

# Madison foursquare

A birthday bouquet  
from Scott

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## Covers

[SC] Absolutely gorgeous covers this month, **Steve** and **Darlene**.

[JG] Indeed! Is that a galactic koi pond? It looks like one of the fish is feeding on one of the galactic swirls/fish food sprinkles.

## Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] I am so sorry you are stuck with this devastating medical diagnosis. Naturally I wish for you the absolute best possible outcome. At the very least, I want ten more years of conversations with you in this apa.

I read your new Chalce story, *Magh*, and enjoyed it very much thank you. I liked your depiction of how magic worked in this world and how, at the end, you left the door open to come back to this incident sometime.

[JG] While reading *Magh*, I found myself thinking about how the magic worked in this latest Chalce story of yours, and I've decided that what your magic's mechanism reminds me of is the process of inventing a story. I've often heard writers talk about doing this, and have dabbled in the game a few times myself: One starts with the image of a compelling stranger

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one has noticed, a bit of overheard conversation, or a momentary snatch of a dream, or an idea ("what if..."). And from that seed, one begins filling out the spaces around the person or episode or idea, finding and creating conflict and plot and resolution along the way. I've constructed backgrounds, complicated living situations, and nefarious motivations for strangers I've noticed on the bus or walking around the farmers' market. That's how Celand Heath seems to intuit information about people and events that he investigates using his peculiar mental powers. Very neat! Thanks, Georgie.

I'm so sorry this cancer has left you with so few options, mostly discouraging. I hope you are able to continue to find beauty and joy in the people and art around you, no matter how this disease changes the way you live your life.

What a lovely instructional essay! Lacking what seems to be the perfect fruit-ripening freezer bag from Kopps, I nonetheless have had good luck with single-layer, but similarly powerful brown bags. But I do like the notion that buying ice cream is an essential step in fruit ripening! Another use of brown bags is the preservation of morel mushrooms. Unwashed, stored loosely (not packed), and refrigerated in a brown paper bag, morels can be preserved, apparently unchanged for many weeks.

## Lisa Freitag

[JG] I'm sorry you weren't able to join us for any of last month's gatherings. We'll continue to let you know about upcoming social events in hopes that you might be able to visit.

## Elizabeth Matson

[SC] Your "plague journal" project was interesting to me. My initial reaction was to say that I would not have felt I had much to write about during the Pandemic lockdown to justify a journal. I wasn't working anymore and our lives fell into a regular

routine. Our weekly grocery shopping excursion became one of our highlight activities of every week. Even now we joke to each other every week that our shopping day is a “big, big day!” It seemed that our days rotated through ordinary living activities, plans for our bathroom remodel, reading the next book discussion group book, producing *Turbo* and pursuing our own separate distractions. Not riveting reading, at least I thought so little of it that I stopped trying to think of something to write about for our apazine’s “What’s New” section. I’m glad you were more inspired.

Thanks, as always for the latest Yurt progress report. You must realize by now that you have the whole apa hooked on your progress with this project. Whereas our bathroom project turned into an endurance saga, yours felt like it moved along in a more natural progression since it was making a journey all the way from Mongolia. Lovely photos, too. It sounds like a wonderful community you will be moving into.

Regarding your comment to **Catie**, Jeanne and I were lucky to visit the Isabella Gardner Museum in Boston during a trip out East years before it suffered the infamous art heist. It’s definitely worth a visit. They have nicely preserved the feeling that you are getting to visit an exclusive private art collection rather than just seeing art in another museum.

[JG] I gathered together my *Madison Foursquare* Covid reports into one chapter in the book/memoir that I am writing. I’m really glad to have it; I expect that future me would recall a much-simplified memory of the past year without this chronicle. The Wisconsin Historical Society will work against a similar cultural fate as Covid disappears (I hope) into the past.

The picture of you standing in front of the primed yurt platform looked, at first, like a miniature Elizabeth beside a tiddlywink. What will the next step be after installing the yurt? Will you need to do anything to protect it so that it survives winter?

### Andy Hooper

[SC] “Lost Cat” was divine. As a regular reader of our various local online neighborhood groups, I find myself scrolling through a depressing number of, often emotional, lost pet postings. That all the fleeing animals are thinking the same thing about their owners seems entirely possible.

The story of the Green Bay Horror Hosts was interesting once again. I wonder what Faye Fisher ended up doing after she left her popular horror show to move to Chicago with her boyfriend. And whether Al Gutowski ever regretted his decision to leave show business for a career in something called Regional Analysis.

Regarding your comment to **Lisa**, you may be exasperated to learn that, as I write this, Jeanne and I just finished up reading aloud *Jade War*, book number two in Fonda Lee’s saga. The second installment has increased my admiration for Lee’s intricate plotting with respect to individual character stories as well as the overall criminal enterprises, but also at the level of multinational politics. Even more impressive is how she writes about the theory of leadership as practiced by the ruthless clan leader Hilo. We have to wait for November 30th for book three.

[JG] I’d like to hear “Lost Cat” scored as a song. What musical genre would best suit it I wonder.

Re your comment to **Jim Hudson** on ironing: “Electric irons make the job much easier, but completely forgetting that things were supposed to be pressed at all made the job disappear altogether.” Well, when one person in a household persists in *remembering* that things should be ironed, it makes their partner’s desire to forget a little harder. But I have found that it’s worth the effort.

Thanks for the history of Roscoe. I never really understood the why and how of Roscoe. I should have asked Stu Shiffman. I especially liked the two Sacred Writings Poems. Was the original text laid out in verse form?

### Marilyn Holt & Clifford R. Wind

[SC] Speaking of social outings, Jeanne and I went to a wedding this month. First one we have been to in years. Details below in What’s New.

It seemed completely appropriate to me that it would be **Andy** and **Carrie’s** party that inspired your increased social activity. They have always been party animals.

I hope you will post a photo of your Saab once it’s fixed up and painted.

[JG] In 2005 we had our (previous) car, a 1999 Lincoln, painted, rather than replace it. We kept the car for 14 more years, so it was certainly worth it, though rust spots gradually began reappearing in the last couple

years we owned it. The body repair work was less successful than we'd hoped.

It feels nice that things are slowly opening up again, differently of course. I'm just hoping that Delta and other Covid variants don't cause us to backslide entirely. If booster shots do eventually get approved, I am already eligible, since I received my first jab in mid-February. Since Scott's vaccine was one of the single-dose J&Js, we are hoping that he will be able to get one of the more effective Pfizer or Moderna vaccines.

### Carrie Root

[SC] The nice coed at the Memorial Union and the nice waitress at the restaurant sure took some excellent photos! Thanks for sharing them. I think we all look great. Shockingly, your visit was the first time Jeanne and I made it down to the Memorial Union so far this year. I think the biggest issue for us is that parking is inconvenient and maybe some lingering Covid hesitancy about sitting so close to a lot of people. It felt pretty comfortable to me the day we were all there. It was not that busy for a Saturday. I miss hanging out down there occasionally, especially while the students are mostly gone for the summer.

In a late breaking development, the restaurant we ate in, Paisan's, has closed, temporarily. The city evacuated the entire building and supports are being installed in the basement parking garage before reopening. The city says the building is not in danger of collapsing (Florida-style) but they are taking action anyway, out of "an abundance of caution." One person who worked on the 12th floor reported that the building often shakes a bit when a train goes by (tracks are between the building and John Nolan Drive, Law Park and Lake Monona.) However, last Friday, folks on the 12th floor could feel the building shaking and swaying a bit in spite of the absence of an actual train. Soon after the city evacuated the place.

Cheers for the progress on your kitchen project. Our bathroom is finally DONE and I love it. I expect we will eventually forget the pain we went through over time and we will start talking about the Next Thing. Fortunately, there are not many things left that we intend to renovate.

[JG] Great photos!

The pelican story belongs to **Elizabeth**: I plucked all the elements of the story from Elizabeth's zine and simply

rearranged them! But maybe if she writes a fuller version, she will ask me to illustrate it!

Interesting thoughts on how some culture-bound travel writing tends to age badly. That reminded me of a conversation with Kim Stanley Robinson about the future of travel writing. As you might suspect, Stan was mostly interested in eco-tourism, i.e., travel that helps people learn about the world and understand the importance of protecting it. Our conversation happened very soon after the publication of his novel, *Antarctica* (which I loved). Stan wrote the novel specifically to fulfill his obligations to the National Science Foundation, which sent him to the Antarctic in 1995 as a visiting scholar as part of its Antarctic Artists & Writers Program. (He initially tried to get them to accept the *Mars* trilogy as his Antarctic-inspired work, but they held firm and demanded that he create something specifically about Antarctica. I'm so glad they did!) Stan used one of the main characters of *Antarctica* to speculate about how the business of tourism might evolve in remote and inhospitable parts of the world, given advances in high tech gear and considering people's eagerness to explore spectacular landscapes. The character, Val, is a trek guide in the novel. She and her clients wear amazing survival suits that protect them in the most unforgiving of environments. Val leads a group of tourists along the route taken by Sir Ernest Shackleton, starting in the Weddell Sea, where his ship, the *Endurance*, was trapped in ice in 1915. Shackleton's original plan had been to reach the South Pole, but in spite of failing to reach his goal, this journey of survival has become one of the most epic, astonishing stories in the history of exploration. The *Endurance* sank 11 months after being trapped in ice, after which Shackleton and his crew drifted on ice and then sailed/rowed in lifeboats to Elephant Island, and from there sailed/rowed 800 miles to the *wrong side* of South Georgia Island, where they had to climb up and down two mountains before they climbed a third mountain which provided a useable pass that allowed them to safely descend to the other side of the island. That's where the whaling station was located. Shackleton's entire crew of 28 men survived the 1200-mile journey. Future trek guide, Val, and her clients were significantly better protected than Shackleton's crew had been; nevertheless, it was a grueling trip and exciting to read...and a really interesting take on future tourism and travel writing!

We wish you the best of luck on your new kitchen!  
Sincerely!

## Steven Vincent Johnson

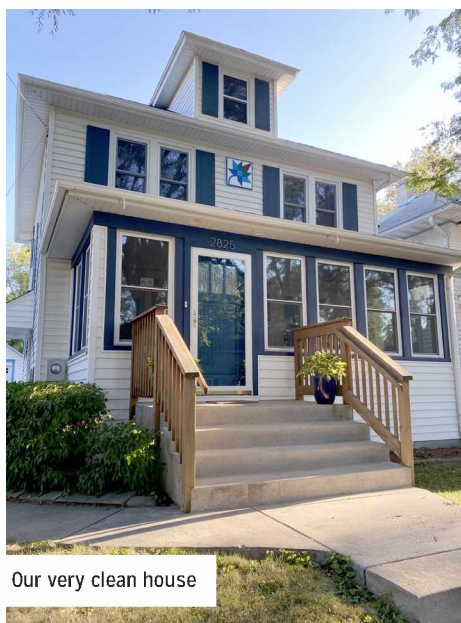
[SC] I agree with you completely about shit-canning the Electoral Collage. I was done with it back in 2000 when it was last misused to rob the majority of voters of their chosen leader, as you pointed out. Where we might disagree is that I no longer have patience left for gradual or incremental change. We need big, bold action right now on a variety of fronts with no time to dither over process. The filibuster needs to go away, the Supreme Court needs to be packed and strong climate change policy needs to be enacted at once. Time is running out.

[JG] I agree.

## Jim Hudson & Diane Martin

[SC] FYI, it appears that Gretchen Treu of Room of One's Own bookstore has purchased a house near us. How close? It's a block and a half away from our house. I stood in front of it to catch the bus to work every morning for 20 years before I retired. It's an old former store building on Milwaukee St, that has at least two living units. After spending all spring and summer getting the bookstore's new home ready, it surprised me that she would then buy a house that will almost certainly need some work as well. I know they are doing work on it, there is a dumpster parked in the back parking area.

I think Room is in a good spot on Atwood Ave, which has really picked up in recent years. Right across the street from Room is the tiny Victory café and coffee shop. It's run by a slightly eccentric Brooklyn, NY native. During the dark days of the Pandemic winter he was running the shop almost completely by himself and I dropped in once a week or so for a mocha. I liked his mochas because he did not make them as sweet as most places. I had the pleasure of telling him about Gretchen's interview in the local newspaper about the bookstore's move to the Atwood neighborhood. The reporter asked her if she was going to put a coffee bar in the store. She told them no, and instead planned to direct customers to the Victory, "right across the street." He was thrilled.



Our very clean house

I did not get enough time to visit with Ariel while she was here this trip. I need to work on this next time. Also, nice pictures once again.

[JG] Thanks to your photos and writing on the subject of your new pressure washer, Scott and I went beyond our usual comment, "we should really get our house pressure washed one of these days..." We've been saying that for several years now, and though buying a pressure washer seemed like it might be an interesting idea, we knew we would never be able to deal with our three-story house. Also, we were concerned about damaging the quilt square hanging on the front of the house. So, I typed out a request for bids to Angie's List and received several; we went with Orchard Ridge Pressure Washing. Turns out that Orchard Ridge is a fairly new, one-man business. Malcolm (a young, red-headed, mullet-sporting guy) arrived driving a small hatchback into which he had managed to cram all his equipment, including a ladder. I took off to swim at the YMCA, and when I returned, he was still hard at work.

Malcolm was magnificent. He spent three hours working on our 3-story, vinyl-sided house, getting the white siding SPOTLESS. In addition, he paid special attention to the quilt square and used a special soap as requested (Simple Green) to avoid damaging the artwork. Also, he managed to remove a lot of moss covering the front porch shingles that had grown over the course of a couple years. We will definitely call him again, sooner next time, to keep on top of that problem! Malcolm provided service Over and Above: He cleaned wooden fences adjacent to the house and also the garage doors. On top of

that, he really enjoyed his work. What a guy! So, if any of you Madison area folks are looking for someone to pressure wash your house, we definitely recommend Orchard Ridge. We hope that Malcolm will soon be able to afford to buy a truck.

I would like to revise my review of the British cop show, *Line of Duty* (seasons 1-5 available through Amazon Prime; all six seasons available through Britbox; season 7 in production.) A couple of issues ago, I wrote that Scott and I were impressed by the show, but had found it exceedingly dark. I think I mentioned that the show reminded me of *The Wire*.

We almost stopped after watching the first season because the world of *Line of Duty* seemed to be one in which corruption and organized crime groups have totally incapacitated the Anti-Corruption Unit (AC-12) in the fictional Central [London] Police Force. We were surprised to find, however, that season two *continued* AC-12's investigation of "bent cops" embedded in the police force. In fact, all six seasons, so far, continued this arc; each season our heroes get closer to victory. At the end of season 6, it seems there may only be one more "bent cop" to ferret out. So, as I said, this is a revised review; I now whole-heartedly recommend it. The characters are great; flawed but mostly admirable. Also, this show contains the most riveting and entertaining cop-suspect interviews that I've ever seen: each one is choreographed like a chess game.

### J.J. Brutsman & Tom Havighurst

[SC] J.J., I think your view of camping and mine match up well. Back in our camping days the best part for me was always the hotel room at the end with shower and air conditioning. Followed closely by the dinner in a restaurant with a stiff drink. Not to say the camping out did not have its enjoyable parts, but I always remember how fabulous I felt coming out of the shower for the first time in 3 or 4 days.

That coconut cake looks luscious. Fortunately I live with an excellent baker who also likes coconut quite a lot.

Great pictures of your many cool adventures. I don't think I knew Brian Curley, but I am sorry for your loss.

[JG] What a gorgeous cake! Can you explain how you apply the browned coconut to the side of the cake? Please. I make such a mess when I frost and decorate multi-layer cakes!

### Jae Leslie Adams

[SC] I had to nod my head in sad agreement with Matt and Beth's reasons for looking for new jobs. I think their story is a familiar one all over the country as burned out, frustrated essential workers re-evaluate their futures after struggling through this horrible Pandemic and the even more horrible ways too many people have chosen to respond to it. Who can blame them for wanting a change?

[JG] Wow, the virtual calligraphy summer camp sounds fun!

I am awestruck that so many health care workers stay in as long as they do. I would be so angry caring for a community that is not willing to care for me.

### Jeannie Bergmann

[JG] Loved "Lost Ark." It needs to be a painting.

### Pat Hario

[SC] Welcome back, Pat. We can always use more good apa stories. As far as perceptions of you go, I'd agree with "private" rather than "secretive" and "friendly" for sure. Not so "intimidating" as occasionally intense, which is true of many of the rest of us from time to time.

For the anglophile. When my aunt died some years back, Jeanne and I went to the funeral in Iowa City. Before the ceremony, my sister arranged with us to stop for lunch at a local restaurant that was on the way and easy to find. The restaurant was on the edge of Iowa City on Hwy 1 just across the bridge over Interstate 80. I will never forget the place she chose because it was so completely out of place in the middle of Iowa. The name of the place was "Bob's Your Uncle." It was a British style pub and restaurant with actually good food. It's long gone now, but I'm left wondering how many confused Iowans who stopped in and had to ask what the restaurant name meant.

Your cookbook and recipe collection behavior might be a little weird, but at least you have the excuse that you might try to actually use them to cook. I'd argue that I'm at least as odd as you because I read cooking articles, sometimes collect recipes and even been known to watch cooking shows and read through cookbooks when I have absolutely no intention of making anything. I cannot boil an egg without instructions. I suggest stuff to Jeanne to cook or use. She'll tell you that I do it all the time. She hasn't killed me yet.

[JG] Welcome Pat! I agree with Scott: The adjectives, "private" and "friendly," apply to you best in my mind. Every once in a while, someone has told me that they find me intimidating, but usually I manage to interpret that as a compliment.

I seem to have stopped buying cookbooks. Of the couple dozen cookbooks that remain on the bookshelf beneath our kitchen island, it's likely that each one contains one or a handful of recipes that I make frequently. But I rarely peruse the cookbooks

for recipes I haven't tried anymore. I am gradually recording all those frequently cooked/baked recipes from my cookbooks into my recipe app, *Paprika*, which is a very cool tool, because it will automatically synch recipes between my computer, iPhone and iPad. That means I can check a recipe for ingredients at the grocery store (on my iPhone), and prop up my iPad in the kitchen while I cook. The app can automatically double or halve recipes in order to feed larger or smaller groups if I need that. But the best thing about *Paprika* is that it automatically imports recipes from the web and I don't have to laboriously type in the ingredients and instructions. It even imports the photos. These days I get almost all my new recipes on-line from *New York Times Cooking*, which is a subscription service of the New York Times, or from the Washington Post. When I find a recipe that I want to try, I import it into *Paprika*. I've thrown away the file folders (seafood, baked goods, beef, poultry, etc.) in which I used to keep recipes that I'd snipped from newspapers and magazines, or picked up at Penzey's. I realized that I'd stopped looking into the folders once I'd filed them, so out they went.

Covid affected my cooking habits differently than it did you. I have enjoyed trying out new recipes and for the most part they've turned out pretty well. Once in a while we find a recipe that we dislike or that I ruin because I make a crucial mistake. But for the most part, I think we get much more variety eating-in than ordering out from restaurants.

### Ruth & Jim Nichols

[SC] On the one hand, Ruth, I enjoyed your Skippy Trip piece a lot. It sounded like a good time, if a bit too much rain. On the other hand, it made me a little sad that, as we sail into September, it's looking less and less likely that Jeanne and I will be making our own trip to Door County this year. It could still happen, but the fall is getting busy for us.

Jim, I am not surprised that you chose to delay your vacation trip out west until next year because of the virus. It's very frustrating. [Andy & Carrie, please note:] We are taking a trip to Seattle in late October and have chosen to take the train. Despite some trepidation, we are going to take a risk.

[JG] I miss Door County vacations too. When we realized that we would definitely not be going to Door County last year, I *did* find a good recipe for Swedish Pancakes which tastes almost exactly like the ones served at Al Johnson's. And the Atwood Scoop ice cream shop

near us serves a coconut ice cream with almonds and dark chocolate, called "Coconut Explosion," that tastes very close to my favorite ice cream flavor served by Wilson's Ice Cream Parlor in Ephraim. So, there is that consolation.

Ruth, I love that someone in the Limnology Department got back to you to answer your question about the wailing midges! It would never have occurred to me to ask them, but I will keep in mind, from now on, that there may be scientists at UW eager to answer obscure real-life questions. I think the idea of lake-bottom dwelling midges rising in a raucous cloud over the lake actually seems more magical than suspected space aliens.

I sympathize with your frustration at not being congratulated upon reaching the 150th level of your video game. I've been playing solitaire on my iPad for years, often while we "watch" news broadcasts, or during other waiting-around moments. The Mobility Ware version of solitaire that I play awards players with silly titles, like "Suit Savant," "Deck Diviner," "Madame Shuffles," etc. You get a different title after reaching each new level. But when I reached the awesome level of 1,000, the game began recycling the silly titles, thus—"Suit Savant II," "Deck Diviner II," "Madame Shuffles II," etc. Disappointing.

I love it when rearranging a closet or room results in *more space*.

Jim, you aren't saying that you think *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* is a BAD movie, are you? I love that movie.

### Kim & Kathi Nash

[SC] Fall is also my favorite season. I love the cooling weather, the fall sunlight and fall color. I like fall holidays, too (though pumpkin spice can get old pretty fast.) I also like the boost of energy and excitement the returning students bring to Madison. The movies get better in the fall, too. I'm looking forward to going out to APT and sitting under the stars huddled in gloves and a blanket and sipping on my hot (sometimes spiked) drink and watching the play. So much better than sitting in those same seats and sweating on a hot, humid summer evening with the light fading slowly, watching out for mosquitoes and other flying pests and trying to focus on the play while hoping to keep cool by sipping a beer in a paper cup that is turning warm too fast.

[JG] ...speaking of favorite seasons, have you ever seen or heard a Charlie Berens' comedy act? Charlie is a

Wisconsin comedian, very funny, and you can find a lot of his stuff on Facebook and YouTube of course. In one of his best routines, "Spring vs Winter," he performs the four distinct season personalities against one another. They're all competing for the title of best season. I think of that whenever people talk about their favorite seasons. Recommended. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7jneG4AKHo>

### Hope Kiefer & Karl Hailman

[SC] Karl, I greatly enjoyed and appreciated your trail reports. Although I would be travelling by bicycle instead of Rollerblades, your reports were still quite useful and informative. I'm such a newbie to the idea of expanding my territory beyond the city, that it did not occur to me that the trail information would simply tell me how much of a stretch of trail was paved. How nice is that?

At the beginning of this season, I had grand plans to start exploring more trails around the state. My bike is not very rugged, it's mostly designed for commuter travel around the city, so I was hoping to discover whether I should eventually start planning to invest in a sturdier bike. I was also seriously weighing the pros and cons of various bike racks for our little Kia Niro (I really don't want to attach a trailer hitch.) Sadly, all these ambitions hit a snag in mid-summer when I started having trouble with pain in my right knee that turns out to be osteoarthritis in both my knees.

I was not having problems on my bike. In fact, even now, almost the best my knee feels is when I am pedaling my bike. I started having pain when driving. Stop and go driving, which involves working the pedals with my right leg, suddenly became agonizing. Hence the x-rays and diagnosis. So now I'm sort of relearning what my knees are willing to take in terms of bike travel and, so far, I have not taken any trips outside of town, beyond the Capital City State Trail. Maybe by next spring I will have recovered enough to check out some of the other trails you wrote about. I will keep track of your zine from this issue for future reference.



In response to your comments to us, I avoid biking around town on weekends because of all the families and large groups on the bike trails, but also to avoid the weekend warrior guys who can only get out in their bike shorts, bright jerseys and \$1000+ bikes on the weekends. Jeanne and I also have racked up a total of one state park visit so far this year on our 2021 park sticker. Sad. We still plan to get one again next year.

[JG] Karl, if you ever get the chance to take a tour INSIDE the buildings at Epic, grab it! In addition to the theme-decorated theaters, conference rooms, and restrooms, the hallways are packed with amazing art works. I think it's probably the best art gallery in the city. You should ask Becky to get you a pass to see all the wonders of Epic.

I enjoyed your tour of the state trails!

### What's New

#### A Wedding

[SC] My grand nephew, Tyler, finally married his longtime partner, Tenisha. They already had one son and, just two weeks before the wedding, added a new daughter. That was pretty close timing. The wedding was in Prairie du Chien, WI, along the Mississippi River about 2 hours due west of Madison, but we decided to make a weekend of it and schedule a drive to my hometown of Anamosa, IA to visit my brother, Jon, and his wife, Donna, and

my sister, Bonnie, the day before. We drove down to Iowa on a rainy Friday taking a side trip to Durango, IA (a little west and north of Dubuque) to pick up a new clock for our bathroom by the same artist who made our bathroom mirror. (Left) Then we drove down to Anamosa.



The five of us had a nice visit Friday afternoon at my brother's home. Tyler is my sister's grandson, so she was also going to be at the wedding the next day, but Jon and Donna were not attending, so it was a good time to visit since I had

not been back since early summer and might not be back again for some time. The last time we visited, the five of us ordered dinner out but this time Jon, Donna and Bonnie were all very unenthused about take-out possibilities. So Jeanne suggested we just make spaghetti. Jon had ground beef, pasta and even a bagette on hand. Jeanne and I were dispatched to the store for pasta sauce and dessert. Jeanne and Jon combined forces in the kitchen when we got back and produced a meal that delighted everyone. We have probably seen the end of take-out on future visits.

After staying overnight in the comfortable local motel, Jeanne and I drove to Prairie du Chien for the wedding. It was overcast and a little rainy in the morning, but was supposed to clear off in time for the event in the afternoon. We got to town in time to drive around a bit. I lived and worked in the McGregor, IA/Prairie du Chien, WI area for two years back in 1985–1987. Jeanne lived in Madison and we carried on a commuter relationship until I could afford to leave my job and move in with her. A lot has changed in Prairie since then. Clearly the area had shifted into much more dependence on tourism. All the towns had grown, there were a lot more bars, restaurants and places to stay and there was even a riverboat attraction on the Iowa side.

The wedding was held outside in a gazebo shelter in a park next to the river. It was a small, but enthusiastic crowd and all went well. The plan was to have dinner in a nearby reception hall. Jeanne and I were a little concerned about eating dinner in a possibly crowded hall. We had gone out to restaurants many times in Madison, but Prairie was out in the hinterland where there's far less enthusiasm and cooperation with COVID vaccination efforts. We felt the risks were much higher in Prairie. However, the hall they arranged was quite large and airy and they got far fewer than the 80 guests they expected, so the dinner felt comfy for us. We drove home afterwards, just as the dancing was getting under way, as we did not want to stay another night in a hotel and home was an easy drive. We had a good time. It was a nice to see people and just have some fun.📍



Sarcastic sign

## A Birthday

[JG] I celebrated my 70th birthday this month and though we talked briefly about doing a party, I couldn't get very enthusiastic about the idea. (You will just have to wait a while longer to get your chance to tour our new bathroom.) So, Scott and I celebrated quietly: He bought me a delicious carrot cake from Madison Sourdough Co and a beautiful bouquet of flowers, and a promise of tickets to the Madison performance of *Fiddler on the Roof*, which I am looking forward to. We went out to dinner at the Heritage Tavern and had an incredibly delicious meal. Yum. 📍



## A Book

[JG] I seem to be writing a book. For the past year I've been scanning my old manuscripts and apazines with OCR tech, arranging stories and essays chronologically, and amassing a fairly huge manuscript. Until recently, I've referred to this nascent anthology as a *memoir*. But now as I slowly read and edit this huge conglomeration, cutting out chunks, re-writing old stories and writing new ones, stitching it all together into one *thing*, I have begun to think of it simply as a book. I am writing a book. The story I append to this issue of *Madison Foursquare* isn't a reprint, it is a re-mixed and expanded essay based on stories I've told aloud, but never preserved in text except as a couple abbreviated versions. It is one of the first stories in my book. 📍



*Snippets of this essay can be found in Shoreline 4, in Cascade Regional Apa (CRAFA), February 1979. And I may have told part of the story to you at a party. But most of the text was created in 2021, and never published before.*

Sister Joseph's lesson plan for us second-graders relied heavily on the fear factor. Years later I developed the theory that she may have considered herself better qualified to teach high school English and resented the fact that her talents were wasted teaching second graders. I came up with this theory in a high school English class, which is where I first encountered James Joyce's novel, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and recognized the description of hell that Joyce's protagonist, Stephen Daedalus, was exposed to during his Irish grade-school days. It was the very same nightmarish inferno with which Sister Joseph had scared us in the second grade. Of course, Sister Joseph did not endorse Joyce's criticism of the Church, which was one of the points of the novel. And I don't think she was at all concerned about the effect that such an oppressive and terrifying story might have on the sensibilities her students. In fact, I think my grade school teacher enthusiastically endorsed the educational benefits of scaring her young charges with horrific descriptions of the hell awaiting them if they misbehaved.

The centerpiece of Joyce's and Sister Joseph's story is an enormous ball of steel, bigger than a million galaxies, hanging in the middle of space. Once every billion eons, a butterfly lightly brushes its wing against the surface of the steel ball. In the vast, unthinkable amount of time it would take for butterflies to erode the steel ball down to the size of a tiny marble, Sister Joseph warned us, not even a *moment* of the time would have passed in eternity for those of us whose sins condemn us to be cast into hell. Sister Joseph didn't stop with the horror of infinite time, though. She went on to describe some of the most ghastly ordeals of pain and suffering to which we would be condemned in hell if we displeased God.

Given the stakes, it's no wonder that I was concerned about the fine print in the Scapular Contract.

### **The Scapular Contract**

In preparation for our First Holy Communion, a scapular was issued to each of us second-graders. The scapular was constructed with a pair of tiny holy cards (about 1" x 2") along with a *relic*—i.e., a piece of ribbon that had once touched the hem of the Virgin Mary's veil.



The cards and relics were covered in plastic and then connected with two long ribbons.

According to the scapular contract, the party of the promiser (henceforth known as "the kid") agrees to sling the scapular over their head and vows to wear it *all the time*, except while bathing. In addition, the kid commits to recite special prayers every night in the correct order and number. If the kid upholds their part of the contract, throughout their whole life, the party of God (known as "God") promises to reduce the kid's likely sentence in Purgatory. God pledges to release the scapular-honoring kid from purgatory and send the kid to heaven on the *very first Friday* after their incarceration!

Neat contract huh? But I was sort of cynical for a seven-year-old kid. I demanded an explanation for the blatantly unfair possibility that a murderer might die on a Thursday night and go to heaven the next morning, while a good little kid like me might die on Saturday morning and have to suffer through a whole week in Purgatory, waiting to cash in my get-out-of-jail scapular. That isn't fair, I insisted. Sister Joseph assured me that it was unlikely that a murderer would say his prayers every night and I grudgingly agreed that was likely the case.

But I had another objection: Where is hell? It would have to be on Earth for "Friday" to make any sense. How did we know that hell wasn't located out in the orbit of Pluto? Then how would we know when the next "Friday" would occur...in four or 400 years? I suggested to Sister Joseph that we might be better off not signing onto a contract with such an ambiguous "guarantee." I was sent to the principal's office after posing that question.

### **Hosts**

I was sent to the principal's office a few more times during my grade school career. The principal, Sister Mary Rupert sighed deeply when she found me sitting in the chair in the hallway outside her office and completely ignored my attempts to justify whatever I'd said that had resulted in my temporary expulsion from class. Sister Mary Rupert droned on about how disappointed she was in me, using phrases like "respect your teachers," "use your common sense," and "behave yourself." However,

most of my delinquencies were pretty minor, relatively speaking. Probably the thing that got me into the hottest water was my role in the “Maze of Terror and Thrills.” But that’s another story (“Corrugated Confessions”).

I suspect that I might have incurred a spectacular punishment for my role in the sacristy heist if Sister Mary Rupert had gotten wind of it. Luckily none of my fellow students turned me in, so I got away with it entirely.

The competition was fierce for altar-boy slots among fourth-graders. Candidates were judged based on their grades, attitudes, appearance and ability to memorize Latin phrases. Almost all the boys volunteered for this prestigious job. I believe that the opportunity to swing the incense censers during mass was a big attraction. But since not enough slots were available, many boys failed to make the cut. However, it was a different story entirely for the job offered to fourth-grade girls—that of altar and sacristy cleaner. Hardly any of us were interested in giving up part of our lunch hours to vacuum and dust in the church. Rather than filter applicants against a list of rigorous qualifications, the nuns were forced to draft unwilling girls to do this work; I was one of the students picked for this odious duty.

We altar/sacristy cleaners would gather in the church at 11am, near the sacristy, in which the priest prepares for a service, and where vestments and other things used in worship were kept. A nun would unlock the door and our clock would start. We had to work quickly in order to finish with enough time left over to run to the cafeteria and gobble our lunch. We brought our lunch bags with us.

One day while dusting some shelves in the sacristy, I noticed a partially-filled cellophane bag of unconsecrated hosts. This was the bag from which the priest scooped hosts into his chalice for Mass and then performed transubstantiation—converting them into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. I stood transfixed before the sight, but without much hesitation, I plunged my hand into the bag and pulled out as many un-magicked hosts as I could hold. No one was looking. The other girls had rolled the vacuum cleaner, dust rags and spray cleaners into the altar area. I spun around, found my lunch bag and dropped the hosts into the sack.

Later, in the cafeteria, I opened my lunch bag and casually began nibbling on hosts to the astonishment of my seatmates. I’d finally found a perk in the sacristy-cleaning gig.

## ***Father Devil's Advocate***

I think I may have been the first person to convert to atheism in my seventh-grade class. Not, however, because of James Joyce, scapulars, or unconsecrated hosts. Ironically, Father Mehan, the Pastor at St. Luke’s Parish unknowingly converted me. Traditionally, Father Mehan taught one religion class a week to seventh and eighth graders in order to prepare students for the shock of encountering non-Catholics when they eventually matriculated to public high school. Only the richest and/or most devout of our parents were willing to pay the extremely expensive tuition charged by Catholic high schools. That meant that the majority of us would most likely attend either New Berlin or Brookfield high school after graduating from eighth grade. Father Mehan solemnly warned us that we risked losing our faith if we were not able to mount a strong defense against atheistic ideas and even outright challenges by diabolical public-school teachers and students.

“You need to be able to defend your Catholic faith,” he proclaimed. “I will help you win debates against non-believers!” Wow, he certainly caught my attention.

“I will argue the devil’s advocate position, that is, I will argue in favor of atheism. And you will each take turns championing your belief in God and the Catholic religion.”

It was a fascinating hour. I’d never heard the arguments against the existence of God and the harmfulness of religion articulated so clearly and logically. By the end of the hour, Father Mehan had definitely converted me...to atheism.

## ***Lapsed***

After that, I skipped Sunday Mass as often as possible. I would find an out-of-the-way spot in the building to read for an hour before returning home, so Mom didn’t realize I was no longer attending Mass. I joined the community of Lapsed Catholics.

Nevertheless, my Catholic childhood had an enormous effect on my life. After Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy were revealed to be shams, I embraced some of the fantastic theological elements of Catholicism because I wanted the world to include magic. I have a clear memory of making room in my bed for my guardian angel in case she got tired of standing watch over my sleeping self.

When I tossed Catholic mysticism in the same bin into which I’d abandoned Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy, I grabbed for the life raft of science fiction and fantasy, to which I have clung ever since. ☐