

Madison foursquare

60



Scene from the Fall Art Tour

Covers

[SC] Catie, lovely covers. They look like vacation photos to me. Where were these taken and did you have a great time?

[JG] Thanks Catie! Nice photos.

This issue of *Madison Foursquare* is brought to you by Scott Custis and Jeanne Gomoll, who live at 2825 Union Street, Madison, WI 53704.

Scott@unionstreetdesign.com

Jeanne@unionstreetdesign.com

This is *Madison Foursquare* #60. *Madison Foursquare* was created using a Mac Pro with InDesign, Illustrator and Photoshop, all CC 2021, and printed on a Ricoh Aficio CL7200 color printer.

All contents ©2021 by Scott Custis [SC] & Jeanne Gomoll [JG] October 2021 for *Turbo-Charged Party Animal* #424.

Greg Rihn

[SC] The exhibit *Americans in Spain* sounded fascinating.

What a struggle you had with the power outage. The risk of a significant power loss from a storm in Wisconsin was already fairly high and I think climate change will only increase the likelihood. I have been getting more concerned about that since we have an upright freezer in our basement that we keep generally full of meat and other items most of the year. Suddenly losing all that in a prolonged power outage would be significant. Lately I have been getting more interested in looking into a backup generator system, if only to protect the freezer. We'll see how practical of an idea that is.

Thanks also for your review of *The Green Knight*, which we have not seen but I was curious about. I think your review gave me a much clearer picture of what the movie does and does not do well than any other review I have read about it. I'm not very familiar with the original Green Knight tale, so your review was especially helpful.

[JG] I hope we get to try out the Lake Park Bistro someday. Sounds lovely.

I think Manshin's and Sinema's obstruction of the infrastructure bill has little to do with their admittedly conservative districts. The bill is actually very popular in their districts, and M&S are getting a lot of heat from their constituents for blocking the bill. Also, there are several other Democratic Senators who come from districts even more conservative than M&S, who are nonetheless willing to back Biden's agenda. M&S's REAL constituents are industry and business interests which fund them.

Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] I had no idea there was a Milwaukee State Forest.

In your comment to **Jeannie B.**, I think I went through the same stages you described for your reaction to the Sedlec Ossuary when Jeanne,



Jeanne’s sister, Julie, and I toured the *Museo de las Momias* (mummy museum) near Guanajuato, Mexico many years ago. The display was of petrified bodies that had been buried in the highly alkaline soil. Back in the old days in Mexico people did not buy burial plots, they rented them. When a family stopped paying the rent for a relative’s body it was dug up and tossed on a pile. Eventually someone got the idea of organizing a tour of the petrified bodies displaying death by gunshots, blunt force trauma or hanging. There were also bodies of women who were pregnant at death and children of all ages and many other weird and disturbing things. I remember being fascinated at first, but pretty spooked by the end.

[JG] Your comment to Jeannie also reminded me of Scott’s and my visit to the *Museo de las Momias*, but Scott beat me to the response. After thinking about all the ways a museum exhibition can go wrong, I expect the job of curating a museum must be very challenging.

The other night I actually dreamt that I built a new museum. On consideration, I think my museum would rank among the not-very-successful museums like House on the Rock, or *Museo de las Momias*. My dream museum was the first of a series of “National Lampoon Place Events”—physical satires of actual structures. My mock-building, the *Wisconsin Arch-Archives*, was filled with exhibits, punning statues and glass cases containing farcical Wisconsin memorabilia. A gigantic frieze of Father Joliet exploring the Foxy River, can of Pabst in hand, stood in the entrance foyer. On the second floor was the mock library and archives completely stocked with bogus texts. Happily, no one has offered to fund this travesty, though in my dream, billionaires tripped over one another to give me money.

Steven Vincent Johnson

[SC] I liked your piece, “UAPs (UFOs), Grounded in Reality, or Not. That is the Question.” I agree with you that anecdotal evidence regarding UAP’s should not be ignored completely. I think a lot depends on who is doing the reporting. Military and commercial pilots, for instance, who are trained and expected to report their experiences accurately, and who have no motive to make up stuff, should be given a fair hearing.

[JG] I enjoyed the pun and idea of E-motions controlled by Newton’s third law of motion, e.g., karma. Nice.

You noted that UAPTF avoided listing extraterrestrials in their classification list. I am fine with this. Also not included:

- ◆ Objects from another dimensional plane, whose movement can only be partially perceived by 3-dimensional beings
- ◆ time travelers or drones, aboard vehicles developed by future technology
- ◆ Humans who have developed super-human intelligence and/or powers

The list of imaginable explanations is of course infinite.

Elizabeth Matson

[SC] I want to thank you for the invite to join your crew for the yurt “raising.” I’m sorry I could only be there for one of the two days. It was a hoot getting to see your wild and beautiful land, meeting your lovely friends and neighbors and actually being useful in getting the project done before rain set in or we ran out of daylight. When I drove up, I was a little concerned about how much a large old man

with bum knees would be able to contribute, but it turns out that height counts for something in a yurt raising! It was a challenging day, but we made it. The drive up and back were both nice too. I had forgotten that your land is nestled in the countryside near the Kettle Moraine, so the drive in through the hills with the changing leaves against the dramatic clouds was great. As I drove back, the same big clouds contributed to beautiful sunset.

Jeanne and I are both on Room of One's Own email list for regular updates and event announcements. I have been keeping a close eye on them for notice when R.O.O. actually opens their new doors to the public. Nothing came until a recent Saturday morning as we were driving around town running errands (and dodging football traffic) when Jeanne happened to check her email and they suddenly announced they were opening TODAY, noon to 6 pm! I swung down Atwood Ave. and people were already lining up. They only let 30 people into the store at a time. I found out later there was an announcement on TV the day before that we did not see, but they did not send out an earlier email notice that I saw. Looks like they will be open every day. We finally dropped in for a visit on a weekday last week. It's a beautiful space, it even has skylights! We had a nice chat with Gretchen (and talked some about home remodeling projects) and bought a couple books. Worth a stop next time you are in town.

[JG] It never occurred to me that you had painted your yurt platform in Packer colors, but then I also live outside of football world. Funny! I was so glad to see photos of the yurt raising when Scott returned home and also when you posted pics on Facebook. I was stunned at how many layers there are in a yurt. I loved the inlaid, colorful art on the rafters and door. I hope it stays safe through the winter! I also hope that if autumn stretches out the way it seems likely to (we're past the date when leaf colors should have been at their height and there's still so much green!), that you and Nick the Greyhound will be

able to spend some weekends this fall enjoying your property and cozy nights in the yurt.

Thanks for your recommendation of *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*. Your description appealed to me and on impulse I bought an electronic version of it and added it to my reading-list, for our trip to Seattle next week.

(Re your comment to JJ) I share a dislike of wasting egg yolks when recipes call for many egg whites, or vice versa. I've edited recipes in my electronic files with tags, "extra egg whites," or "extra egg yolks," so if I decided to bake one of them, I try to pair it with a recipe that uses the extra egg whites or yolks.

Jim Hudson & Diane Martin

[SC] Nice photos, as always. Congratulations on your 18th anniversary.

I have very similar feelings to yours about my own family back in Anamosa on the subject of vaccines. I'd like to see more vaccinations, which is also unlikely and I don't understand their attitude about it either. At least my brother, sister and sister-in-law all got their shots as soon as they become available. Two of them already have boosters. Jeanne and I are waiting impatiently for Moderna and J. & J.

We have started watching *Foundation*. For myself, I'm enjoying it so far and I'm rather liking the fact that I have no pre-conceived ideas where the story will go since I've never read the books. The production feels a bit grave and ponderous at times, like it's taking itself a little too seriously, but the production values are high and many of the performances are good.

American Rust is the thing we are watching that I'm currently most caught up in. Very absorbing. We are also getting to see the 2018 *The Little Drummer Girl* mini series starring Florence Pugh. We are buying the episodes one at a time. It's excellent. Pugh and Michael Shannon are outstanding.

[JG] Happy anniversary Diane and Jim!

We were delighted this year that the Art Fair on the Square was rescheduled to



a cooler part of the summer. We snagged a great coat rack from one of the artists.

Thanks for reminding us about *Come from Away*. I will put a sticky note on the TV after I write my comments to remember to watch it when we get the time.

I'm pretty sure I read only the original three *Foundation* books when I was young, like you. I do remember hearing that Asimov had tied them all together with the Robot books, and that I guessed he was mimicking Heinlein's "Future History" consolidation of all his SF, but I decided I wasn't interested. I feel similarly about the Marvel Universe movies. In any case, I can recall very little about the *Foundation* stories other than the plot's basis in the Roman Empire's fall/dark ages/renaissance, and that Seldon left messages behind that become available after he died (to his progeny I think?). The messages revealed that his predictions were spot-on in the first century (centuries?) but gradually became less relevant, especially once the Mule makes his appearance. And maybe because I remember so little of the books' plots, I am enjoying Apple+'s version quite a bit. I am especially impressed by Empire, Cleon's clones. I've loved Lee Pace's acting since I saw him in *Halt and Catch Fire*. He does Visionary really well.

Marilyn Holt

[SC] I remember in 1983, when it was 20 years since the Kennedy assassination, feeling similar to the anniversary of 9/11/01. What was most striking to me then was the realization that a fast growing number of my fellow adults did not remember the assassination (not born yet, or they were too little to understand it). It had no affect on their lives and they looked at it as a notable, but personally remote, historical incident. It was before their time. So, too, with 9/11 today. The people who were traumatized by witnessing 9/11 as it happened are slowly going to fade away and young people will not feel the same connection to it. Sad in some ways, but possibly good for the political health of the country if people grow up to regard 9/11 from a less personally visceral and emotional viewpoint.

Regarding your comment to us, we were certainly lucky to not have allergy issues to contend with through the various home improvement projects we've done over the years. This last bathroom project was probably one of our least messy and disruptive projects compared with our 2nd floor re-do, the living/dining room/attic update and our kitchen remodeling. It just took so very long to

finish the bathroom. I like your travel trailer idea, but it would have been somewhat inconvenient for us. We'd have had to park it in the street because our contractors always use our driveway for the best access to our house via the side door. They even do work in the driveway and our garage such as sawing and assembly.

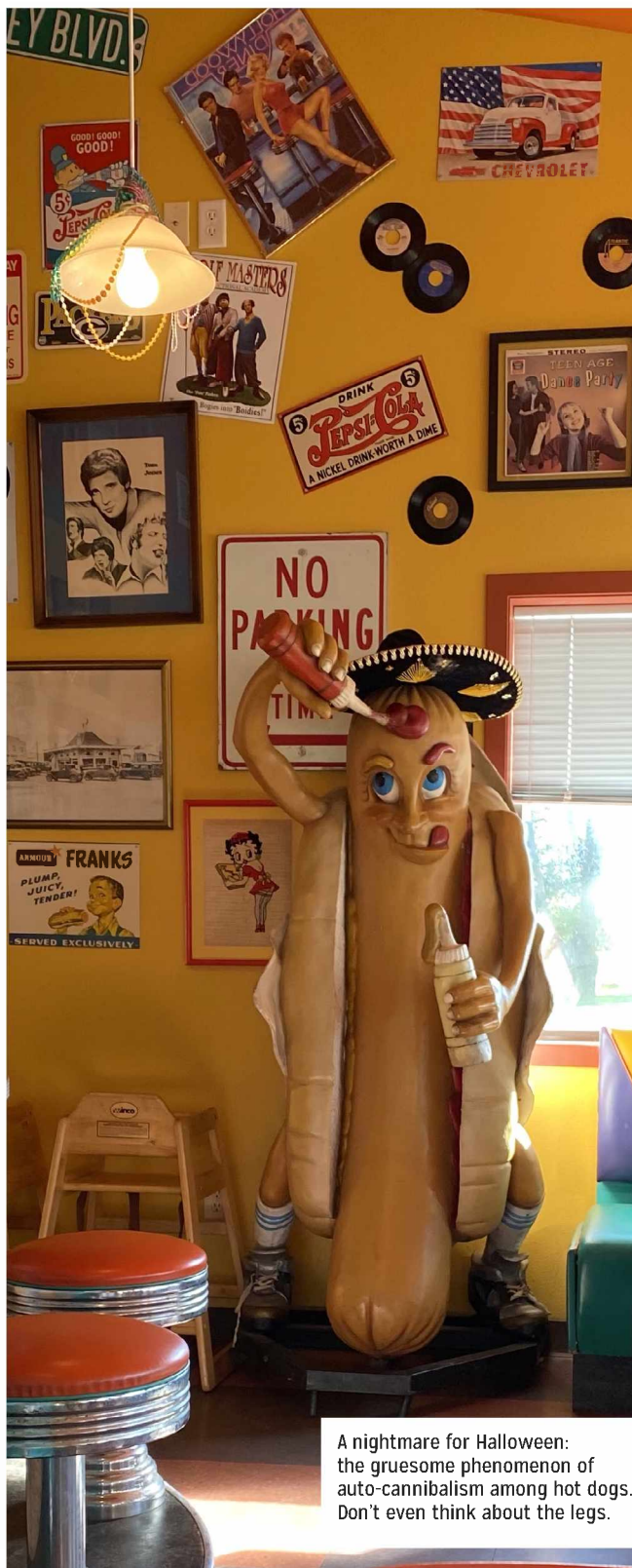
[JG] A travel trailer retreat from home renovation work sounds like an excellent idea for you, especially since you have the space to park the trailer out of the way of workers. We also had to figure out alternate living plans for two of our renovation projects, though not for the bathroom. We simply used the upstairs bathroom for the duration. But when we had our kitchen re-done, we set up a satellite kitchen in the basement. And when we had the second-floor work done and lost our bedroom, we moved a mattress into the attic and bought an electric blanket to survive the winter in the unheated, uninsulated attic.

Andy Hooper

[SC] "Read and Enjoyed But No Comment" is fun. As you know by now, I'll play.

Regarding your comment to me, I'm sure you are right about the factors behind the quality and quantity of mailing comments in most cases. In my own case, I usually start reading and writing comments within a week of getting our copy of the apa with the aim of handing it off to Jeanne with plenty of time for her to read, comment and do layout. I never feel much deadline pressure beyond my own glacial reading/writing pace. I don't think your comments are "overlong". I think you're the king of thoughtful commentary and I enjoy reading your remarks to everyone.

In your comment to **Kim & Kathy** on winter, it can be daunting and a bit depressing looking ahead to winter here in the badger state, but I have learned to look forward to it instead. Winter is a time of year I always set things aside that I want or need to do indoors. Clearing out my office, catching up on paperwork, doing other things at my desk or around the house that I'd feel guilty about spending time on in the summer when I should be outside doing other stuff. In the winter, I have absolutely no qualms about ignoring the world outside and "wasting time" reading, watching movies or listening to music all day because I'm stuck indoors. I sometimes consider taking some classes, too. And when I do go outside, it adds a bit of edge to it knowing that the weather



A nightmare for Halloween: the gruesome phenomenon of auto-cannibalism among hot dogs. Don't even think about the legs.

alone is capable of injuring or killing me if I don't take it seriously. Harsh winter weather reminds us about survival, which keeps us sharp. Survival is a good thing to not get too complacent about.

I enjoyed reading about the Australian Horror Hosts. It appears there are no current practicing Horror Hosts there today? No contemporary Deadly Earnest? I was not surprised at Canada's adopting

the genre, but it seems weird that the idea migrated as far as Australia. And you say Britain has a Deadly Earnest?

I thought George Villick's letter was hilarious.

[JG] Re your comment to **Jae**, about how it seems unlikely that we will be comfortable again in crowded room parties at conventions ... I thought about other "normal" activities that may never return, or at least will seem weird for quite a while. Sharing a lane in the lap pool. Rallying at the Capitol, shouting slogans and singing protest songs, crowded in with one another under the Rotunda. It seems a little strange that we haven't returned to shaking hands, but it might feel creepy if we did go back to that custom. Opening the door to a stranger, standing close face to face, impatiently listening to a sales pitch. Various party games involving drink and embarrassing physical contortions.

Great poem! I loved the Martian perspective.

Kim Huett's and your history of the Hugo rocket trophy was fascinating. I was unfamiliar with most of it.

Carrie Root

[SC] You once lived in a town that is now a ghost town? Cool. What happened to the nice WPA gym? Is it still there? I hope it was not left to fall into ruin. I attended 3rd, 4th and 5th grades at a nice brick elementary building with a gym in the little town of Viola that was part of our school district. I did not like the commute because I had to take a bus into Anamosa from our farm, then transfer to a bus for Viola out and back each day. I spent an annoying amount of time on school buses every day, but the school itself was spacious and solid with huge lawns and playgrounds bordering farm fields out at the edge of Viola. Since then the district let it all go to ruin and recently they tore down the rundown buildings. Sad.

I love the "Little Free Rock Library." I'd have to keep Jeanne away from it however. She'd just try to take all the rocks and somehow try to slip them into my bag.

[JG] Or, **Scott**, you might think of a little free rock library as a way to get rid of some of the rocks I've already brought home, or rather than *you've* brought home in your backpacks. Just saying.

Re your comment to **Elizabeth**, and inadvertent collections... In preparation for our kitchen remodel, I found way too much stuff that I no longer needed and

perhaps never needed. Most of the useless stuff had been stored at the bottom of a corner cabinet, almost impossible to access, and thus the “perfect” place for rarely-used items. But after a while, rarely used items turn into items that are never used and then forgotten entirely. That’s one of the reasons I came up with the idea of our kitchen elevator, to make use of that hidden, hard-to-access space. It’s worked out really well, and I endeavor to throw out or give away things that I am tempted to keep “just in case.”

I love the image/sound of you walking along listening to your “own Andy-cast.”

Cathy Gilligan

[SC] Regarding your comment to me on feedback, I certainly recount similar experiences in comments and I’m not above climbing on the occasional hobbyhorse. You make a good point. It works a bit like conversation in that way. I like that sort of dialog.

I always thought vandals smashing mailboxes with baseball bats was a rural pastime, something common in the country around my hometown. Not something I’d expect in the city, or down Troy Drive.

[JG] We have not gone into withdrawal for lack of bathroom remodeling mishaps. We are fine, thank you for asking. Here’s a picture of the final touch.



What's New

Full Disclosure

[SC] I have a little news to share this month. I have prostate cancer. At my annual physical this year, my PSA levels showed a second dramatic jump in two years which prompted my primary care physician to order a prostate biopsy, an experience I would not describe as a barrel of laughs. I got the results two days later.

The news at this point gets better. It’s a slow growing cancer and they appear to have caught it early. The cells they found were not the most aggressive type. The doctor who called me with the news was clear at the end of the call that “this will not kill you.” After considering a choice of treatment options, I’ve decided to go with surgery which will probably be sometime in December. If this all sounds familiar, it may be because **Steve Johnson** wrote in the apa about his experience not quite two years ago. I will basically be having the same procedure he had at UW Hospital, but with a different doctor. Re-reading Steve’s apas, his operation was more extensive than I expect mine will be, but one can never be sure what’s really going on until the actual operation.

I am sharing this news in the spirit of full disclosure. After seeing the openness and bravery of other apa contributors with more serious cancer issues (and other health issues) than I have, I felt it was only fair that I lay my cards on the table as well. I’m now looking less forward to the coming winter than I had been a couple weeks ago. I have never had surgery of any sort and I already know that it’s an experience I would rather take a pass on, but things could be worse.

Book

[JG] I am working on my book a few hours every day, sometimes as many as 5-8 hours a day. When I started this, I remember assuring Scott that this would not be like some of my other projects where—once begun—I became obsessed and worked all hours, sometimes all-night, to get them done. Like the *Space Babes Coloring Book*, for which I basically lived in a fantasy world for a few months. Scott would notice my attention drifting and ask, “you’re inventing a new space babe,

aren't you?" I could hardly stand to be away from my computer. Sometimes, in the middle of making supper, I'd sneak into my office and open the most recent Illustrator file to make a small change that had occurred to me as I trimmed beans. No, this book would not be at all like that.

"This book is going to take a long time to write, and I know it," I said seriously. "I'll work on it sporadically, whenever I feel the urge. But it won't take over my life."

Ha. Turns out I may be handicapped when it comes to finding a "moderate" setting for my work habits. It could be worse, though. I consider it a victory that I have not stayed up any nights working on this thing. Because of how I've structured the book into discreet stories, each in a separate chapter, I am able to continue a mostly normal life in between writing bouts. So, there's that. But on the other hand, I am excited about how the work is flowing. I am happy with how it is going. So that just encourages me to spend more time writing.

My first plan was to begin with stories and essays that had been previously published in fanzines and apazines. I would polish them or extensively re-write them, whatever seemed appropriate. I would put the material into chronological order, according to their setting (not publication date). Then I would fold in bits from my journals, along with short articles, comments, and partial stories from apas. Most of the bits I chose were fragments of larger stories that I remember telling out loud, in more detail. I planned to flesh out these abridged text fragments and expand them into unexpurgated, whole stories. What I didn't plan to do was to write very much new material. But I'm doing more original writing than I expected.

The exciting thing about having organized all these stories and essays together in chronological order with bits and pieces from my journal and apazines, is that by reading stories and comments that took place in the same general period of time, I have been experiencing frequent epiphanies. I'm learning things that I didn't notice at the time or never articulated. For instance, I've often told the story of Mom sending me to Charm School when I was 13 years old. Some of you may even remember having heard me tell that story. I used to think that the funny thing and point of the story was that I played hooky, and visited the library and a bookstore while I was supposed to be learning charm. But at the same time in my life, my relationship with Mom was becoming increasingly combative. I refused her offer to teach me how to sew. I made my first pie long after I left home and my pie crust recipe

of choice came from a quiche recipe book, not from observations of Mom's techniques. She predicated her offers with phrases like, "You will need to know this when you get married..." or "Your husband will expect you to..." She hoped Charm School would encourage me to start dating. I stubbornly declined her overtures. So, I rejected it all.

Mom took justifiable pride in her excellent sewing and baking skills. I would have benefitted by accepting the lessons. But I didn't resist the lessons so much as I resisted Mom's explanations for why I needed to learn to sew and cook and how to adjust my appearance to appeal to men. All of that looked like a trap to me. I think it was my rejection of her personal life's goals that generated the most intractable of our differences. I spoiled her expectations that she and I would share the experiences of marriage and children as she and her mother had shared them, and she was unable to accept a different kind of mother-daughter relationship. I couldn't have succinctly explained why I rebelled against Mom's advice so angrily as a teenager until I read through several stories that I wrote about my relationship with her.

I also laid out for myself the almost unbelievably torturous route I took toward finally choosing a career in art. There were so very many hints in the things I loved to do, in the things I was good at...but until after I graduated from college, I persisted in claiming that I was not a good enough artist to even hope to make a living at it. I was quite proud of my pragmatic, realistic estimation of myself: I'll always do art as a *hobby*. I told myself. I was always aware of others who I thought were so much better artists than me. In addition, I thought the job of making art was so obviously the most interesting and fulfilling and wonderful job possible, that it made perfect sense to me that *everyone* would choose to be an artist and that meant it was unrealistic of me to hope that I could win such a popular job. Over and over again apparently, I failed to recognize the joy I felt while making art as the tornado-siren, flashing-lights, earthquake-rattling signal that should have convinced me to choose art as a career.

Experiencing these epiphanies has been a really interesting and rewarding side-effect of writing this book. I begin to see why time travel stories fascinate me so much. I would love to have been able to go back in time and give my younger self a few tips.

Oedipus

[JG] I loved American Players Theater's production of *Oedipus*. It was actually the only APT production this season for which I felt unalloyed enthusiasm. I was also disappointed by Forward Theater's current season. And once Scott and I returned to the movie theaters this summer, we saw too many clunkers. It's been distressing. So, it was a huge relief to rise with the crowd at the end of *Oedipus* and give the actors a standing ovation. I leaned to Scott and whispered, "The drought is over!" Most of my unhappiness at the plays offered by APT and Forward Theater had to do with the plays themselves, the *writing*, not so much the actors who were frequently very good. It made me wonder if the fact that both APT and Forward Theater did a combination of zoom and in-person plays meant that they were limited as to which plays they could legally perform. Perhaps they were unable to obtain permission to do the plays they would have preferred to do, and were forced to choose from plays that allowed them to videotape and distribute electronically.

I suspect that the mediocre films available this summer may also have a Covid-related explanation. Movie studios did not want to release their best films at a time when so few people had returned to theaters. Now that the drought is over, fingers crossed, I have high hopes for movies coming out in the next couple months.



Two mugs and a bowl from the Fall Art Tour

Fall Art Tour

[JG] It was a perfect fall day on Saturday, October 16, when Scott and I drove through Baraboo, Spring Green, Mineral Point, and environs, visiting artists in their studios and galleries for the annual Fall Art Tour. We've done this many times in the past, though it's been several years since the last time, but one of the best things about it is that the organizers always schedule the tour for the weekend closest to peak color. So, if it's a clear, sunny day, a drive through unglaciated southwest Wisconsin can be spectacularly beautiful. Well, as I said, it was a perfect day—cloudless, sunny, and cool. But sadly, there was very little fall color to be seen. There *should* have been lots of color, according to all the meteorological forecasts I read. But there were only dabs of yellow among the still mostly green trees carpeting the hills, and maybe a branch or two turning orange or pink, but those were rare sightings. My guess is that this is either going to have turned out to be a bad year for fall color or that global warming is stretching out summer season. Perhaps my apazine

cover was not as appropriate as I assumed it would be when I put it together.

Scott has been collecting well-made ceramic mugs and he found two that he liked by two different artists. We also brought home a shallow serving bowl.

Train trip to Seattle

[JG] We leave October 22 and return on November 3. We'll post a report in the next issue of *Madison Foursquare*.

New story

The world I remember from my childhood feels both smaller and bigger than the one I know as an adult. My lack of interest in the world outside my home and neighborhood made it smaller. But my childhood reality also felt bigger because it contained so many possibilities. As a child, I found it difficult to discern fantasy as distinct from reality, and rarely spent much effort doing so. Everything seemed possible. I also recognized that other kids were willing to accept wild fabrications as truth.

In 1957-1958 I attended St. Anne's Catholic School in Milwaukee as a first- and second-grader; we were all required to attend Mass each morning before class began. It was pretty boring. One morning, as the priest droned on, and I sat on a pew with my first-grade classmates, I began making complicated but discrete hand motions, all the while staring up at the window above the confessionals. Once my behavior caught the attention of the kid sitting next to me, I whispered to her that I was communicating with a 4-H spy. (A few days ago, we had discovered a blackboard in a corridor, scrawled with the 4-H logo and other cryptic phrases, and were told that only older kids were eligible to join this mysterious club. Of course, we developed many theories as to what the four 'H's stood for, all of which turned out to be wrong, but were far more interesting than the prosaic truth.) My pew-mate's eyes grew large and after Mass she reported the situation to Sister Mary Joseph, who told my parents, who proceeded to punish me for "fibbing." My folks warned me that if I didn't change my ways, they might be forced to send me to psychological counseling in order to cure me of my Very Bad Habit of Fibbing. I think for the most part, this ultimatum simply encouraged me to cover my tracks more carefully. It certainly didn't end my career of rearranging facts. Happily, the threatened psychological counselor was never deployed.

My family rented the first-floor flat in a three-story house on N. 39th Street in Milwaukee, just a few blocks north of North Avenue. Shelly Gompf lived directly across the alley behind our house. She and I were the same age and had many adventures together. Shelly impressed me early in our friendship with a demonstration of a phenomenal feat: she could eat an entire stick of butter in one sitting. I hope that I was able to show off an equally nifty power. I must have

eventually passed muster because we became best friends.

One of our most frequent games involved space travel exploits on Shelly's front porch. We piloted the porch ship to weird planets, where outer space pirates would kidnap us, tie us to the balustrades, and do horrible things to us before we were able to escape. What "horrible things," you ask? They forced us to eat **nails!**

The principal of St. Anne's called my parents one day and inquired as to why I so often arrived late to school. In fact, both Shelly and I had been reported tardy several times that week. "I don't understand," my mom no doubt replied. "I send her off on time every morning." The distance between home and St. Anne's school was just three blocks through a quiet neighborhood. Mom made sure to send me off with a bag lunch every morning with plenty of time to get to morning Mass. My explanation? I said "we take the long way."

Shelly's and my greatest adventure took place on the day we bought everything in the world we wanted. For my birthday, my grandfather had given me a shiny, brand new silver dollar. Coincidentally, Shelly had also come into wealth and we boldly plotted to disobey one of our parents' cardinal rules, that we never, never, never go to North Avenue without an adult. But the vast sum of money in our possession excited us and we were convinced that, whatever punishment we might incur for our premeditated crime, a quest to the fantastic, alluring retail palaces that lined North Avenue would be worth any disciplinary action. So, one Saturday afternoon, Shelly told her parents she was going to play at my house and I told my parents I was heading out to Shelly's porch ship. We met in the alley between our houses and, with money in our pockets and hearts pounding, headed south toward North Avenue.

Images flash in my memory from that glorious shopping expedition—shelves packed with candy bars, bubble jars and wands, crayons, cool erasers, chewing gum, magnet toys, and magic tablets. I think Shelly and I must have spent most of our time and cash in what was then called a dime store. I can no longer recreate the ecstatic conviction that I could afford it all, so I've lost many of the details from that fabulous shopping expedition. The amazing thing to me now is how **little**

I must have cared about what filled the majority of the store's shelves, not to even notice other more expensive items. But I clearly remember the moment we paid for our loot. Shelly and I dug into our pockets for our money and, on tip toes, reached up over the counter to deposit our money beside the treasures we'd found in the store.



The clerk rang up our purchases and—disaster!—it turned out we were a few cents short of the total. “Oh no!” we cried. But a customer waiting behind us chuckled and placed a nickel onto the counter besides our coins. “That should take care of it.” Yay! We were saved!

Exhilarated and profoundly happy, we left North Avenue behind and slowly began walking home. I was grinning and blowing bubbles into the air when two facts suddenly punctured my mood and consciousness. First: it had somehow gotten DARK. Another one of the pesky parental cardinal rules decreed that we must be home, inside, before it got dark. The second fact was that the taxi slowing down on the street beside us was Dad's cab.

Dad worked for the US Postal Service sorting mail on a train. He traveled through Wisconsin and Minnesota for two weeks, then stayed home for the next two weeks. (My family frequently rescheduled Christmas and other holidays to accommodate Dad's availability.) During his weeks “off,” Dad worked with my uncle Jerry as a landscaper and also took evening shifts driving a cab. In the second that I recognized Dad's grim face above the taxi's steering wheel, I realized that Mom and Dad must have discovered Shelly's and my deception and were combing the neighborhood looking for us. We were in Big Trouble.

To this day, I can still remember how much fun Shelly and I had that afternoon. I can even recapture a bit of the totally satisfied, joyful feeling that flowed through me as we walked home. On the other hand, I've completely blanked or suppressed the severe punishment that must surely have followed. So, from the point of view of my young self, I probably considered the adventure as having been worth doing.

With many decades of perspective, I must admit that eating a whole stick of butter is terribly unhealthy. I take note of the fact that good parents today rarely allow their kids to play and roam through the neighborhood unsupervised. Shelly and I were lucky that something bad hadn't happened to us while

taking the long way to school or during our buying spree on North Avenue. What if the generous stranger who helped us out at the check-out had followed us home? The consequences might have been so much worse and real than being forced to eat nails. Nevertheless I am glad to have had the freedom as a little kid to

go adventuring. Of course, decades later as I tell this story, I find it impossible not to view my child self from a parental perspective. I sympathize with my mother, who I must have exasperated with my tall-tale-telling and wandering. I cringe as I imagine my hard-working Dad suppressing panic as he roamed the neighborhood looking for his missing child. And I'm reminded of another incident that happened a couple years later.

My folks took the whole family and grandparents to the theater to see the movie, *How the West Was Won*. The movie was interrupted by an intermission, during which time the audience streamed out into the lobby to buy snacks. After Dad ordered popcorn and sodas, and we stood talking about the movie, I felt quite grown-up as I expressed my admiration for the scene in which the settlers' river raft capsized in the rapids. Then I casually mentioned how irritating I found the very rude guy sitting next to me who kept pushing his knee into my leg. Dad suddenly disappeared and when the house lights flashed and we returned to our seats, the irritating guy did not return. Years later I pieced together what Dad must have said or done to the possible pervert. We certainly didn't discuss the episode at the time.

I can't tell you how much of these stories happened exactly as I describe them here. After all, I've admitted to being a serial tall-tale-teller, or “fibber” as Mom described me. **Hope Kiefer** starred (or was victimized, in her words) in a story (“Pong!”) that I published in a fanzine, once suggested that I write two versions of the story: the unedited truth and my re-arranged version, so people could see how I'd distorted the truth. She admitted that the rearranged version was entertaining, but felt uncomfortable about the divergence between my story and her memory of the sequence of events. Not possible I told her, and would say the same thing about most of my stories. It's not like my brain keeps track of things like a criminal enterprise—keeping two sets of books, one with the real records and one with the faked ones. It's all jumbled together and, in fact, gets more jumbled the more often I tell or record the stories.