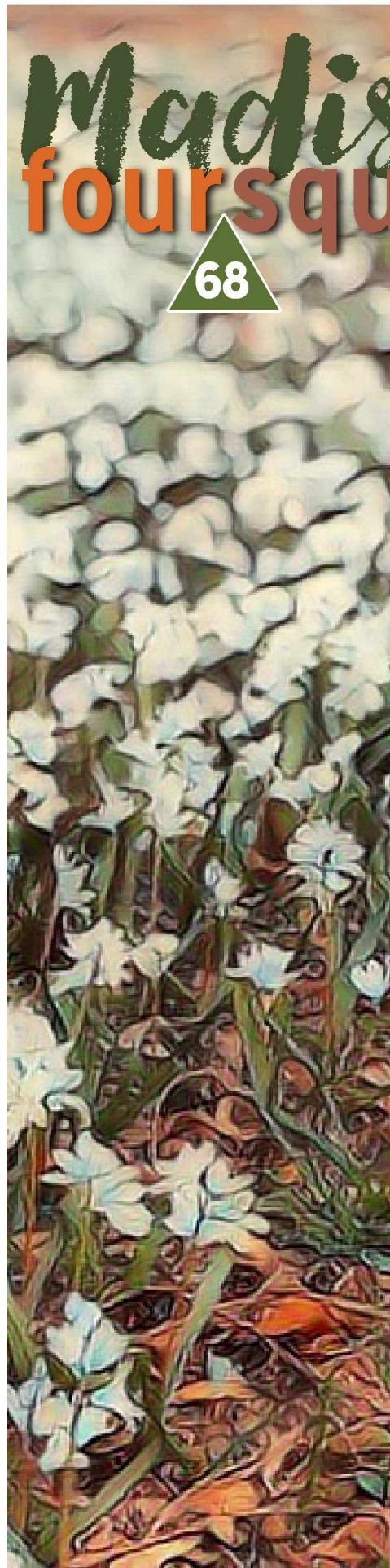


# Madison foursquare

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

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## Covers

[SC] Nice photos as usual, **Jim**. I think the black and white photo of the cats was a nice contrast with the other shots.

[JG] I liked the black and white photo too—for all the gorgeous textures of fir and fleece blanket, striped with reflected sunlight from the window. Nice.

## Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] The Baumgartner presentation at Concinnity sounded great. I would have liked to hear that.

Regarding your comment to us about cancer counseling, your comments on what sort of counseling approach you were looking for were very interesting. I have not had any cancer counseling as yet. My whole experience seemed so straightforward it almost didn't seem like cancer. I didn't have any symptoms. It was like they found some subtle imperfection that might cause problems down the road and removed it, problem solved. It's not quite that simple, just because they can't currently detect any cancer does not mean it can't come back at some point somewhere else. With my prostate gone it just doesn't feel likely, so I tend not to view it as a real threat. Consequently counseling has not been in the picture for me. But I totally agree with you that I never felt like my cancer was "unfair" or that I was somehow too special to get cancer. There were lots of carcinogens around me too, especially growing up, plus the fact that I haven't always made the wisest decisions and, as a male entering old age, I expected the probability of prostate cancer was increasing for me all the time. It would be helpful for a counselor to start by understanding the client's acceptance of reality and place the focus on moving forward.

[JG] I was intrigued by your corollary to **Steve Swartz's** essay on literary genres ("The people who speak your language are over here." (This was also the origin of SF Conventions.)...but...sometimes neighborhoods...get turned into ghettos." That sparked two thoughts in my mind:

1) ...that it's important not to make too many assumptions about the denizens of a congenial neighborhood made up of people who speak one's language. I have stumbled over this assumption many times in my life. Years ago, I was enjoying conversations with people with whom I shared a passion—at a multi-day, intensive training course on electronic graphic techniques. My instructors and fellow students worked together all day, ate our meals together, and talked graphics into the

night. (A single question like, “How would you recreate that lamp’s reflection in Photoshop?” would spin us all into a collaborative frenzy.) I loved it. But I also stepped in it several times. I forgot that people can share a perspective and interests and enthusiasm about one thing, but still be very different from one another in other ways. I made casual jokes about religion or sex or politics, thinking that of course, we’re all on the same page, but of course we weren’t. Sometimes we weren’t even in the same library. I wasn’t the only one who stepped in it, though, but we got through it by focusing on our common interest and avoiding other topics.

2) ...that the neighborhood/ghetto of SF seems to have completely lost its boundaries as the wider world became interested in it (and made films based on SF stories, and developed technologies which echo SF tropes), which in turn, means that SF conventions are no longer places where it is all that easy to find people who speak “our” language. You have to seek out sub-fandoms.

The world of SF was expanding when I first joined fandom in the 70s; many of us remember fans who felt uncomfortable when feminists insisted on playing in their sandbox. The field has kept expanding. It now includes Sad Puppies, LGBTQ activists, furies, anime fans, Afrofuturists, Proud Boys, and more, and they’re all aware that they do not share many vocabulary words with one another.



I think Jane Austen purposely created Elizabeth Bennet (of *Pride and Prejudice*) as someone who broke most of society’s rules of “proper” feminine conduct. And then Austin went on to create Fanny Price (of *Mansfield Park*) as Elizabeth’s opposite—someone who behaved strictly according to society’s dictums. Austen made Elizabeth admirable and gave her a happy ending, but then she made us dislike Fanny and gave her a sad ending. I think Austen was making a subtle and hilarious comment on the values of society’s rules for women. This is not my epiphany, though. I must credit Claudia L. Johnson and her book, *Jane Austen: Women Politics and the Novel*. Johnson spoke at an Austen festival here in Madison in 2001, and inspired me to re-read all of Austen in the months afterward. I highly recommend Johnson’s book.

### Greg Rihn

[SC] I think I need to read up on early Renaissance history. I’d never heard of Charles the Fifth and your short bio. was very interesting. I thought your

review of *Spider-Man: No Way Home* was tempting but I think I will still resist getting drawn into the Marvel multi-universe mess for the time being.

Regarding your comment to **Jim and Diane**, the City of Madison was officially supporting “low-mow” May (rather than “no-mow” May) and we went along with it. I mowed once in mid-May, then gave in and mowed again on May 31<sup>st</sup> because I couldn’t stand it one day longer. I’m trying out a suggestion from our monthly free newspaper, *Isthmus*, to raise my mower bed to above 3 inches so our “lawn” (by this I mean grass mixed with a hodge-podge of weeds) will grow in thicker and (hopefully) healthier. So far, so good.

I thought the Tenniel Humpty Dumpty illustrations were weirdly fascinating.

[JG] “Dell” is a technical geological term (miniature cliff; or, a secluded hollow or small valley usually covered with trees or turf), so it may be that the Mars rock formation named after it did not reference the iconic Wisconsin vacation destination.

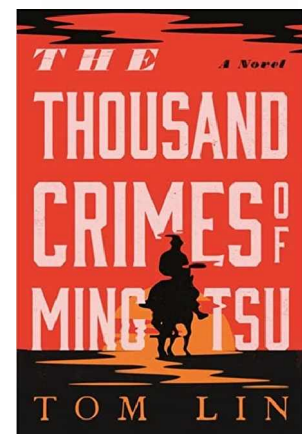
I don’t know if many people in the audience of *The Mytilenean Debate* were familiar with the historical incident; I certainly was not. And I had some difficulty keeping the allegory in mind during the play. The connections kept falling apart. Just now, I had to look up the term in Wikipedia and I still don’t remember exactly how the idea was woven into the story. Sorry.

### Marilyn Holt

[JG] How cool that Freddie Baer is doing your book cover! Did you contact her directly? Or did you put out word somewhere that you were in need of a designer. I checked out the cover on Amazon and like it. Very peaceful, but mysterious.

### Carrie Root

[SC] Book report: last month I finished a short novel (about 275 pages in hardcover) called *The Thousand Crimes of Ming Tsu*, a first novel by Tom Lin. It’s a Western, or actually more of a weird Western. It’s the late 1860’s, Ming Tsu is Chinese and grew up in California in the care of



a white man who taught him from an early age to be an assassin for hire. Ming kills many men. After his guardian dies, Ming marries a white woman but her father, a powerful railroad tycoon, objects and sends a bunch of thugs to take the daughter back and bribe a judge to send Ming out to work on a Chinese railroad gang for many years. Ming eventually gets free and, since he has kept careful track of those men who wronged him, he starts a journey back to his lost wife in California while tracking down and killing these men one by one. Along the way he travels with a magic show whose performers are actually magical in very specific ways and the story takes a turn into the weird. It's violent, but surprisingly well written. I liked it.

Jeanne and I read aloud *Booth* by Karen Joy Fowler. I liked that, too, but I will let Jeanne tell y'all about it.

Regarding your comment to us, I think you should drop *We Have Always Been Here* into an LFL without misgivings. After all, it's a jungle out there. The books are free for the taking, but customers must assume some risk.

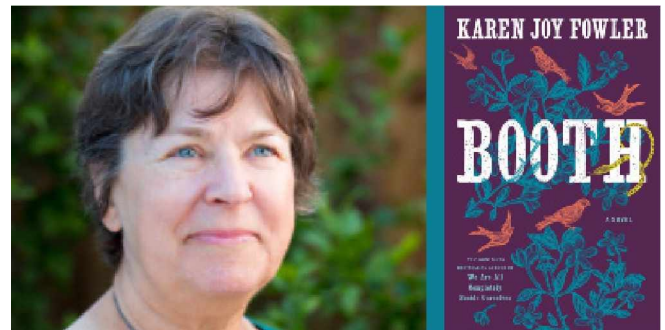
Regarding your comment to **Steve J. and Darlene**, I have all the business pages from my time as OE. I will have to send you copies in paper, however; I don't have electronic files. We will send them in the same package as *The Silver Horse* artwork.

Regarding your comment to **Steve S.**, it was brilliant that you thought to apply his Discursive vs. Dialectic thoughts to *The Actual Star*.

Loved your comment to **Cathy** and I liked your photos at the end.

[JG] I will you send the two drawings from *The Silver Horse* soon!

As Scott said, we read aloud Karen Joy Fowler's latest novel, *Booth*, to one another. (We had extra reading-aloud time this month since the novel for the book discussion—*Pet* by Akwaeke Emezi—was so short.) *Booth* was written from a perspective and with a tone that I did not expect for a story about Abraham Lincoln's assassin. But then the author is Karen Fowler, and she always confounds expectations, though I feel like I can hear her voice and recognize her quirky sense of humor all the way through the book. She writes in an author's note at the end: "I did not want to write a book about John Wilkes. This is a man who craved attention and has gotten too much of it; I didn't think he deserved mine."



The thing I thought about most as we read was how much of a historical novel, by necessity, must be imagined. **Andy Hooper** may like this book. Most of the novel was about the Booth family (thus the title), and is not centrally concerned with John Wilkes or his motivations. The main characters are the ten children and wife of the celebrated Shakespearean actor Junius Booth, about whom very little factual information can be found (I assume). I imagine Karen staring down at a line of text about Rosalie, whose name was preserved simply because she was John Wilkes Booth's sister, that listed her date of birth and date of death and perhaps invoked the term, "spinster." Nothing more. And yet, as one of the older siblings in the Booth family, Rosalie presumably had a relationship with her sisters and more famous brothers. From that very tiny seed and sparse details about the family's homes and careers, Karen created a world. I thought of how the plot of Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* grew out of the stage directions and a very few lines in *Hamlet*.

We enjoyed *Booth*. But I have to warn **Georgie** that it employs the relentlessly present tense. But I think Karen uses it appropriately. If she had used past tense, the story would have seemed aimed at the moment John Wilkes Booth Assassinated Lincoln. Instead, the reader is forced to stay in the present, when the future assassin was simply someone's irritating brother and mundane family events were more important than national politics.



I wrote my time travel story before we read the Ted Chiang short story collection. It was actually inspired by a nightmare in which I was walking on a crowded city sidewalk and saw someone struggling within a body-size, transparent plastic bag. They were in obvious distress, thought not by the bag it seemed, and it turned out that a time-travel sales person had sold them on a trip that involved sending their mind into the body of a person in the past. The experience was apparently very unpleasant.

## Andy Hooper

[SC] Once again, your Horror Host piece was a fine read. I particularly liked your covering Norman Foster's history, too.

I liked your review of our book club selection, *The Actual Star*. My own feeling was that I respected the book more than liked it. It somehow felt a bit cold and detached to me. I appreciated how she weaved the three different storylines spread across three timelines together, but only the story set in the present engaged me at an emotional level. Your insightful comments and the group discussion helped me appreciate it more, so I'm glad we read it.

Your letter column is attracting some great letters. Heath Row's suspicion that we Turbo contributors exist only in the mind of Andrew J. Hooper had me spinning in my chair for a few minutes. Hey, Andy, maybe he's right and it's all been your dream!

[JG] I have the artwork from *The Silver Horse*, but only have a single copy of the book, so you will have to find a copy elsewhere I'm afraid. I note that there is a newer version of the book (without illustrations) out there. Ah well.

Oh, please, please, please do what you can to convince Steve Bieler to join SF Without Borders. I would love to talk books with him. I met him a couple times at west coast cons and really enjoyed talking with him. Thanks for printing his letter.

For Heath Row: books read in the past by our book discussion group are listed in the SF W/o Borders Goodreads page: <https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/166941-science-fiction-without-borders> He can also ask to be added to the Google group list if he's interested. Have him contact me.

## Steve Vincent Johnson

[JG] I thought at first that you were going to explain how a rotating space ship or space station generates artificial gravity. When reading SF stories, I always get a little vague about how this works for someone climbing around inside a rotating ship and have to envision a diagram to keep it all straight. But no! you explained gravity for a rotating 2-D structure. *Artificial*

*gravity in Flatland*. Cool. But if you ever want to give us a clear diagram for how artificial gravity works inside a spinning space station with lots of interior hallways, ladders and chutes, you know, I'd appreciate having a better reference diagram than my own imagination can provide.

## Catie Pfeifer

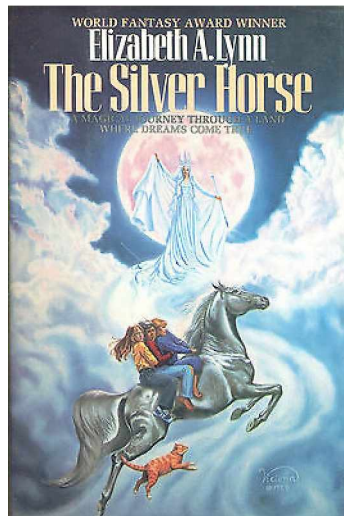
[SC] I'm a little embarrassed to admit that I have not seen so much as one episode of *The X-Files*. I don't know why not. I suppose I assumed it was kind of paranoid and hokey and I just wasn't tempted, but it was wildly popular and I still see occasional cultural references to it. How many seasons are there? I'm glad you guys are enjoying it. Maybe someday....

[JG] I'm experiencing something similar to your belated *X-Files* binge. Scott and I recently subscribed to HBOMax and have seen a couple shows that were all the rage...several years ago—like *Watchman*, *Westworld*, and *The Gilded Age*. Hints and scraps of conversation, reviews, and reactions are still available on-line, but for the most part, most people we know have moved on from those shows. I was never an *X-Files* fan. I get rather irritated when there isn't an explanation for weird phenomenon and the weird phenomenon is supposed to be entertaining in itself. You know, like *Twin Peaks* or *Lost*.

Actually, the belligerent Henry in my story, "Time Travel Week" wasn't Henry VIII. Jackie was a science geek and wanted to meet Isaac Newton, so the time travel agency sent her to Woolsthorpe, to which Newton fled in 1665 when the Great Plague swept through London. Henry was a servant in Newton's house and Jackie was disgusted that he had no interest or respect for her idol.

## Jae Leslie Adams

[SC] I notice as I travel around Madison, there is still a lot of mask wearing here. I even sometimes see people wearing masks outside walking alone down the street. Jeanne and I still unabashedly mask up when we go inside most buildings or encounter crowds. We've also noticed the profound lack of mask wearing whenever we leave town. Later in June, we will be going to Door County for the first time in a couple years and we will be curious how sensibly people will be behaving there. Our expectations are not high, but we will mask up to suit ourselves.



I like highway driving, so long as I'm not commuting every day. Jeanne and I don't always have long conversations on the road like we used to, but now we can listen to a mix of podcasts, audio books, music, sometimes Jeanne will read aloud and, of course, NPR in the afternoon.

[JG] I also think of the Midwest as a safe, or at least safer part of the world, when it comes to ecological disruption, especially drought, not to mention earthquakes and tsunamis. As an insensitive youth, I used to think it was unfair that disaster fiction in books and movies always seemed to be set on the coasts, never in the Midwest. The aliens rarely invaded Wisconsin. I'm not so irritated by that anymore.

Like you, I sometimes chant the name of an item I am looking for when I pass through a threshold. It helps a bit. But today I noticed a thing, a *good* thing. Before I had fallen asleep last night, I thought about something I needed to pick up at the grocery store. Should I write it down? No, I will remember it in the morning, but of course I did not remember it in the morning. I sat at the dining room table for ten minutes with my head in my hands trying to reconstruct my thoughts from the night before, but...nothing. So, I shrugged and we walked out of the house to go to the store to pick up the items I had recorded on a list and...bang! As I walked through the outside door, I remembered the forgotten thing! What a wonderful discovery: thresholds apparently work *both* ways—they both erase and recover!

### Pat Hario

[SC] Lily seems to have poor taste in men. This game would not interest me either, but you write about it so entertainingly I'm tempted to ask you to keep playing so you can write more about it for us.

Regarding your comments to me, I am also willing to let others look up something online faster than me, particularly Jeanne. Sometimes we will get into a little race to find something if we are taking different approaches, but mostly I lose. The only time this is a problem is if she looks something up first, then takes action before I'm ready. She'll say "Okay, I ordered it" and I'm like "What! Really?"

I remember my biggest adjustment to working on a computer at work for the first time was very early on at D.O.T. when I realized that I needed my right hand to both write and manage the mouse. To constantly be dropping my pen to move the mouse then pick up the pen again was not going to work. So I learned to be a left-handed mouse wrangler. I

do most stuff on a laptop now where I have a thumb-pad instead of a mouse, but when confronted with a mouse, I'm still tempted to switch it to my left hand.

[JG] I wonder if *Lily's Garden* is popular among the same people who like to read advise columnists like Dear Abby, Carolyn Hax, and Ask Amy. Not so much Miss Manners, I guess. I read Carolyn Hax in *The Washington Post* occasionally and her column is actually an edited version of an on-line, interactive webpage, where readers chime in with their own advice and insights. Lots of people participate. Most people like to gossip, probably for the same reason—it's easier and more fun to examine and diagnose *other people's* problems than deal with our own issues.

I invested in a pair of computer glasses once, and maybe that would help you. Their prescription is set for the distance between your eyes and a computer monitor. You can't use them for distance or extremely close work, so I had to have one pair for working on the computer and one pair of trifocals for everything else. But I frequently set the computer glasses down at work or at home and then didn't have them when I needed them. I think I finally misplaced them and decided not to invest in another pair. It was expensive to buy two pairs of glasses at a time.

Re your comment to **Elizabeth Matson** about the goals of insurance companies, employers, and employees, all at odds... Many, many years ago, my sister Julie once had an irritating interaction with an insurance company rep who wanted to sell health care insurance to Julie for her employees at Go Media. He was highlighting the ways she could spend as little money as possible, completely misunderstanding (or not believing) her insistence that she wanted to buy *good* insurance for her employees, and would he please tell her how much that would cost.

Your mention of fake ice rinks sent me to Google and down a rabbit hole. I had no idea!

My Dad sold Scott and me our last car and it turned twenty years old before we traded it in 2019. We joked about getting classic car plates and I did look up info on the program. There are a couple rules that would probably discourage you from getting classic car plates: You must own or lease at least one other vehicle for regular transportation. If jointly owned like our car was, Scott and I would have both had to own or lease another vehicle. Also, as you noted, you can't drive a collector vehicle in the month of January. I don't understand that one at all.



Batch Bakery Little Library

Scott and I generally eat between 7 and 7:30pm. Are we not really Midwesterners?

### Jeannie Bergmann

[SC] Thanks for the recommendation of *The Gone World*. I read a bit about it online and Goodreads and it looks promising. How did you come across it?

So sorry to hear about your illness. Did kidney disease end up to be the final diagnosis?

Your story *Mirror* was a hit with me. Thanks for sharing it.

[JG] Loved “Chronopatetic,” a tragic time travel story.

You might be less irritated by the prequel to *Yellowstone—1883*, a really excellent, short series on Paramount Plus. There is a bunch of horse stuff in that series which I hope is more accurate than the stuff you noticed in *Yellowstone*. I understand that there will be a second prequel, titled *1932*, with Harrison Ford and Helen Mirren, and I am really looking forward to that.

### J.J. Brutsman & Tom Havighurst

[SC] Thank you, J.J., for sharing your delightful Eastercon adventures. It may have been better for me than actually being there since there was no risk to me and you went to a lot of interesting places. I

have to give you credit for volunteering to work on the con, giving us a more inside look at the workings of the convention (and the lovely people) than I’d normally get as an attendee.

You are far more willing to risk a hangover than I am, these days, but your hangover selfie still looked nice. All your photos were great. I think you were very lucky to miss getting Covid. Your post-con touring in Ireland was my very favorite part of your travel story. Jeanne and I got to see a bit of Belfast and Northern Ireland back in 1987, so I’d like to see Dublin now, too.

You are the first person to introduce Malort to me. Never heard of it before. I Googled it after reading your piece. I’m past the point in my life where I have any interest in tasting it, but I’m impressed by its reputation. Back in the mid-70’s I was introduced to a Wisconsin liquor called Vermox. Ever heard of it? It was a vile combination of whiskey (I think) and vermouth. The bottle came with a ragweed in it. It had a reputation similar to Malort and was mainly used as a challenge to one’s willingness to drink something very bad. I introduced several friends to it. I cannot find any reference online to it these days. It must have disappeared from the market before the Internet. But I know it existed. I remember once standing on a curb puking outside the Red Room in Sturgeon Bay after taking a shot of it. Those were the days.

[JG] You convey the joy of friendships and appreciation of food and drink beautifully in both words and photos. I’m glad you had such a wonderful time in Dublin! Your selfies are so well done. Do you use a selfie stick? Or are you just that good, holding your phone at arm’s-length?

### Jim Hudson & Diane Martin

[SC] Jim, you just finished *A Desolation Called Peace*, what do you think of the series so far? I may be interested in it, but I’m looking for opinions.

Sending you best wishes on your walking ambitions for this year. I try to get out on my bike two to three times a week, skipping weekends (too much non-bike traffic on the bike paths to suit me.) I did manage a brief ride early on Memorial Day before many people got out and about. I tried to stay off the paths and on the street as much as I could and it worked out okay. I have managed longer rides earlier in the season this year than in the past

couple years, so I have ambitions this summer for rides out to new areas. Two of the things I notice as I ride around the city: one, I always wonder about the story behind Madison's hodge-podge of neighborhoods with and without sidewalks. It can be puzzling. Why do some neighborhoods have them and others don't, even when differing areas are almost right next to each other? Two, whenever I ride down a street like Woodward Drive along the northeast shoreline of Lake Mendota, or Lake Mendota Drive along the south shore I wonder why the streets are so poorly paved, uneven, missing curb and gutter and (of course) sidewalks in some of the richest lakefront property in the city. Obviously the rich residents do not want street improvements. Is it just to discourage people from driving, strolling, or biking through the neighborhood to gawk at their mansions?

[JG] I took note of Diane's favorite greenhouse, Kopke's. We want to get some colorful coleus plants for the side of the house and were disappointed to find out that our usual place to get plants—America's Best Flowers—has closed.

We also liked Forward Theater's play, *Troll Farm*. My reaction was similar to yours, that it was maybe too soon to laugh about the 2016 election.

The first play of the summer for us won't be at American Players Theater. Scott and I will go up to Door County for a week, right after the *Turbo* deadline. While we're there, we will see *The Rainmaker* at the Peninsula Players Theatre. (I wish they would settle on one spelling! "Theater" for APT, "theatre" for PPT, aargh.) I love the old movie with Kathryn Hepburn and Burt Lancaster, and I always thought it felt a bit like a play with only a few sets. Looking forward to that.

### Steve Swartz

[SC] In spite of a busy and difficult period of life, you still produced a very thoughtful and entertaining comment zine. Thank you.

Regarding your comments to me, I'm sorry for the loss of your friend, Randy. I know you told this story in context of a wider discussion we were having, but it's still sad. I hear what you are saying about wanting to feel ready for your own death when it comes. For some reason it was not until they were about to wheel me off to my first serious surgery (the prostate removal last winter) that the same thing occurred to me. I wished I had felt more

ready in case I did not make it out. I figured my chances of survival were excellent, but not absolute, and I suddenly felt I wasn't well prepared. I'm better aware now and working on it.

Jeanne and I have gotten so far out of the habit of going to cons, that I don't really think of travel in the context of cons much anymore. Your suggestion of a Con and Tour for a week in an interesting city is attractive but I'd ditch the Con part and just do the Tour activities you described with a group of like-minded friends. If the city is interesting enough, who needs a competing agenda? BTW with respect to calling me a "faan," in fact, I am a rare Convicted Faan. Serving Life, with apparently no appeal (we will have to ask **Greg** about that last part).

I'm having trouble deciding which is funnier, your Timmy the tiger story or your recounting of your Mr. Ed fan fiction.

Regarding your comment to **Pat** with respect to your hybrid's noises, the only noises I have had to get used to with our hybrid have to do with the engine power switching from electric to combustion engine. Many times I have backed the car out of the garage, climbed out to close the garage door and when I stepped in front of the car to reach for it, the car switches from electric to combustion with a sudden rev of the engine. The first couple of times I nearly shit my pants. I'm expecting it now. The other time is when I park the car someplace while the engine is in electric mode, which is silent. I jump out of the car focused on my errand but get delayed because I can't lock the car door. I eventually figure out I can't lock the car door because it won't let me because I forgot to turn the car off because the engine isn't making any noise. Maybe an EV would be easier to adjust to because it's silent all the time.

[JG] I don't know that I can answer many of your questions about Wisconsin fandom. **JJ Brutsman** or **Jim Hudson** and **Diane Martin** might be more helpful. I can tell you that WisCon appears to still be alive. At least it is promoting WisCon 46 in 2023. One or two people must have stepped up and volunteered to chair next year. I think this year's WisCon went OK, at least it appeared so from Facebook posts of some of the attendees. I don't know why the folk who run WisCon continue to run it in Madison. Maybe because the out-of-town people who run it are scattered across the county? I don't know. I can understand why they want to do it at the Concourse Hotel, though. WisCon

continues to be an intensively programmed convention and they need a lot of program rooms, plus several ballrooms for programming, plus one for the dealers. The Concourse is still the best hotel in town for this. The new group also runs SF<sup>3</sup>, but I have no idea what it does these days. I suspect they have suspended charitable donations to WisCon sister organizations for financial reasons. But I don't know if SF<sup>3</sup> oversees anything other than WisCon anymore. As for Wisconsin fandom in general, my knowledge is equally thin on the ground. Eric Larson's Teslacon (immersive Steampunk convention) is still running strong, but that's the only Wisconsin con I know about, and I only know about it because I'm Facebook friends with Eric.

I have most often thought about the link between the light of Wisconsin and the south of France in the early Fall. There is a space of just a couple days, late in the day with the sun low in the sky, when the grasses in meadows and wetlands display a subtle but wide range of colors that I sometimes admire more than the extravagant show-offy leaves of maple trees and sumac and ash. I wish that I could bring Van Gogh or one of the other great Impressionists to paint the scene for me. I can't believe that Allison would berate me for that!

### Kim & Kathi Nash

[SC] What enormous projects. While Kim is clearing out a massive supply of books, Kathi is tackling a major backyard redo. You guys should learn to relax more. Too bad about the July 4<sup>th</sup> party, but you seem to be truly busy. Good decision.

The photo on page 2 of your zine is the best cat picture I have ever seen.

[JG] I'm glad to hear that you were able to hire some guys to help you with the heavy lifting, digging and moving in your backyard! That leaves the more fun stuff for you.

While I am sad that you had to cancel your Fourth of July party this year, I understand. We accepted an invitation to go boating with my brother Steve that weekend. We'll watch fireworks from his pontoon boat.

That same brother has invited us to a tailgate party and Brewers game in September—which will be the first Brewers game...no, it will be the first pro baseball game I have ever attended. The reason for this unusual recreational choice is that Steve is going to throw out the first pitch. When he invited us, I immediately searched for and found the 2020 video of Dr. Fauchi throwing an incredibly bad opening pitch for the

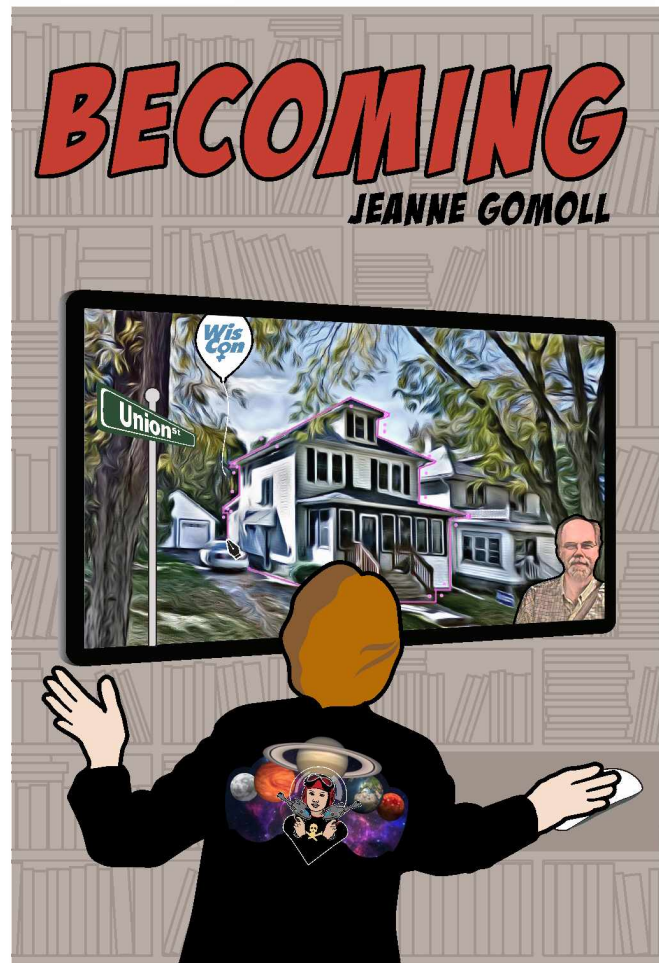
Washington Nationals. I showed it to Steve and urged him to make sure to practice his throw in order to avoid embarrassing me.

### The Book

Here's the cover art for the second part of my memoir, *Becoming*. There's no specific story that accompanies it, but its elements are major topics in the book.

Scott and I will be going up to Door County the day after the *Turbo* deadline and that got me thinking of the many other trips we made there over the years. So the story I attach here is about Rock Island. It's a chapter from *Becoming*.

Next-week's visit won't be a camping trip. We'll be staying at a nice hotel in Bailey's Harbor on the eastern side of Door County, the Lake Michigan side. But we hope to take the Washington Island Ferry and the Karfi to Rock Island in order to spend a day there.



Cover art for the second book of my memoir, *Becoming*.



## From the Book

### Rock Island, by Jeanne Gomoll

My family used to camp a lot when I was very young, but I started camping with other people when I was in college—in the early 1970s—most frequently at one of Door County’s two backpacking state parks: Rock Island State Park and Newport State Park.

The first time I camped at Newport, on the eastern side of Door County, with some college friends, we owned very little of even the most basic kinds of camping equipment. We borrowed some stuff and rented other equipment, and survived mostly because the weather stayed fine and because it is possible for any human being to survive without food or beer or soda for a few days. We got dirty and hungry but had fun splashing in the waves of our own private beach and hiking around the park.

But Rock Island State Park was my favorite place to camp. Rock Island is located just past the larger Washington Island, which dots the “i” of Door County peninsula—Wisconsin’s bony thumb that points across Lake Michigan toward the northern part of the state of Michigan. To reach Rock Island one travels northeast through Door County. The most interesting route is along the road that skims the northwest shore, along a series of scenic bluffs that overlooks Green Bay, dipping in and out between bluffs, fjords, and small towns. Door County’s major industries are cherry orchards, freshwater seafood, and tourism; its economy supports a thriving community of artists; picturesque views wait around every turn. But we usually hurried through the more heavily populated part of Door County, sometimes stopping for a fish boil or Swedish pancakes. Franchises are outlawed, (so no



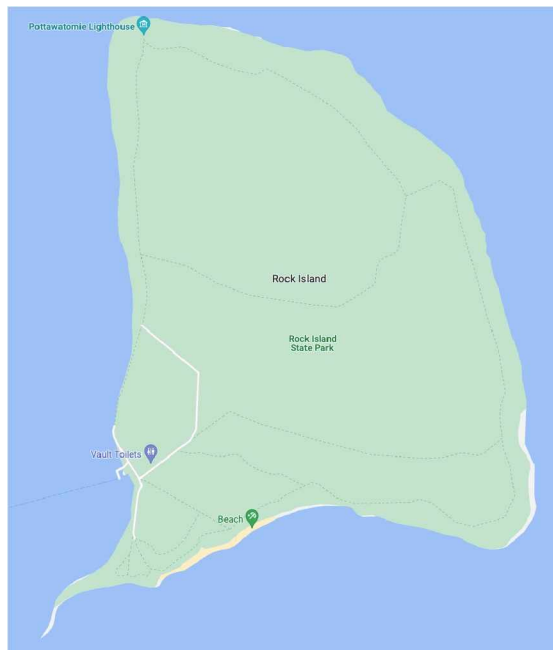
MacDonald’s, no Walmart, nor any other chain stores), but the high density of Scandinavian “kitsch” can overwhelm.

For many years after we met in 1984, Scott and I went camping on Rock Island at least once every summer. Scott and I drove onto one of the giant ferry boats leaving Northport Pier at the northernmost tip of Door County and crossed *Porte des Morts* Strait to the more rural Washington Island, where the permanent population usually outnumbered visitors. We bicycled around the island a few times, visited a lavender farm, bought fresh fish from fishermen, and almost

always stopped for a drink at our favorite coffee house (The Red Cup) or tavern (Nelson’s Hall and Bitters Club). Scott liked the beer at Nelson’s; I liked Nelson’s because their TV was never tuned to a sports ball game, but to the food channel. Locals heckled the hosts and commented on cooking techniques from their bar stools. I could imagine retiring to the island. It was a wonderful place, in spite of which, we usually took the shortest route to Jackson Harbor on the other side of the island, to catch a ride on a foot-ferry—the *Kharfi*.

We left our car in the parking lot by the dock, and slung our heavily loaded backpacks onto our shoulders, grabbed one cooler handle each and crossed the strait to Rock Island.

The State of Wisconsin owns the whole island, which is about four square miles in size, and administers it as a state park. There are about twenty-eight miles of hiking trails, but no roads. With the exception of the Park Ranger’s pickup truck, no cars are allowed on the island. There are thirty-five widely scattered campsites located as close as a mile from the dock and the only water pump. Most of the campsites are situated between



two beaches, one rocky and one sandy, that embroider a wide tongue of land that extends from the southwest corner of the island. Four sets of pit toilets service the area. In addition, there are five wilderness campsites a couple miles further along the path from the dock. Scott and I usually reserved a campsite along the furthest sand beach. In a week's time we rarely encountered more than a few other people on our hikes or on the beach. It's not one of the more popular state parks because it is too much of a hassle for most folks to carry stuff in and out. There are no garbage pickups.

I loved it. One of the most amazing things about the place was the peculiarly restful sound of the surf that can be heard all over the island, as it sucks and tumbles millions of rounded, limestone rocks, rattling the rocks against one another. These rocks are what gave the island its name. The sparkling clean water in that part of Lake Michigan was another wonderful thing. It was crystal clear; you could see the rippling pattern of sunlight upon ridges of white sand perfectly through water twelve-feet deep. And then there was the mature, dense forest, which covered most of the island and bordered the long sandy beach adjacent to our campsite with a whispering fir wall, not to mention the cliffs and the wildflowers. Our favorite campsite was located a few feet from a cliff overlooking a rocky shoreline. Sitting at our picnic bench we could watch the sun set, framed by fir trees. At night we gazed upward at the night sky blazing with stars and the Milky Way, or listened to the hypnotic sound of the surf rattling rocks. There were no roads and no bridge across to Rock Island. The absence of automobile noises was almost startling at first. After the last ferry left at 4PM and removed the day-trippers, not many people remained overnight.

Every year the same thing happened to me: Within a day or two after we arrived, I suddenly noticed that I no longer felt a weight upon my shoulders, and that before it went away, I hadn't been aware of the strain. Rock Island was the place I always imagined myself going to if something really bad happened in my life.

Over the years, I learned some valuable lessons about camping which one fails to learn if one pulls a car into one's campsite and uses the trunk as a pantry (which



Scott, backpacking at Rock Island

was my family's *modus operandi*). The first lesson was: don't pack a ten-pound textbook just in case you get some time to do some studying. Second, don't pack a whole stack of books because you don't know what you'll be in the mood to read. Third, to hell with fashion. The lessons were many, but most of them could be distilled into one meta-lesson: *pack light*. After a mile or more wearing an extremely heavy backpack, I found it easier and easier to understand the Bible's maxim, "all is vanity." Freeze-dried food; tiny, lightweight pup tents, and a Spartan approach to packing, inspired my planning for many years afterward.

And then I met Scott, whose family's idea of "camping" involved RVs, electrical outlets, and sometimes even a TV. Scott and I compromised on our respective bottom lines when it came to planning a camping trip. I gave up freeze-dried food and agreed to pack

a cooler containing steaks and beers. Scott accepted the idea that "vacation" may include some heavy lifting. I have to admit that the steaks were delicious, and I myself soon added another weighty item—air mattresses—for a little bit of padding between our sleeping bags and the ground cover. But every year we refined and updated our packing list in an attempt to eliminate some weight from our packs and make things easier. Scott finally gave up on beer, which made the cooler much lighter. Instead, we scheduled a trip to Washington Island on the ferry, mid-camping trip, to refresh the ice in our cooler and stop at a local tavern for a beer. Another year we discovered a really neat little inflatable, dish washing sink which eliminated the need to pack a cumbersome plastic tub. And we replaced our old-fashioned, bulky sleeping bags with new models that stuffed down to the size of a loaf of bread. We were delighted by the advances in camping technology which gave us wondrously light-weight, yet durable tents and sleeping bags. I especially admired collapsible tent poles with rip cords.

When we first went to Rock Island together, Scott was more than a little dubious about the value of a vacation that involved so much sweat and energy expenditures, but he grew to love the island too. It was a gorgeous place. The long curve of the white sand beach against

the backdrop of forest, wild lake and sky revitalized both of us.

I loved the millions of smooth, mostly white rocks on the beaches. I searched for rocks that felt good in my hand or that had interesting shapes or colors.

Every time Scott and I vacationed on Rock Island, I would bring one

or two of them home with me. As we packed up our campsite and prepared to leave the island, I slid the rocks into a pocket of Scott's backpack. When we got back home, I listened for Scott's cry of mock outrage, "There are ROCKS in my backpack!"

It wasn't all bliss and laughter, however. I felt relieved on nights when I didn't need to crawl out of my sleeping bag and find my way to the outhouse, especially when that outing entailed a quarter mile walk through pitch black forest paths that a flashlight barely illuminated. I tended to avoid drinking anything a few hours before zipping our tent flap closed. We craved warm showers the longer we spent on the island; our clothing smelled of campfire smoke. On hot, sunny days, the swarms of black flies chased us from the beach into the forested interior of Rock Island. One day we were hiking through a meadow near the ruins of a century-old, stone water tower and a small graveyard that marked the site of an eighteenth-



Thordarson's Rock Island boat house and Karfi foot ferry

century fishing village, when a cloud of black flies engulfed us. I looked down at my jeans and could see only flies, no blue denim at all. I could barely curb my screams as we ran frantically for the tree line, waving our arms around us, and plunged—safe at last—into the cool shade of the forest, where the

flies abandoned the chase.

Sometimes thunderstorms forced us out of our tent, but there were several places to shelter on the island. One of the cool things about Rock Island was inventor and millionaire Chester Thordarson's magnificent boat house, built from the island's limestone rock in 1926. The boathouse was large enough to accommodate two fifty-foot yachts. The Viking Hall occupied the floor above, a massive space reminiscent of Norse myths with rows of soaring windows, a gigantic fireplace big enough to roast a whole ox (we were told), and Icelandic oak furnishings. A white oak chandelier, nine feet high and six feet wide and adorned with twenty buffalo horns, hung from the thirty-five-foot-high beamed ceiling. It felt safe and fun to watch the storms from inside this massive structure. A lighthouse and several smaller structures also remained from the days when Thordarson owned Rock Island. The Park Ranger lived in one of them.



Scott and Jeanne looking toward Rock Island beach



We had perfect weather for our vacation on Rock Island in the summer of 1994. It didn't rain and the temperatures stayed warm, in the 70s and 80s, all week. The moon was full and we enjoyed spectacular moon rises most evenings. Each night, the moon rose in the midst of a grand sunset that painted the

sea's horizon a lovely pinkish orange that reflected upon Lake Michigan's placid surface. Scott and I walked out onto our "private" beach, just beyond our campsite, and watched the sunset and moon-rise each evening after dinner. Other years, we enjoyed completely moonless nights, and more stars than we'd ever seen in Madison's skies. But that year, for the first time, the bright moonlight prevented the nights from ever getting completely dark.

One evening I decided to take a quick swim and left Scott tending our roaring campfire. I shed my clothes on the beach and ran into the surf. The water was warmer than it had been in the day, almost bath water warm, and I dived in without hesitation and swam away from shore for a long distance and did a slow backstroke back to the beach. As I stood on the shore, getting my breath back and letting the breeze dry me, a sudden stillness seemed to breathe around me. The long silver beach, the dark forest, the gently lapping waves, the great sea in front of me, and the glowing moon—suddenly felt almost painfully beautiful. There was no other person in sight, no sound except the gentle surf, no reminder of human existence. I could, for a moment, believe that I was the only person alive on an uninhabited, alien planet. I raised my arms and felt, for a moment, completely alive, completely aware of the moment, completely a part of the world.



As my Mom got less tolerant of the discomforts of camping and impatient because her family continued to depend on her to cook our meals and clean up the campsite, we gradually progressed from wilderness tent camping, to trailer-tent camping with electrical hook-ups, and finally to cottage rentals. By the time I began high school, Mom and Dad reserved hotel rooms for their vacation excursions.



Obviously, this isn't me swimming nude, but it's my favorite drawing of how swimming FEELS.

Scott and I followed the same pattern after my hip replacement surgeries. It was no longer easy for me to crawl in and out of a tent, and I was unable to confidently make my way to the outhouse during the night without fear of stumbling and falling. It was unfair to ask Scott to do more of the heavy lifting—of backpacks and firewood. Scott's cousin lent us their vacation home in Egg Harbor (in southern Door County), and we usually chose one day during our visit to drive north to the tip of Door County, take the ferries, and spend a day on Rock Island. I loved seeing Thordarson's boat house heaving into view over the waves from the *Karfi's* deck, but also felt a little sad knowing that we were no longer campers, that we'd become day-trippers.

Rock Island beaches are no longer as pristine as we remember them. Lake Michigan levels fluctuate erratically because of global warming, and the sandy beaches have narrowed and at times almost disappear. The last time I tried to swim at Rock Island, a thick layer of green sludge clogged most of the shallows and the water was cloudy. It was pretty disgusting.

Scott and I continued to travel, but the last time we camped out was during our trip along the Colorado River, following it from its source in Rocky Mountain National Park to the Grand Canyon.

But I will always hold onto the memories of camping at Rock Island. I still think often of that perfect, late-night, nude swim in Lake Michigan. When I do, I feel my shoulders relax and my mind quiets.

