

The illusion of gray created  
by an arrangement of  
alternating black and white dots



This is Grayscale #13, a zine for *Intercourse*, and an Obsessive Press Publication #220, from Jeanne Gomoll, 2825 Union Street, Madison Wisconsin 53704-5136. 608-246-8857. ArtBrau@globaldialog.com

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**T**his month for me has mostly involved checking off jobs on a list entitled "To Do before Surgery." My hip replacement is scheduled on July 28th and they say I'll be in the hospital for 3-5 days after that. Then I'll be recuperating at home, off my left leg for two weeks at least. They say I'll be good as new in about five weeks. I'm planning on holding them to it.

My sister Julie will stay with me for the first week at home, which will be great for Scott and I, because that means Scott won't have to take so much time off work. In fact I'm hoping that with crutches I'll be largely self-sufficient by the time Julie leaves. I've got a stack of books to read, a list of videos to send out for, a course of study to attempt ("The Artist's Way"), and an idea for a story to start. The freezer downstairs is full of meals and a few desserts I've made in preparation for several weeks of convalescence, and I'm continuing to check off things done from my list. It looks like everything I need to get done will be done on time. I've ordered the hospital bed to be moved into my ground floor office at home, sent for some decent nightgowns, and arranged things for my absence at work. I'm finishing off apazines for *Intercourse* and the Madison *Turbo Apa*. We even bought a new TV to set up in my office to make it easier for me to watch videos from bed. I've got lots of doctor visits scheduled this month in preparation for surgery — physical exams, procrit injections (which beef up my hemoglobin production so I don't need to donate blood in advance of surgery), and physical therapy sessions to practice with crutches and other equipment I will live with in August. Scott and I are attending several shows in July for which we originally held August tickets, and engaging in a mad whirl of social activity with friends and relatives who want to do things with us before I'm tied down at home. We went to a book discussion and sailed across Lake Monona on a pontoon boat with a newly licensed pontoon captain/friend. We drove to Milwaukee so we could meet my newly born nephew, Jacob — son of my brother Dan and sister-in-law Kelly. (He is very cute, but not so cute as his one-year-old sister who is supposedly the spitting image of me as a toddler.) We entertained visiting friends, John Bartelt and Lucy Huntzinger, and the weekend before, we went to the Art Fair on the Square, which involves a lot of walking, but I decided I did not want to miss it. So I took several high potency codeine pills, which I normally take only at night. Luckily they didn't make me sleepy as I was afraid of; I just got very very happy. How nice. In fact I got so happy, I suggested we continue touring the fair long after Scott expected me to give up. I had a great time as I always do at this lovely outdoor show, though<sup>o</sup> I paid for it physically later that day. We've been busy. I'm almost looking forward to a restful August. I'm not looking forward to the surgery, though. But as usual I seem to be coping by not thinking about it much.

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### Comments on N<sup>o</sup> 82

© Elizabeth Fox

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“There aren't enough boxes in the world,” you wrote. Well, sometimes there are, or at least there were, until my father retired from his job as packaging

engineer with Mead Containers. (This isn't really a mailing comment, I guess. But I can't resist telling this story. "Not enough boxes!" Nothing I would ever have said in my youth!)

Dad designed and sold corrugated boxes for a living. But before that, when I was very little, he worked for the post office, traveling on the mail trains, sorting mail in the cars as the train rolled down the tracks. He would be on the road for a week or more, and then home again for an equal length of time. During his time home, he landscaped people's yards with my uncle, who owned a construction company. And in the evenings, dad sometimes drove cabs. Then, around the time I was in third grade, and the post office was beginning to automate its mail sorting process, dad was laid off from the post office job. We had just moved "out to the country," i.e., the suburbs, and things got a little scary for a while. Or at least I imagine they did for my folks, although we kids didn't really understand the situation. But there were three kids and lots of bills, including the new mortgage payment and no paychecks. Dad started job hunting and went after a particular job that a friend of his told him about: packaging engineer for a little corrugated box company named Evert Containers, which later got bought out by Mead. Dad offered the president of the company a deal. Since my father didn't have any experience as a designer, he offered to work for Evert for a month without pay, and if they didn't like his work or if he didn't learn the ropes fast enough, they could let him go and not owe him a cent. I imagine the audacity of this suggestion surprised the president, and he gave Dad the job. He turned out to be a very good box designer, and was always extremely proud of his work there. (Remember when toys — especially trucks and cars with moving parts or noise-making capability — started showing up on the shelves in those boxes through which you could touch but not remove the toy? You could spin the wheels or honk the horn or whatever, but you could not take the toy out of the box, which was made tough enough so that it functioned as both the shipping container and the display case. That was my father's invention and it spread quickly through the toy industry.)

Anyway, as I said, Dad was proud of his boxes. He made costumes for us every Halloween out of boxes. One year I roamed the neighborhood as a robot in silver-painted corrugated cardboard, with lots of LED's and a drawer in the belly of my costume that I could open to receive goodies. Another year, I blasted through the neighborhood as a rocket ship.

One year, a friend and I constructed the Ultimate Attraction at St. Luke's Grade School Spring Festival. At my request, Dad delivered hundreds of huge, refrigerator-size boxes to the school cafeteria. My friend, Jeff and I taped the boxes together in a torturous, snake-like route that started in the cloakroom, ran up and down a stairway, and took a serpentine course through a long hallway. Sister Mary Rupert made us change the route so we didn't block access to the rest rooms. And in the middle of the festival, the nuns ordered us to remove the wet rags hanging down between two boxes in the darkened Cloakroom Of Horror, after a crybaby fourth grader screamed and froze in "Boogeyman's Corner." We also had to slice open the box at that point so she could be extracted, but otherwise it was a complete success and the triumph of my Eighth Grade experience.

In other ways, though, my brothers and I sometimes got tired of dad's enthusiasm for boxes. Every summer, when we went on vacation, dad would present us each with a new piece of luggage, made — of course — with authentic corrugated cardboard. There were handles designed to fold up out of the top of the boxes and each of us had a different color suitcase. But by the time I was a teenager, I longed to own a real suitcase, one that wouldn't need to be thrown away when we got back from our camping trip. Ah, but I soon learned to appreciate Dad and his boxes again. The first time I moved from one apartment to another in Madison, I called Dad and asked him for some boxes. "Sure honey," he said. "How many? What sizes? What color?" Later on, when I was moving whole HOUSEholds of goods, that color option came in handy. I packed Kitchen stuff in plain brown boxes, office stuff in white boxes, living room stuff in blue boxes, etc.... With enough boxes, one can get pretty picky about packing. Everything must be put in boxes, not bags. All boxes must be sealed on top. All boxes must be sealed with reinforced tape. Being the organized and/or anal sort (pick one), my moves have all gone pretty smoothly, but I have my father to thank for the fact that I never ran out of boxes. Or at least I've never run out yet. Dad retired one year after Scott and I bought our house in 1989. And if we move again, we'll find ourselves in the same sad situation everyone else does, begging for boxes and over-filling the ones we do have. Oh, the horror!

End of reminiscences.



I'm not a parent, nor unlikely ever to be one, but speaking as a former child, I side with those who say

that a kid's hair length or color should not be turned into a battleground between parent and child. Who gets hurt if the child picks an unusual style? If the kid is embarrassed, the kid learns a lesson and doesn't do it again. If the parent is embarrassed and lets the kid know it, the kid has gained a lever to use against the parent. Just because one has the power to do something or prevent something, doesn't mean it should be exercised at every opportunity. Unless it is exercised only when the child's safety and well-being is clearly an issue, the child will quickly become cynical about that power. Really bad things can happen then.

Perhaps some people do display the Confederate flag with no thought of its racial connotations. I'm not convinced of that, but I'll assume it for the moment. However, even so, they have to be aware that others DO regard it as a symbol laden with racist connotations. Apparently they don't care, and that's a pretty awful thing in itself.

You wondered if the fact that computer industry wealth has created comparatively little philanthropy so far, contradicts my theory of boomer change-the-world-philanthropy. Well maybe, although it seems to me there *has* been an increase in philanthropic gifts from relatively young people. However I'm inclined to believe that the phenomenon hasn't peaked yet. I think it's generally true that philanthropy doesn't happen until a person gets into their 50s and 60s. A lot of the new wealth in Silicon Valley is still pretty young, even if a lot of those millionaires are already considering retirement.

Yeah, I feel pretty comfortable about diving into work and planning. Sometimes I wait a little too long to start the planning, but once I make a list, I'm usually caught by the task and very soon my tendency to want to finish it takes over and I'm on the home stretch. This month, for instance, one way I am coping with pre-surgical anxiety has been to make lists of things that need to be done before I'm laid up, and to concentrate on checking them off, rather than on my fears.

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### © Karen Summerly

Congratulations on 40! And good luck with the reorganization at work and home. Scott and I have often talked about hiring someone to help us with the more odious cleaning tasks. It's a priority that may rise higher when and if we can better afford such help. But it would be really great to have someone come in every couple weeks and do a thorough

cleaning of the sort we usually do only sporadically and usually just before we have visitors. Scott and I are fairly neat people in that we both dislike clutter, but we both tend to procrastinate on the more time-consuming cleaning chores.

I agree with you in your doubts that the opposite of "stressed" is "relaxed" — that there is good stress and bad stress. When I am coming off a big project that takes up all my time and energy, and things have gone well, I'm more likely to feel excited and temporarily (though usually mistakenly) convinced that I am capable of more work or furious partying. That passes if I've been sleep-deprived, but for a while the energizing aspect of good work done well and proudly, keeps me spinning. On the other hand, I identify bad stress as work done well but ineffectively, or unnecessary work done grudgingly. Or something along that line.

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### © Guy Thomas

Congratulations on your election to the Board of Directors for the Center of Independent Living! But I'm sorry to hear that you are feeling uncomfortable and depressed about your sex life. Is there counseling available to you? I can hardly imagine how frustrating this must be, to have this aspect of your life affected so profoundly by physical limitations, especially since it's one that is so difficult to talk about in this society. I mean, disabled people can use public forums to point out the barriers in architectural or street design and urge changes, but the private and personal barriers are no doubt even more painful and isolating in nature. I hope it helps you to at least be able to vent here in this apa about the way your disability affects your sex life.

In the first draft of the story of my movie and bike-riding evening, I did actually mention the name of the film I saw, but I deleted it when I re-wrote. With the film title retained, the description of my ride seemed to read as if it were a reaction, or even a minor re-enactment of an element of that particular film, and I didn't want it to read that way. I mentioned that the movie was a tear-jerker because it felt significant that I was feeling emotionally open as I swung onto my bike, but I certainly wasn't thinking much about the film's story as I rode. But for you, Guy, here is the name of the movie: *Meet Joe Black*. I don't think it was a particularly good movie and I can't even remember much about it now. But I suppose it promoted the *carpe diem* impulse I felt afterwards, relishing the beauty of the night around me.

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 © Lisa Hirsch
 

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One thing I've noticed about the traditional *vs.* non-traditional usage of the word "girlfriend," is that the traditional usage almost always seems to include the word "my" preceding it, whereas the non-traditional usage is often used alone as a weird sort of honorific. Maybe that's where I make the assumption about the possessive aspect of the traditional usage.

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 © Debbie Notkin
 

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I am aghast at the plight of J in "An American Tragedy." Nevertheless, I can't say that women like her are uncommon. I've known a few of them. It's hard sometimes to understand how women like J can ignore even the possibility of their own power. It sometimes feels like they are trapped, standing in a room with their back to the a single open door, and if you could just convince them to turn around to *see* the door, they'd be able to walk through it. But they don't believe there is a door, or if there is one, that they don't believe they are capable of turning. And yet, I know we've all got our own blind spots; sometimes I wonder if there are similar doors I am stubbornly ignoring. As seems clearly the case with J, I think the power of fear is a terrible inducement for self-delusion.

High school PhysEd provided me with some difficult times, too. I once overheard a teacher call me the clumsiest kid she'd ever seen. I doubt that she knew I had was listening, but I bet I became even more clumsy after hearing it. I always hated team sports because I was sure I was considered a liability, but I did end up liking to do things on my own — swimming and biking especially — where I could move at my own pace and where, if I raced with others, they might not necessarily know there was a race going on.

For your survey question to Kerry: I think I liked the *results* more than the *doing* when I lifted weights. But I DO enjoy biking and swimming for their own sakes, and I intend to get back into regular doing of both after my operation. There is no doubt that I will go back to biking; I have missed it terribly this summer. But I've been away from swimming for a couple years, mostly because all the convenient places downtown where I used to swim during my lunch hours have closed. But there is a YMCA I can use if I drive over in the evenings, and I intend to go back to that. My biggest problem with exercising is tearing myself

away from whatever I am doing when I should start exercising. My passion for "finishing things" trips me up when I need to be able to stop for an hour or so, to exercise. (Then, of course, it's hard to leave the pool or the bike, but that's another problem.)

You say the third quarter of the century marked a time of atypically low violence in the western world. The Korean and Vietnam wars happened between 1950 and 1975, so I'm not sure if I agree with you there. But I was fascinated to find out (from an NPR radio story) about the history of gun manufacture in this country. Apparently, before the Civil War, there were very few individuals who owned guns. The specific research that uncovered this information involved searches of probate records, which showed that fewer than one man in 50 owned a gun, even in the wilderness settlements. (I may, of course, be remembering this number wrong, but I'm sure it was an amazingly tiny minority of men who owned guns.) Probate records apparently listed absolutely everything in the estate of a dead person (and in fact, the lists often included *parts of guns*, since they were so valuable), so the rarity of guns in probate records can be assumed to reflect the actual situation of ownership. Pre-Civil War guns were hand-made. Mass production started during the Civil War and the munitions industry established by that war struggled to survive afterwards by marketing its products to war veterans and pushing the idea that all American Men need to own their own guns. It's funny to think of how our culture has created a retroactive myth of American gun ownership. I think of all the movies set in America in the 1700s and early 1800s that show a gun hanging over the mantelpiece of every cabin. Anyway, I guess that's the long way of saying that I think we've played fast and loose with our stories of safety *vs.* societal violence in society in a way that reflects marketing pressures more than reality.

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 © Douglas Barbour
 

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I liked your story-in-response to Elizabeth, about how your father wouldn't let you into the house until you had your hair cut. It would be a little more difficult these days because the kid would more likely be trying to enter the house with a crew cut or more (skin cut?). A hard thing to go out and fix in a moment. Elder hippie to young skinhead: "You're not coming in the house till your hair touches your collar and you look trust-worthy again!"

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## © Jane Hawkins

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I feel really bad about how your friendship with Judy has crumbled in these past months. Do you hope to eventually salvage your friendship with Judy? Would you still be trying if it weren't for Sam? Or are you working on your friendship with a counselor "for the sake of the children"? Is Sam aware of problems between you and Judy, do you think? How is he coping with that?

Re your comment to Kimberly, I think in the long run, that it's a good thing that most people don't try to take sides in a relationship break-up of two of its members. However, I remember how hard it was for me when I broke up with someone who was an important part of the local Madison SF community. Luckily for me, he moved out of Madison for a new job within a year after we'd finally stopped speaking to one another. It takes time and space to get over a painful relationship and the frequent reminders that ones ex-lover is still around, partying and talking with your other friends, doesn't provide much of that necessary space. So I admire you very much for how you are rebuilding in spite of difficult circumstances.

You suggested that I consciously (and regularly) try to catalog my physical feelings. About the only time I do this, and not too regularly, is in Doctors' waiting rooms as I'm waiting for my appointment. I find it incredibly hard. My mind zooms around to other thoughts. I want to read desperately. The magazine on the coffee table in front of me looks fantastically interesting, or the book in my backpack calls to me, and I have to almost wrench my attention to the task at hand. I try to pay attention to my physical feelings and prepare the words I will use to describe my symptoms to the doctor. I work hard to remember everything I wanted to say and yet still my mind flees unless I force myself to do this.... ("Finishing the job" never works as a motivation in situations like this.) So you're right, I probably need to work on this a bit.

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## © Kimberly Cline

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It was wonderful to read your description of new joy. Making each other laugh every day is an essential part of Scott's and my relationship too, so I smiled when I read that part of the description of you and your new sweetie's relationship.

What a good quote from Einstein, "You cannot simultaneously prevent and prepare for war." It's not something that has been taken seriously by our country, but it certainly works when applied to personal

conflicts. Excellent advice, but often hard to take. I'm glad it worked for your first tentative meetings with Sonia.

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## Comments on N<sup>o</sup> 83

### © Arthur Hlavaty

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I tend to write "good-parts versions" when I write con reports. [See my WisCon report at the end of this issue of *Grayscale*.] Perhaps that means I'm burnt out, but I think more likely it means that I prefer to concentrate on the good parts rather than the form of a standard con report. (I got one criticism from a local fan on my report (which was published first in a local apa, complaining that I hadn't mentioned their part in the con. They suggested that I was being an elitist for spending so much time talking about panel discussions at WisCon in which many WisCon staff members had been unable to participate because of their workload. Scott suggested the possibility that some local people might think that when so few of us actually write con reports that the burden to mention everyone is considered something of a responsibility.) No one, however, has complained about the lack of how-I-got-there preamble to my WisCon reports, possibly because I live in the same city where the convention takes place.

You mentioned that you found it unlikely that prisons will rent out prisoners to private industry because other industries would tend to complain. Well, actually, I've begun to do a little research on this and prison labor is fast becoming a growth industry. I've got a large loose-leaf notebook full of examples gleaned from the Internet (and a list of names in my pocket!). You may be right that competition (not to mention Union opposition!) will eventually curtail the use of prison labor, but so far, I see a creeping acceptance of the idea. The other force encouraging this trend is taxpayers' resistance to the enormous and escalating costs of building prisons. Private prison companies have already been gratefully hired by state governments to take over the job of incarcerating prisoners, and I imagine that an industry that actually pays the state for the rights to its prisoners will be eagerly courted by legislators.

For the past couple months, I've been aware of a hazy alternate universe operating alongside my own. It may be that a story is growing in my head about this idea of a world dominated by a prisoner/slave economy. Unfortunately, the alternate world gets more and more clear, but the story is staying hazy in my head. I

don't know if I'm actually going to make something of it.

I haven't thought of calling myself a cyborg yet, but I have told my nieces and nephews that I will beep when I back up after surgery. They seem delighted.

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© Donya Hazard White

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What is "YOT"? You'd of thought? Your other tot? I can't remember seeing that one before.

EXCELLENT response to folks who ask why you didn't change your name when you married! "We both decided to keep our original surnames." I like it because it assumes the person who asked is wondering about your partner's name, too, when of course they weren't at all, but now they are since you phrased it that way. Polite mindblowing is what that is.

May's rheumatologist visit was reassuring. I do not have rheumatoid arthritis, just the osteo variety, which is not necessarily systemic. A good thing.

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© Lisa Hirsch

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Congratulations to Donna on her graduation! Interesting comment on graduation "uniforms" derived from Parisian University styles in the 1200s. That started me thinking about the former nun uniform which also derived from medieval costumes.

Janet and Matt's wedding ceremony sounds lovely. What a wonderful thing to have a good friend officiate. One of the central reasons Scott and I have never married was that we don't have enough respect in the institutions that usually sponsor such ceremonies. It sounds like Janet and Matt effectively created their own institution variant with its own ceremony. I liked the sound of your part in the ceremony.

It's too bad your mom and you didn't work out all the time as ideal travel companions. It sounds like you both have a lot of expectations of the other that are unlikely to be fulfilled. Still, it sounds like the experience had more positives than negatives. I sure envied you your trip.

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© Vijay Bowen

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Welcome, Vijay! I experienced a moment of uncertainty as to which apa I was reading, but it's good to see you here.

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© Lise Eisenberg

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I'm sorry to see you leave *Intercourse*, Lise. I wish you felt comfortable talking about your fears and hopes here in the apa, but baring that, I hope that you eventually find some way to express those thoughts with another person or persons. Your brief description of a marriage "in the only way that counts, which isn't legal or religious (two systems I view with disappointment and loathing, respectively), but a living, presumably permanent bond between two (or more?) people" sounds like it is very close to my own definition of a true marriage. I could, at least, assure you that such a thing is possible and urge you not to give up on the possibility. In any case, I hope that your recent discovery that you can change your working life in a significant way may convince you to think about overhauling your personal life as well, in a way that might lead to more happiness.

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© D. Potter

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“There are never enough boxes.” Ho ho. See comment, above, to Elizabeth.

I remember the ice in Portland a few years ago. That was the winter that Portland hosted Potlatch, right? It was also the winter we had some of the coldest weather, ever, in the Midwest. Nighttime temps plunged way below -40° and the chill factors were obscene. A few of us tossed hot coffee into the super cold air. An experiment, you know. The coffee returned to earth in the form of ice crystals. So you can imagine how sympathetic we were when we flew into the Portland airport and discovered the natives bemoaning their 20° weather. He he; we skipped surreptitiously through the balmy air. We brought along our light Fall jackets and cluck-clucked at the silliness of the home and shop-owners who had failed to sweep the light dusting of snow from their sidewalks and had allowed the thin layer of precipitation to partially melt and then freeze again into treacherous surfaces. We watched traffic slip and slide down the streets in amazement, forgetting for a while that every American city does not own a fleet of plows to push snow off the roads and deposit layers of sand on slippery surfaces.

But the height of the weekend's experience for me happened on Sunday morning while Scott and I dressed. I switched on the TV to catch the news and the top Portland story of the day was the cold. "Hoot," I said. "It's cold, he says." Then I noticed the reporter

was standing beside a river covered with a thin layer of ice. "Look!" screeched the reporter. "The river is frozen over!! The water is frozen! Watch this," he said and then he lobbed a small rock onto the ice. The rock bounced and skidded across the surface. "That rock didn't even break the ice!" Then his attitude changed and he gave his audience a serious, paternal glare. "Don't try walking onto the ice, though," he warned. "You could die!" At this point, Scott and I were both laughing uncontrollably. It took us a little longer to get dressed than we expected.

Don't look now but it seems to me the crew cuts of the 50s and early 60s is back again. My nephew demands a haircut whenever his hair gets longer than a half inch.

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### © Karen Summerly

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There was some interesting stuff for me in your account of how you and Donna are dealing with Uncle Roy's move to a nursing home. As is true, I'm sure, of many people in this area, the conflicts and choices of your experience foreshadow ones I expect to have eventually when my parents die. It's a hard thing to think about, especially worries about how to deal with disparity between a loved one's needs and what I am able to do for them. It seems to me that the only thing you can say to the scolding, elderly neighbor lady is to thank her for what she's done for your Uncle Roy. Her reaction sounds a little like my mother who was angry for years at her brother and sisters for having left Wisconsin for jobs in other states. (They all moved away to various west coast cities when they were in their mid-twenties, but visited their parents often. Grandma and Grandpa visited their faraway children frequently, too. I suspect that the only person who thought the situation was shameful was my mother.) She viewed her siblings as traitors to the family and leavened the care she gave to her aging parents with anger at her brother and sisters for having "forced" this role upon her, even though neither my grandmother nor grandfather had long periods of dependency before their deaths. My grandmother died suddenly in the hospital and my grandfather convalesced at home after a series of heart attacks for several months before his death. My aunts and uncle all flew to Wisconsin and took turns spending a month at a time with my grandfather during that last year of his life. This forced my mother to reconsider her anger at them, but nonetheless she was never totally able to wipe out the feelings she had nurtured toward her siblings. On top of that, the adult relation-

ship she developed with her parents seemed always colored with that anger, and I suspect would have been a lot more fulfilling to her if she had enjoyed that relationship for itself, without imagining herself a martyr for having been the only child of the family to remain in Wisconsin. Anyway, what I'm trying to say about that angry neighbor lady is that her feelings probably have more to do with herself than you and your family.

You raise some interesting questions about the history of PhysEd in US schools. I'd really like to find out whether the purpose was originally aimed at making strong soldiers and laborers. It seems reasonable. I understand that much of the US grade school curriculum has been influenced by the needs of the industries that expected to hire the school graduates.

Sorry for having gotten Kimberly's comment mixed into a mailing comment to you. Once again, I am going to beg off defining my idea of romance here. I will, I promise, get to it. Right off the bat, I can tell you it includes sexual fidelity.

You're absolutely right. Daily letter-writing has come back in a BIG way, in the form of email.

The renovation work on my office and next door bathroom went beautifully and smoothly. Everything got done on time and slightly under budget, amazingly. Our contractor, Jen Voycheck, has become a friend and left flowers, a candle and basket of soaps on the bathroom counter when she finished. The colors I chose worked perfectly with the new rug and curtains. The new windows work well and last week at Madison's Art Fair on the Square, I bought a really beautiful stained glass window which I will hang over the smaller, uncurtained window. It's an oval piece, made up of clear, textured pieces of glass cut into vaguely art nouveau, abstract shapes. Anyway I love being in my office more than ever, and a good thing it is, since I will be spending a lot of time in August in this space. We're moving a couple bookshelves and a table out of the room to make space for a hospital bed because I won't be able to climb the steps up to our bedroom for a couple weeks. It'll be great. The new colors are soothing. The view out the new windows is framed with lilac bushes and lots of greenery, and the new curtains will give me privacy when I need it. Plus, the renovated bathroom will be very convenient.

I think I would have had to be a different kind of person to give doctors a more "forceful" demonstration of the pain I was feeling. I was trying to be precise but emotionally guarded (more to protect myself than them) when I described my pain. I would have appre-

ciated it if they had simply believed me when I used the phrases, “constant pain,” and “impossible to sleep through the night because of the pain.” Later, my doctor admitted that these are “trigger” phrases, but that frankly he had dismissed this information because I was far too calm and smiled too much during my interview with him. \*sigh\*

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© Art Widner

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I enjoyed the story of your trip and serendipitous meeting with your neice.

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© Debbie Notkin and Elise Matthesen

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**Y**ou are pretty fucking cool, indeed. The email exchange was exhausting just to read. It must have been hell to live through. But I’m glad you did and that you worked things out. It may say bad things about me that I might not have gone through all the work you two went through to heal things between myself and a good friend. I may have to think about the implications of that. And I should also own up to the fact that I might not have the qualifications to be a relationship techie....

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© Douglas Barbour

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**A**ctually, I can’t fault the doctors for not reading my body language. I think my body language is what confused the whole communication process between me and him. Being able to ignore one’s body signals makes it easier to appear well, and even though I was *saying* that I was in constant pain, the fact that I was acting calm and even cracking jokes with the staff probably indicated a certain lack of urgency to the doctor.

Some people certainly do think charm can be learned. My mom sent me to “Charm School” (not Likeability School) when I was in my early teens. A large department store offered the course — six Saturday morning classes in downtown Milwaukee. I took the bus from the suburbs into Milwaukee each Saturday morning, but after the first class where I was issued a box of make-up and learned how to sit down correctly like a young lady (touch the edge of the chair with the back of ones legs, and then sinking smoothly and gracefully into the seat), I skipped out of class. I spent the remaining five Saturday mornings in the Milwaukee Public Library and Schwartz’s Book Store on Wisconsin Avenue. Once I had a great conversation about Robert Heinlein with a sailor and fellow SF

fan. Years later I realized that he was trying to pick me up. Obviously, the missed charm school classes severely penalized my social skills. Nevertheless, I still had to attend the Charm School graduation ceremony, and I was scared that the teacher or one of the other girls would spill the beans to my parents and tell them I hadn’t actually attended the class. But I lucked out. The teacher didn’t care as long as she got paid and the other students didn’t seem to notice. I followed their lead across the runway, modeling my new dress, and my mom expressed dubious pride, though afterward she sometimes began sentences with the phrase, “I would think you would have learned in Charm School that...”

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© Kerry Ellis

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**Y**ou did a great job with the Green Room, Kerry! I hope you managed to enjoy your first WisCon in spite of all the work you did there. With respect to your comment about sometimes being asked to do more work than you feel comfortable about doing, I hope we didn’t ask too much of you at your first WisCon.

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**I**’m sorry you lost Klipper. He was a beautiful dog and a wonderful friend to you. And I’m really sorry you won’t be able to get another service dog. I didn’t realize that the owner had to put in so much work in such a dog’s training, though I guess it’s a reasonable thing.

I hope you find a find a house for the three of you soon.

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**I**giggled at your description of your brand of “bad concentration.” If that’s a premenopausal symptom, I’ve been occasionally premenopausal for most of my life. Once in a while, I straighten up in that sort of mood, jumping from one task to another like some sort of kinesthetic stream of conscious. It feels satisfying if I continue until I’ve at last come back to and complete the first task that started the chain.

That’s it for now. Cross your fingers for me, I should be up and around and feeling great a couple weeks after you read this zine.

The following WisCon report was published first in *Turbo-Charged Party Animal* Apa and on an electronic list.



## © WisCon 23...

...was wonderful. I think the thing that I am most enthusiastic about this year's convention is the discussions and programming catalyzed by the People of Color group in the Programming committee. At times I was reminded of the kind of activism that happened during the very early days of WisCon.

We got a bit of criticism during those first few WisCons for being un-fannish, too political, even too perverted. We persisted and surprised everyone, ourselves included, by how energized our audiences became when the discussion was opened to feminism. And through experimentation and the good fortune of doing WisCon with a committee supportive of feminist ideals, we ended up with a remarkable institution. WisCon is now a convention of international fame. We are the only feminist convention in the world and have grown far more prestigious than might be expected of a smallish regional convention. If it weren't for WisCon, I rather doubt that the Tiptree Award would exist at all, and I suspect that the fiction written might not include as much radical feminist content as it does today. It's been an exciting evolution from those early days of excited, hazy plans to the present.

I am hoping that WisCon fosters a similar horizon-opening process among the community of people interested in enlarging the scope of both convention programming and the literature of SF/F to include more diversity. Feminists of the 70s — both in the SF world and elsewhere — worked first to establish safe spaces, to discuss their common problems, brainstorm possible solutions, and just to get comfortable with one another, and gather strength. It may be that people of color, so long and so much under-represented in the world of SF/F, will also need similar time and space to consider options, to gather strength, and brainstorm. It seems to me that that's one of the important things that got started this year at WisCon 23. The two round-table lunch-forums, ("Welcoming People of Color into the Science Fiction World," and "People of Color Focus Group") catalyzed some amazing discussions and revealed a huge range of topics that might (I hope) eventually turn into thought-provoking WisCon programs. But we've just begun. Debbie Notkin and Nalo Hopkinson devoted a lot of time and energy searching out people who were both likely WisCon attendees, and activists of color, and urging them to come to Madison this year. Debbie, Nalo, Victor Raymond, Ian Hagemann, Mary Ann Mohanraj, and Celia Tan, developed some imaginative

and exciting programs to instigate discussion among all the attendees of WisCon 23. Many of the new folks may return to WisCon and many of them will make suggestions for changes and offer to volunteer. It's crucial, I think, that we follow up on this first baby step, that we listen to the suggestions, and that we work hard to figure out a way to communicate with these new folks and enable them to participate in the planning process. I know that the People of Color focus group developed a list of suggestions for WisCon next year and I'm looking forward to hearing more of it.

Speaking of tapping into out-of-town energy sources, what a great job Amy Hanson, Laurie Marks and Donna Simone did on the Writers Workshop and Writers' Respite programming! A few years ago, while we were planning WisCon 20, Steve Swartz received an email from someone asking if we would do a writers' workshop at WisCon. It seemed like a good idea, but the programming juggernaut got a little complicated that year, and the idea got away from us. I suspect that the same person contacted us again the next year, while we were planning WisCon 21. That year I chaired the programming department and I got a note from a woman from the Northwest named Amy Axt Hanson. Amy had been getting frustrated with writers groups she had belonged to in which some of the main criticisms leveled at her work was how much it would benefit from more ACTION. You know, starships, laser battles and \*BOOMS\*. Amy yearned for a more supportive atmosphere in which to discuss her writing, among people who liked the kind of SF that she preferred. It sure sounded like a WisCon idea to me, but I had no illusions that I could organize a writers' workshop myself, having never even been involved with one myself. So, I wrote back to Amy and asked her if she would like to organize it. She accepted my offer, and with the help of Laurie Marks, set it up fairly quickly. It was already pretty late in the planning year, but attending authors were very generous and many volunteered their time to read manuscripts and run individual sessions. Amy planned for five writers per pro, and despite the fact that she began advertising the workshop rather late in the planning year, there was an immediate and enthusiastic show of interest. I think about 25 people sent manuscripts to Amy. In fact the large number of people involved generated scheduling programming headaches for me, because so many of the writers were also program participants. (It's difficult enough to make sure that panelists are not cross-programmed against one another. Much as people would like us to do it we can't

make sure that attendees' favorite panels are not programmed against one another, but that's basically what we had to do with the writers workshop "audience.") People really liked the workshops and this year Amy started working on it earlier and we moved the whole workshop to Friday morning, scheduling it to end with a luncheon for all participants before the regular tracks of WisCon programming had begun. In spite of the fact that this move required participants to pay for an extra night at the hotel and increased other expenses, the workshops filled up all our available small and medium sized program rooms on Friday. (There were about 80 people who sent in manuscripts, plus 8 pros who ran the 8 sessions.) Amy asked me this year why I'd offered an "unknown" like her the responsibility of doing the workshop. Little did she know, that's how WisCon works.

The workshop this year was made even more successful by its companion programs, designed by Laurie Marks, which was called the Writers Respite. Smallish discussion groups were held in the 6th floor writer's lounge. Attendance was limited to the first 20 people who signed up for each of the individual sessions concerned with the stresses and joys of a writer's day-to-day business. I am wondering now if we will eventually see published writers crediting their experiences at the WisCon workshops and respite sessions with helping them achieve their goal.... Wouldn't that be cool? Amy lives in Tacoma, Washington; Laurie lives in Boston; and Donna Simone — whose troubleshooting, and non-stop, juggernaut style of organization energized both Amy's and Laurie's programs — hails from Cleveland, Ohio.

Our Green Room was beautifully hosted by first-time WisCon attendee Kerry Ellis from North Hollywood, California, and Terry Garey of Minneapolis. X-Madisonian and new mom, Rebecca Holden of Minneapolis wasn't able to attend WisCon this year, but organized our academic programs anyway. Scott depended upon out-of-towners, Victor Raymond and Jane Hawkins to run security with him. Lisa Freitag, of Minneapolis, functions as our Doctor-on-Call every year, and Elizabeth Bendtsen of Minneapolis resuscitated our film program. Jim Hudson and Diane Martin depend on a crew of out-of-towners to help them staff the Art Show. X-Madisonians Julie Humphries and Michael Rawdon's contributions were crucial. Michael took care of our web page; Julie ran the Tiptree bake sale. And let's not forget the amazing Ellen Klages, who entertains us at the annual WisCon Tiptree auctions. Ellen, of course lives in San Francisco. It's hard to imagine WisCon managing to exist without the

significant assistance we get from out-of-towners who consider WisCon an important part of their lives.

And one more comment about out-of-town volunteers, before I drop the subject. We couldn't have managed without Debbie Notkin (Berkeley, CA) and Jane Hawkins (Seattle, WA) working on programming. I was delighted to realize that my role this year really was to help Debbie run programming. Jane spent quite a few sleepless nights working on the computer programming that made the Unsurpassed Perfectly Organized Girl-Next-Door-to-the-Mother-of-All-Programs Pocket Program possible once more (not to mention the name tents with the panelist information on the back and the nametag schedules and the room signs). I just laid that stuff out; that's the easy part, believe me. All three of us discovered, however, that there are a few glitches that need to be expected when one is trying to run programming from three different cities. Happily we ironed most of them out. The only noticeable evidence of slippage were a few typos in the pocket program. Debbie ran Program Ops out of the Green Room and kept the program running smoothly.

In general I love it when I feel like WisCon challenges assumptions and status quo. I'm glad we're getting beyond the "101 level" program on the subject of the role of People of Color in SF. That panel, "Racism and SF" that we scheduled several times in past years, reminds me a lot of that one, single "Women and SF" panel that used to stand alone for all feminist discussion in convention program schedules long ago. I'm also happy about what's happened to our discussions of class here at WisCon. Last year Barb Jensen's panel was explosive. One of the best of this year's panels was part 2 of that same panel, "Right, You're 'Middle Class.' Now What Does That Mean?" The Capital ballrooms may have been a little chilly for most of the weekend, but they heated up Sunday afternoon for that panel with Barb, Eleanor Arnason, Suzy McKee Charnas, Victor Raymond, Amy Thomson, and Terri Windling. Barb firmly grounded the discussion this year in real life anecdotes from panelists concerning their backgrounds, and how their perceived class affects their current sense of belonging and alienation. Barb and Terri discovered the similarity of their backgrounds in lower class America. They explored some of their alienated feelings on returning to the communities of their childhood. Barb was moving in her horrified discovery that her own success made her family members sometimes seem ashamed of themselves. Terri talked about having to learn a new language in order to fit into a higher

economic class, but nevertheless feeling as if she is an outsider now wherever she goes. Amy Thomson, on the other hand, declared herself a representative of upper class America, and demonstrated that there is enough pain for everyone when it comes to dealing with the assumptions, institutions and language barriers between classes that aren't really supposed to exist in this country. Nothing exacerbates pain better than denying its very existence. Eleanor argued that many so called middle class people are allowing themselves to be fooled or even blinded by the economic elite who benefit by the false hopes of the majority of people that they might eventually join the upper class. Victor and Suzy joined this discussion with some heartfelt and important contributions of their own, and all in all, this panel went deeper than any other panel on this subject I've ever seen has gone, and suggests the possibility for a whole lot more discussion. It was a panel that few of us in the audience quite wanted to end, but it was clear that the panelists themselves were completely rung out emotionally.

Another panel that I liked quite a lot was one that I moderated, "The Importance of Science Fiction and Fantasy to Radical Communities," with fellow panelists Ian Hagemann, Judith Little, Diantha Sprouse and Donna Simone. We covered a lot of material in a surprisingly organized fashion and the 75-minute period zoomed past.

Probably the thing I liked least about this year's WisCon was an argument that exploded within the WisCon committee only a few days before the convention started. In the hours after the meeting, I found myself speechless with anger, and for a while was not really looking forward to the convention. The concom argument had to do with one of the focus groups planned for People of Color, which was envisioned to be a completely safe space that could be used to brainstorm strategies for People of Color. The plan was to publicly schedule it as open to People of Color only, and in fact it was already listed that way in the published pocket program and on our web site. I had brought the plan to a concom meeting much earlier in the year to sound out reactions on the concom, but apparently the people that thought it was a good idea had no objections and the people who later objected didn't really hear me at the time. Debbie later said she had been surprised that objections had not been raised at an earlier meeting, but after my report was received with no comment, she began to expect some arguments at the convention. I expected that too. I remembered the women-only rooms at earlier WisCons

and the Westercon where the first Room of One's Own (at an SF con) was invented. I remembered lots of guys being very angry and upset that there was a room from which they were barred. I figured we were going to have a similar learning experience at WisCon 23. Instead, Ben Schilling got pretty angry at the last WisCon meeting (four days before the convention began), and argued that a segregated program was "both illegal and immoral." He threatened to walk off the committee if we kept the program. Dick Russell supported Ben's reasoning. Most of the other people in the room scrambled to find a compromise, which eventually materialized as a plan to ink out the references to "People of Color only" in the pocket program book. Wednesday night a few of us paged through the pocket program books and marked out the two references with black felt tips. I was upset that my earlier report had been ignored and that we were having this discussion in the committee so late. I was also angry that there was so much of a rush to appease the potential illegality of the exclusive focus group and no discussion at all about Ben's outrageous use of the word, "immoral." As it turned out, the Equal Opportunities Office in Madison did think we were treading on illegal grounds, and we did decide to obliterate the word, "only." But we did not eliminate the program and I hope that its attendees found it useful. I am not aware of anyone who did not self-identify as a person of color attended the focus group.

As it turned out, the break-out of controversy fed some interesting discussions both at the convention and afterward (on email). I don't believe that Ben participated in any of those discussions, however. Like the panel on class, I think there's a lot of buried anger and pain around this subject; there's a lot to explore. I hope that WisCon planners continue to make space for that exploration.

The thing that I had the most fun doing was Opening Ceremonies with Scott. A few weeks after the 1998 convention, after WisCon 22, Scott and I sat around our living room laughing hysterically over some of the responses to the surveys we include in registration packets and are filled out by attendees. As we read aloud some of our favorite responses to one another ("Kleenex could be softer," "The consuite needs more entrees," "I didn't volunteer because I'm selfish and rich."), we began to think about sharing the fun with everyone at the next year's opening ceremonies. Many of the comments worked really well read as responses to other comments, and so Scott and I developed a script made up of back-and-forth dialog. Morning people's comments contrasted

against those written by Night people. Complimentary comments about the hotel were set against complaints about the elevators. Some people liked the programs that others hated.

*J: More panels on feminist spirituality*

*S: Get rid of that flaky "here's my goddess theory" thing*

Anyway, it was lots of fun to do. We got many laughs. And we were joined on stage by still MORE out-of-towners. Portland Oregon fan, David Levine demonstrated his acting skills in the recitation of two very funny poems to great acclaim. And Ellen Klages told a wonderful and funny story about how David Brin inadvertently convinced Connie Willis to join the Secret Feminist Cabal. Ellen also opened the weekend's campaign to get people to vote for the talented Freddie Baer on the Hugo ballot (best fannish artist). Scott and I are pretty pleased by how Opening Ceremonies worked out, but it wouldn't have felt so much of a whole as it did, nor nearly as sophisticated without the jazz piano playing by Julie Zachman.

I haven't tried to do a chronological description of the convention and so I've left a lot out. I left out Mary Doria Russell's and Terri Windling's GoH speeches which were very different and both very effective. Terri Windling's was a marvelous, in-depth

exploration of fantasy themes involving women and women's dreams. Mary Doria Russell's was an out-and-out performance, almost a stand-up comedy act based on personal biography. But I think it drew wild enthusiasm from us not so much because it was such an entertaining speech, but rather because of the heartfelt way in which she credited WisCon and the Tiptree Award for her success. It was a good thing to hear.

I have also left out the partying, and the conversations I had with friends who are, ironically, the heart and soul of any convention for me, but at the same time — the hardest thing to include in a con report. But I was very glad to be able to spend time with Debbie Notkin, Jane Hawkins, John Berry, Eileen Gunn, Steve Swartz, Karen Joy Fowler, Ellen Klages, Barb Jensen, Spike Parsons, and many others which I will be embarrassed to realize I should have listed here when I read this published report later. I left out the hugely successful Tiptree auction too. (We raised around \$7,000 this year from the auction, art room sales, t-shirts, Gaudy party, bake sale, and anthology sales.) I also left out the magical surprise of hearing Ellen Klages read some of her "child" stories. (Don't miss the opportunity to hear Ellen read these if you ever get the chance!)

WisCon 23 was a wonderful con.