so I had to get it washed the next day. We must have driven through some sort of seasonal bug awakening. The last time I encountered something like this was many years ago when I lived in Prairie du Chien and I drove home

from work one night through a mayfly hatching. That was much worse.

Jeanne and I both liked *Gideon the Ninth*, but I elected not to continue on with the second novel. *Network Effect*, along with all the Murderbot stories, was huge fun. I recently finished Stan Robinson's *The Ministry of the Future* and I liked it every bit as much as his last one, *New York 2140*, which I had declared my all time favorite of his novels (though I have missed a few of his books. I may yet go back to read them.) I can't tell if Stan is becoming an even better writer, or whether the urgency of the climate crisis in the real world is making his recent work even more compelling.

[JG] In addition to getting together with Scott's family, we also spent a day at my brother Steve and his wife Linda's house on Lac La Belle. It was wonderful to hug them both and catch up with them and their family. We floated for several hours on the lake in Steve's new pontoon boat, enjoying the lake breeze and much laughter. We will go out with my other brother Dan and his wife Kelly on Friday (before collation) after a funeral for Linda's father, Richard, who died shortly after a severe stroke. I'm sad that he is gone of course; he was a lovely man, but glad that Covid restrictions have been dropped and that funeral gatherings are now allowed. Linda's family will be traveling from all over the country to celebrate their father's life and it will be a good thing for them to be together.

We just watched the second season of the French series *Lupin*, which I thought was much less successful than the first season. Too many plot holes and some bad acting, no doubt exacerbated by bad dubbing. I am enjoying the second season of Apple TV+'s *Dickinson*, a comedy about Emily Dickinson. It's weird, but I like it a lot. Scott does not.

## Catie Pfeifer

[SC] Learning to drive, what a fun subject! I predict you will get a little avalanche of early-driving-experience comments in response. I failed my first written test, for the record. I eventually made it through my road test okay but not without a lot of jitters. I remember practice driving in driver's ed. with a blasé farm kid who had already been driving tractors and his dad's pickup around the farm for a few years. I sensed a lot of mean grinning and eye-rolling going on in the back seat when it was my turn to drive. My best practice partner was my mom who let me drive with her all the time in her massive 1963 Buick LaSalle.

Mom was a patient enough passenger, but she was notorious with all of her kids for loudly sucking in her breath through her teeth if a tense driving situation suddenly came up. It had the same effect on me as if she'd poured a glass of ice water down my back. She inadvertently taught me not to panic and freak out behind the wheel.

After meeting a lot of SF fans over the years, your reasons for not driving all this time do not sound unusual to me anymore. Madison is a friendly town if you are carless. When I was a kid, however, getting a driver license and being able to drive was essential to having a viable social life in a small eastern Iowa town. Everybody got their licenses and everybody drove everywhere. Biking was difficult and risky and mass transit options did not exist, not even a taxi. Getting a license was a given, actually getting the reliable use of a car was the real challenge, and, as you pointed out, could be expensive and problematic. If I had grown up, or lived for a long time in a city like Madison as a young person, I may have made the same choice you did.

[JG] Congratulations on getting your driver's license. As Scott predicted, your story reminded me of my own experience—of flunking my driver's test two times. I didn't try for a license until after I graduated from high school in 1969, and did so only because there would be no way to go to college without a driver's license. I attended UW-Waukesha, located in the middle of farm country, for my first two years of college. My mom gave birth to my brother Dan in October of my first semester, and so she was *desperate* for me to get a license. She did not think she'd be able to ferry me back and forth to school and was willing to let me use her car to commute. Doing a poor job of parking behind a bus doomed me during my first test. (Oh no! Dad had showed me how to park behind a car, when to turn the wheel right, when to turn it left, and none of that made sense behind a bus!) And then I made an illegal turn—from a one-way street onto the wrong side of a two-way street. So, I flunked the test again. But I did finally pass the third time...to my mom's enormous relief. When I moved to Madison, enrolled at UW-Madison, I no longer needed to drive and in fact, depended solely on mass transit and a bicycle for all local travel until I met Scott in 1984. I took Badger Bus to visit my family in the Milwaukee suburbs and very occasionally rented a car for out-of-town trips, but that was very rare. It was easy to live in Madison without a car.

What happened with your apartment repair situation?

## J.J. Brutsman & Tom Havighurst

[SC] Wow, the Kvaefjordkake cake looks amazing! Let us know what you end up doing with the tonka beans, which I have never heard of before.

I am so with you regarding the pandemic and “are we there yet?” I think I will re-adjust to the old life very fast. Once vaccinated, I was ready to test the odds in public interactions and I think I will be able to wade unmasked into the Farmers Market or music festival crowds with little trouble this summer. I keep a mask with me mostly to blend into whatever crowd of people are around me. If most people in the room are masked, then I will go along. If no one is masked, I’m fine with that. I’m ready to comply with whatever atmosphere a given establishment is striving for. I’m ready to move on.

[JG] I thought it would take a long time for me to feel comfortable going around in public without a mask, but no, not at all. Almost immediately I’ve been noticing that Scott has had to remind me to bring a mask along, just in case.

Yum, Kvaefjordkake cake. Could I have the recipe please?

## Jim and Ruth Nichols

[SC] Jim, we have continued our small effort to support local restaurants by eating out once a week. Only now we’re not doing takeout but actually visiting the restaurants. We’ve sat both inside and outside and sometimes used masks for part of the visit, or sometimes not at all. It’s a matter of adjustment for everyone. I always prefer eating at the restaurant, takeout is rarely as good. I agree with you that it’s a treat to go out again, and I think it will be a good while before I take the freedom for granted.

Ruth, your pictures are lovely. I liked also your musings on the arrival of the warm weather. On our walks around the State Capitol, Jeanne has had to put up with my occasional plea to the universe that “we really don’t need for it to be any warmer this summer than this...” always on a beautiful day, usually around 75 degrees with low humidity and a light breeze. The gods weren’t listening as we have been hiding in retreat from the daily 85+ degree heat wave that has recently arrived as I write this.

Like Sourdough, we have locust trees, too, in front of our house. We have two of them on our terrace (verge,

berm, kill strip, whatever it is) and we are familiar with their frequent shedding. I had to sweep those same “green bits” off our sidewalk.

[JG] “Rockbridge State Park”?? Where is that? I never heard of that one and can’t find any information on it. Do you mean Natural Bridge State Park? Whatever, I feel quite lucky to live in a state with so many beautiful parks. Scott and I bought a State Park sticker recently and hope to visit some over the summer. Gorgeous photos Ruth!

## F. J. Bergmann

[SC] Although I have read very little of H.P. Lovecraft’s work, I still liked *Carnation* the most of your absorbing flash fiction pieces. A lot was said about humans that I found myself nodding in agreement with.

I smiled at your point about the nose-bleed-from-using-magic cliché. I thought a good parody of this idea would be to have the character empty their bowels whenever they used magic instead. I think it would mean a lot fewer trivial magic incidents cluttering up the plot.

[JG] I just had a Shingrix vaccine injection (my second) with no side-effects whatsoever, not even soreness. So, I lucked out. I will go for a Tetanus shot in a week or so and hope that one will be an equal nothing.

Wasn’t there a fantasy show (movie? TV series?) in which a girl would hiccup uncontrollably whenever she lied? Much more interesting than a nose bleed.







[JG] The YMCA is open and I am swimming again! Hooray! But, boy howdy, have I lost a lot of endurance. When the pandemic interrupted, I was doing 36 laps, or 1 mile, three times a week, all of it using a crawl stroke. Head out for one stroke and a breath, then underwater for two strokes blowing air out. No stops, as fast as I could do it. I was a machine. I do recall, however, many years ago, when I started swimming again, that it took a while to reach this exciting performance plateau. At the very beginning, I would do the crawl for one length and then the next length I'd do a backstroke, never stopping. (That was key.) And that's what I was reduced to last week: a crawl one length and backstroke the next. And I didn't manage a mile, either. I was only able to swim a half-mile. But I'm improving daily. The second day I did *two* lengths with a crawl and one with a backstroke. The third day I did *three* lengths with a crawl, and so on. Once I am able to do the whole half mile using a crawl stroke, I will start increasing the number of laps so I get back to a mile as soon as possible.

It felt soooo lovely slipping into cool water again, especially with the outdoor temperature hovering around 90°. This, to me, is one of the best parts of getting back to normal, post-Covid life.

[JG] In the last issue of *Madison Foursquare*, our bathroom saga had already stretched through three months starting in March, with worker activity sporadically occurring once a week (if we were lucky). By mid-May, the dry wall had been sanded, primed and painted. The next thing on the schedule was the installation of slate tiles—floor tile and shower floor tile. Sadly, as I write here and now, in mid-June, the tile installation has only just begun.

Weeks ago, on the Thursday that work was supposed to begin, we got a call from the tile supplier letting us know that, surprise!, our tile had been suddenly, inexplicably back-ordered till August. AARRGGHH! Scott and I drove over to the tile store that same day and the salesman tried to talk me into switching to a different slate tile. Absolutely not. It was the wrong color; we would have had to re-paint and for sure, the copper mirror frame art would not work with the new colors. But it turned out that if we accepted a different SIZE tile, which was in stock, we could get that right away. So, of course we said OK and the salesman put in the order for the differently sized tiles.

A week passed. Trucks arrived, but none of them contained our tiles.

Another week passed. No tiles. We learned that the warehouse was located in Dallas Texas. I imagined a scenario in which the person at the computer reported that our tile is "in stock," but the warehouse workers couldn't actually find it. I started googling images of other slate tiles. I was seriously bummed

Another week passed. The tile arrived! And then workers arrived at our house to begin work that would apparently take at least 4 days. But on day two, we received a phone call from our contractor telling us that one of the workers had had a terrible accident (riding his moped, a car drove through a red light and t-boned him.) Nevertheless, work resumed on day 3, and that is where we are right now as I write. Tile has been laid on the bathroom floor. The shower floor has been mudded and moisture proofed. The bathroom floor tiles will be grouted tomorrow. Supposedly.

Supposedly, most of the rest of the work in the bathroom will happen swiftly next week. Our contractor swears this is true. Hmmm. We will see.



"Our dream is to live long enough to see the end of our renovation."

## *The Millionth Shopper*

by *Jeanne Gomoll*, Allargando #7, in *Turbo-Charged Party Animal Apa*, April 1987. An earlier version was published in *Alcheringa #1*, in *Anzapa*, 1982.

It was late in the day, almost 3 PM on a Friday, and we were all watching the clock, itching to get out of the office to enjoy what was left of the day outside. I finished the job on which I was working—12 certificates honoring the artistic creations of a bunch of pre-teens for a children's Wisconsin State Parks naturalist program. I shuffled them into order, slipped them into an envelope and tossed them onto my boss' desk. I went back to my office, prepared to spend the next hour straightening up and poising my muscles for a dash out the door at the end of my shift at 4:30.

"Uh. Jeanne..." came the voice from the other side of my office's partition. I looked around and saw my boss shuffling through the certificates.

"Anything wrong?" I asked. Please, please, let there not be anything wrong. I wanted to go home on time.

"Oh. no, no, nothing wrong at all. These are just great. I just thought we really shouldn't just present them like this." He held the certificates up above his head. No, I thought, one would generally present them one at a time. But I didn't say that. Judiciously I just gave him a puzzled look.

"I mean." he said, "I think we should frame them."

He said "we." I thought. "Hmph," I thought.

I don't think we have twelve frames of that size on hand. When do you need them?"

The ceremony is tomorrow. Saturday. I wonder where you could go to get twelve frames on short notice?" He looked at me expectantly.

"Gosh, I don't know." I said

Dave Aslackson was attempting to leave early. He and his briefcase slid behind my boss, making for a fast-escape-while-the-boss-is-bothering-someone-else. It didn't work.

"Do you know of a place where we could pick up a dozen frames in a hurry, Dave?" my boss said as he turned and pinned my co-worker against a partition wall.

"Uh...maybe Shopko. You know that big department store on the west side."

"If I took the bus there, I couldn't get back here before 5:30 and the building would be locked by then," I countered.

"Hmmm, and I've got to be out of here before 5:30," Boss said. I thought he'd drop the matter, but no...

"Why don't you drive her over there, Dave? You've got your car here, don't you?"

"Uh...yes."

"And you normally don't leave the office till 4:15, isn't that correct? I'm sure you could get the frames and be back here before then."

And so Dave and I went to Shopko, Dave snarled at me for having gotten him involved in all this to begin with. "Hurry up," he said as I jumped out of the car in Shopko's parking lot. "I've got a date tonight."

"Oh Jeez, I thought I'd browse for an hour or two..." I said sarcastically. Shopko is not the sort of store that I'd normally fantasize about shopping the hours away in. I'm not that big on shopping anyway, buying as much as I can through mail order catalogs. But stores like Shopko irritate me because their layouts seem purposely designed to make it hard to find things in order to tempt you to make impulse purchases.

And so I dashed inside, ran through several areas and finally asked directions to the shelves where art prints were displayed, and found vast numbers of cheap looking picture frames. I was at first stunned at all the choices. But I recovered quickly, grabbed a dozen faux wood-grain plastic frames, and dashed back toward the check-out counters.

This is where the plot thickens.

I was on overdrive, hurrying to get back as quickly as possible, and I scanned ahead to locate the shortest line, or at least the line with the fewest number of people with checkbooks out ready to cause a major delay when asked to dig out several forms of identification by the checkout clerk. While I was casing the line of checkouts, I noticed a disturbance at one end.

A guy in a tuxedo was waving at the checkout counters and giving instructions to a bored-looking young man who carried a video camera upon his shoulder. Two anorexic teenagers wearing ballerina costumes twinkled next to the tuxedo, waiting for their cue. I groaned: a commercial in progress, I thought. Stay away from there. And so I ran to the other end of the

line of cash registers, and took my place behind a woman even though she was digging for a checkbook from inside her enormous purse.

"I should turn my purse over to the archaeology department at the University," she smiled at me apologetically. "Who knows what they could find inside this thing. I haven't cleaned it out in a couple years."

I laughed. My adrenalin level was high and I'd suddenly stopped running. The energy had to go somewhere. "Purses of the Gods!" I laughed. "Wouldn't that make an amazing story!" and we laughed together. She ended up paying cash because she couldn't find two forms of identification in the archaeological site that was her purse, and suddenly it was my turn.

While the woman and I had been laughing together our smiles must have caught the attention of the games show host wearing the tuxedo. At least that's what I speculate may have happened. Because as I reached for my bag, it was snatched away by the tuxedo and handed over to one of the ballerinas. I looked up and found a microphone thrust under my mouth and a video camera focusing on me.

"CONGRATULATIONS!" the tuxedo said. "Congratulations! You are the millionth person to shop at Shopko!"

I was speechless. All I could do was to stare longingly at the bag of frames and wonder just how long this was going to take.

"Well, young lady, how do you like shopping at Shopko?"

Forgive me, but only one thing came to mind: It's what I was thinking about. "You've got nice cheap frames." I said.

I'll say this for him. He only looked vaguely disappointed, and paused only a beat. "How long have you been a Shopko shopper?" he asked, beaming at me, obviously expecting me to vindicate his choice of me as the millionth shopper with my next breath.

"This is my first time," I said truthfully.

Well, after that he started rattling on about the gift I would be given for being the millionth shopper at Shopko, but he'd obviously given

up on getting something sales-worthy from me on tape. I stood there while he turned his back on me and pitched some hype into the camera about how everyone loved shopping at Shopko. I couldn't leave; the ballerina had my bag of frames.

Finally the tuxedo turned around and told me the choices I had for my millionth-shopper prize. They were prepared to present me with a lawn mower, a water softener, \$200 worth of Shopko clothing, OR a color TV set. I was renting an apartment at the time and so didn't need a lawn mower or water softener. Shopko clothes? No thanks. But I didn't own a TV, so I took the TV, thank you sir.

This is the good part.

Dave looked up from the newspaper he had been reading while he waited for me behind the wheel of his car. This is what he saw: Me with the tuxedo guy walking in front of the ballerinas, who twinkled alongside the store clerk, who was wheeling a cart with a television on its bed. The guy with the video camera walked backwards filming the whole group of us. Instead, he should have been filming Dave's stunned expression. Now that would have made a compelling commercial. The clerk put the TV into the backseat of Dave's car, the ballerina gave me back my bag of frames, and they all waved to Dave and I as I slid into the front seat.

"Goodbye!" said the tuxedo. "Now you be sure and come back a second time!"

"I told you. I wanted to do a little shopping," I said to Dave.

