

Madison Foursquare

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This issue of *Madison Foursquare* is brought to you by Scott Custis and Jeanne Gomoll (layout/design and occasional contributor), who live at 2825 Union Street, Madison, WI 53704. Scott@unionstreetdesign.com
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So it's an absolutely gorgeous Sunday (4/17) as I write this, the day after an equally gorgeous Saturday. I have to be a little chagrined as just a week ago I posted on Facebook a photo of our house with about an inch of new snow on the ground with a snarky comment, "Spring in Wisconsin. Farmers Market begins next week!" Well, we went to the first Farmers Market yesterday along with about a billion other first-market-of-the-season customers. I was completely comfortable in a short sleeve shirt. The modest number of vendors who showed up are not accustomed to a crowd like this on the first weekend. It looked to me like many of them could have sold everything they had right down to their shoes and socks to a vast crowd deliriously wandering around soaking in the magnificent weather and looking for something to buy.

Life has been going on much as usual. Jeanne is chairing the Tiptree panel of judges this year, her second time. She is busy getting organized and suggested works have already begun to arrive, mostly as electronic files. I have mostly been working. Since February, we have been down to Iowa twice in two weeks. The first trip, on the weekend of March 19, was for our first family get-together since Thanksgiving. I organized it for a time when I thought the weather might be less dicey than earlier in the winter, but before a lot of kids would be on Spring break. The very next weekend we drove back down to Iowa for the funeral of my Aunt Esther, who had taken ill and died rather suddenly. She was 98. My father was the 3rd of four children, three girls and one boy. Esther was the 2nd eldest. All of them are gone now.

Kind of odd to think of my sister, my brother, myself and our first cousins as the "older generation" now. Like her siblings, Esther was hard-working and strong and I always loved her. She was always nice to us and happy to see us. It was always fun to go to Iowa City to visit Aunt Esther and her mellow husband Max. She helped us through the loss of my mom and my dad.

We've seen some good movies lately. We enjoyed *Whiskey, Tango, Foxtrot* with Tina Fey, about the experiences of an initially reluctant war correspondent in Afganistan based on a memoir. The movie had a much more substantial story than I expected. *Remember* had Christopher Plummer and Martin Landau as two ninety-year-old nursing home residents and Holocaust survivors who hatch a plan to track down and kill the Nazi camp leader who was responsible for murdering their families. With Landau in a wheelchair and Plummer experiencing severe memory lapses, together they almost make a functioning person. It was a captivating story. We were appalled that the studio wasn't distributing it more widely; Sundance was the sole Madison theater showing it, matinees only. *Eye in the Sky* had Helen Mirren as a British Colonel commanding an operation using a drone to help capture terrorists in Kenya. I can see some people hating the plot of this story because it is very manipulative, forcing the viewer into a difficult "shoot, don't shoot" situation. We both liked it because it was well written and performed and prompted an interesting discussion afterward on terrorism and what you might be willing to do to combat it.

Comments on #356/February only...

...because this month, I realized late in the game that I hadn't actually finished reading the March issue when I sat down to write out comments.

Greg Rihn

Sorry to read about the loss of your mother, Alice. Your essay about her was well, and lovingly, written.

Thank you for the review of Ian Tregillis' *The Rising*. We read the first book of his Milkweed series, *Bitter Seeds*, for our book discussion group some time ago. Jeanne and I read it aloud to each other and had fun with it. However we were about the only people in the book group who really liked it. We ended up reading the whole trilogy anyway. I have wondered from time to time what Tregillis got up to after that. He's an inventive guy and your review sounds promising.

Catie Pfeifer

RE: YCT Jeanne for issue #352, on her WisCon history piece, I picked up an Isthmus this week to find they are also celebrating their 40th year. Willy Street Co-op and Room of One's Own also started up at almost exactly this same time. WisCon, Willy St. Co-op, R000, Isthmus are all venerable institutions now. Seems it was a very special time to be in Madison around 1976.

Steven Vincent Johnson

Thanks for sharing your journey of self-discovery essay. I think many of us have wanted to "reset" our lives at one point or another, but your very literal experience (re-boot?) sounded rather scary. At least you were prompted to begin the long climb to a better place.

Ruth Nichols

Congratulations on the new job and I hope you continue to enjoy it. You earned it.

YCT me, I remember "good times" under Doyle, too. It was under Doyle that Jeanne and her co-graphic artists (all of them with 20+ years of service) at the DNR were laid off. Tossed out like old rugs. Of course things did not work out as the grand poo-bahs calling the shots expected. Instead of staying around the DNR with their skills intact and available, by using their seniority to bump into crappy phone answering jobs, the artists all decided to take the layoff and go out on their own. Jeanne has never regretted it. She loves working on her own. But I will never forget how they were treated after all those years of service. You are right, plenty of tough times happened before Walker, but things always seemed fixable somehow. Now I'm starting to think state service is too ruined to ever fully repair.

I agree that retirement by plan is preferable to being forced into it. But even when you are actively planning for it, retirement is no stroll through the flowers. Jeanne and I have attended our first brief presentations on Social Security and Medicare recently and they are both full of deadlines, options, penalties and pitfalls. Who knew it would be so complicated?

Jim Nichols

The renovation of your office building will be part of the giant “Judge Doyle Square” project? I probably should not ask you what opinion you have of the various proposals, or even if the project makes any sense to you at all, but at least your dislocation during construction sounds tolerable.

Meanwhile over at Hill Farms, construction is well under way for our new office building. Information comes to us in dribs and drabs, whatever happens to leak out as this monstrosity rises from the muck like a creature in a cheap horror movie. They are making progress on the whole site, but the top priority is to build the above-ground parking structure first so they can start using it as soon as possible and start generating some revenue. What has everyone on our office in a panic is that parking rates in the new ramp are rumored to be rising dramatically, far beyond what many people feel they can afford to pay especially since we have not had a pay raise in years and are not likely to see a raise anytime soon, if ever. The building will be home, not just to the DOT, but to eight other state agencies who are all giving up their leased spaces around town. The new building will be tucked into a corner of our lot next to the parking ramp, leaving the rest of our enormous lot available to sell or lease to private users. A funny thing has very recently emerged about the plan. Always before, or so it was implied, the new building, like the current building, would be home to the DOT headquarters including the Madison West Service Center for folks getting their licenses,

taking road tests and transacting other routine DOT business. Recently, however, it was announced there would not be any room in the new building for the Service Center after all. And the solution to that problem was to start looking around town for some space to lease and (remodel? build?) a new West Side Service Center. This completely ignores the fact that, first, the new building hasn't been built yet, why not just rework the plan to include the Service Center instead of building or remodeling another building? Second, if you have to move it, wouldn't it make sense to site it on land the state already owns (the rest of our lot) instead of leasing out more space? I thought cutting down on leased space was the point of jamming all these state agencies into one building? Since the project has no oversight at all (the Legislative committee that usually oversees building projects was not included in this project's planning) it's hard not to speculate about backroom deals being made by the Governor's office over this juicy prize site. My expectation is that news about this project will be coming out for many years.

Jim Hudson and Diane Martin

Jeanne's brother Dan and his family have gotten obsessed with *Hamilton* lately, too. Dan and his wife are also planning a trip to New York to see it. Dan's wife Kelly doesn't want to know how much Dan paid for the tickets, and Dan isn't talking. But they both seem to feel the opportunity is well worth whatever the price was. Anyway they contacted us a while back to say that a bootleg film of the show was up on *You Tube* and they all got to see it, but it had subsequently been taken down. A while later on an otherwise quiet Saturday night, Dan texted us that the bootleg tape was back up, so we got to see it, too. After listening to only the music, actually seeing the show helps to answer questions we both had about the plot and helped to clarify the action. The tape was far from perfect viewing of the show, but it was better than nothing and considering that tickets are effectively unavailable (tickets for the travelling show in Chicago this fall cost \$700-800+ per seat), we will take what we can get until such a time as we can afford to see the show ourselves.

Kim and Kathi Nash

Wow, what an amazing story about your tenant David The Cretin. There really are lots of nice, thoughtful, considerate people in the world, but a few like him can soon convince you that the world is full of assholes.

Sad news about your Uncle Carl and Mary. I hope you will be able to find them a comfortable facility.

Andy Hooper

I enjoyed your next installment on Madison history about the masons and stonecutters of Madison. It is sad that more of the old stone buildings did not survive to be enjoyed today. Just driving around Madison, one likely would not realize how much stone construction was once done here from the scattered examples that are still around.

Susan Hastings

So sorry to read about the sudden loss of your job. I hope your time on unemployment is brief and that you end up getting the last laugh by getting something better. Still, pretty hard to come back from a trip and get dinged like that.

Thanks for all the terrific photos of your time in Cuba. I would love to visit Cuba someday.

Karl Hailman

So sorry for the loss of your father.

Also tough news about the job situation for both you and Hope. Best of luck to you both while you try to figure this out.

—Scott Custis



**The only way to stop
a bad guy with a gun
is with Space Babe
with a blaster.**