

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

G R A Y S C A L E



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WisCon happened on the weekend of May 23-26. It turned out I was absolutely useless through most of the following week and weekend, which makes me question the medical theory that one cannot "make up" lost sleep over a long period of time. For about 2 or 3 weeks before the convention I worked at my computer till about 2:30 or 3 am, which left me 3-4 hours of sleep a night. I did OK; I didn't get sick. But it feels to me as if I was making up some of that sleep for about a week after the con with 9-10 hours of sleep every night. And then suddenly it was Tuesday June 3, and I realized that the *Intercourse* deadline was staring me down and here I am again rushing to get a zine done at the last possible moment. *sigh* I'm really not this kind of apa contributor, she protests.

So, I've managed to do some mailing comments on the last issue, but I haven't gone back yet, to the two issues before that which I read but never commented upon. I still hope to go back and do those comments, not the least because many of you said some really interesting things, many of them directly to me, to which I'd still like to reply. But if I'm not able to catch up by the next issue, I may simply consider this zine a new start with its current mailing comments. Let me apologize in advance for the typos and first draft writing.

Before getting to the mailing comments however, I thought I'd say a few things about WisCon 21. Towards the end of the con, a few moments after Ellen Klages allowed herself to be shaved bald for the benefit of the Tiptree Award fund, one of our Guests of Honor, Melissa Scott, grinned and said, "You know, I used to think that everyone was exaggerating when they talked about WisCon." She promises that she and Lisa will come back next year. Last year I recall phrases like "the best convention ever!" and "let's do it again!" ... This year I think I'll remember Melissa's incredulous murmur, "I thought they were exaggerating...!"

WisCon has carved itself a niche as the world's premiere feminist SF convention. Well, to be honest, we've always said that, but now the title has become more meaningful in that WisCon seems more like a convention by and for the feminist SF community, whereas in the past, it has been a convention run by the Madison SF community with a focus on feminist SF. This is a very good thing in many ways and risky in other ways. It is good because parts of the Madison SF community are less interested in running a feminist oriented convention than it used to be. The local newspaper, *Isthmus*, refers to us as "venerable" and implies that we've always been here and always will, but really, that's not so. The number of Madison people who work on the convention has steadily decreased throughout the last 5 or 6 years; we absolutely depend upon interest and assistance from outside the local group. It's a good thing that the feminist SF community is recognizing that we need to have an annual gathering and that we all need to pitch in if it is going to continue to happen. It's a good thing too, that this change in WisCon's organization coincides so neatly with the consolidation of the feminist SF community around the Tiptree Award. Self-awareness is being encouraged from several angles. It is also good in that a greater pool of interest and involvement from outside Madison will tend to keep WisCon's program on the cutting edge of feminist and gender politics. On the other hand, this identity shift is risky in that as the local group recognizes that they do not "own" the convention in the same way that they used to, the central

WisCon
♀

organization of WisCon may tend to unravel.

Nevertheless, this year's WisCon was a happy experiment in enlarging the breadth of our con to include more out-of-towners. Of course, it wouldn't have been possible without email. In my own department—Programming—I shared the chair position with Debbie Notkin (San Francisco) who was a delightful, energizing and utterly dependable co-chair. We also had Laurie Marks (Boston) on our committee, and despite the fact that for most of the year Laurie didn't expect that she'd be able to afford to travel to the convention, she did a lot of work developing panel ideas and helping to write panel descriptions. At the last moment she received a surprise present from some of her friends—plane fare and hotel expenses at WisCon—and so she was, in the end, able to moderate a couple of the panels she had conceived. Spike Parsons (Bay Area) and Simba Blood (Minneapolis) ran programming ops and the Green Room at the convention. There was no one on the local committee who was willing to volunteer to do any of these tasks, and it would have been a sad state of affairs without these volunteers.

I do hope, however, that having a premiere feminist SF convention is not seen as an excuse for other conventions to ignore the need for more than the usual, single "Women and SF" panel. After all, even though there are premiere *Babylon 5* conventions, and conventions known for other specialties, like an excellent art shows or masquerades, that doesn't stop other conventions from running their own media programming or their own excellent art shows or masquerades. And that's not the way it should be for feminist programming either.

Anyway, enough philosophizing on the nature of WisCon for now. Here are some of my highlights from the convention:

I was bowled over with relief when Debbie and Jim Hudson picked up our Guest of Honor, Susanna Sturgis, Thursday afternoon at the airport. She hadn't arrived on an earlier flight as planned and when I inquired at the airport ticket desk, they told me that Susanna had canceled both her flight to Madison and her return flight home.

Thursday night, many of us enjoyed a warm and very fun reception for writers attending WisCon at Madison's feminist bookstore, A Room of One's Own. One of the young women clerking that night was anxiously searching the crowd for a glimpse of Melissa Scott. "Is she here yet?" she asked me finally. "She's been here for quite a while," I said and pointed Melissa out to her. "Oh! I was looking for someone

wearing a lot of gauze. She looks like a real person!" I burst out laughing. The young woman blushed and begged me not to tell Melissa what she had said.

The evening became more rowdy after the reception when we strolled across the street to the Angelic Brew Pub for dinner and beers, and met up with a gang of people who'd finished stuffing registration packets back at the hotel. Not everyone finished up their work in time to enjoy the festivities at the Angelic, however. Scott and Greg Noggle were delayed quite a while as they loaded cumbersome art show panels onto trucks and delivered them to the hotel. Scott arrived at the Angelic late in the evening and declined my invitation to introduce him to Melissa, Lisa and Susanna. "No, I'd better go home and take a shower first." He got back soon afterward, finished off my dinner and finally got to make the acquaintance of our guests.

Scott and I got to pick up Mary Doria Russell at the airport and had dinner with Mary and Karen Fowler on Friday. Mary Russell is the winner of (half of) the 1996 Tiptree for her novel, *The Sparrow*. Although she had never been to a con before attending the Florida Conference of the Fantastic Conference (does that count as a con?), where she received her award, she fit into the WisCon milieu immediately. Mary is an extraordinarily extroverted, hugely enthusiastic, utterly delightful person. Scott and I (and most of the rest of the convention, I think) became great fans of hers over the weekend. She'd broken her ankle just a week before WisCon, and so she took on the traditional role of "author-in-wheelchair" that WisCon seems to require each year, but there was no shortage of people eager to wheel her around the hotel, or even down State Street to restaurants. (Once, as I pushed her to the Mideastern restaurant, Kabul's, she suddenly laughed when she noticed the similarity of her position to that of the many babies who were being pushed up and down State Street in strollers. "My people!" she shouted, as she saluted the bemused kids. It was quite a scene.) Mary read excerpts from *The Sparrow* and the already completed sequel to that novel with passion and drama. She's one of the best author/readers I've ever heard. She told us the news about how Anthony Bandaras has purchased rights to *The Sparrow* and that he's going to play the main character's role himself. And then, as an encore, she let herself get completely caught up in the emotional scene of the Tiptree auction at the end of the convention. Two 1997 Tiptree shirts were auctioned, a medium and a large; and unsurprisingly, there were no bids for them. Mary was wearing one of the 1997

shirts, a size large which hung rather loosely on her very petite frame. So she offered to trade her shirt with whoever would bid on the small shirt, and—getting into the spirit of the auction—announced that she'd trade shirts with that person right there in the middle of the auction. And she did. As far as I know, no photographs were taken, at Mary's request. Mary's planning to shop for one of those old fashioned, outrageous, pointy bras for next year's auction. Oh yeah, she's coming back (as a taller person) to WisCon too.

What is it about auctions that so much flesh gets revealed so often? It seems to me that it was Luke McGuff's turn at Potlatch this year. This year, auctioneer Ellen Klage's courageously offered to bear her *head* for the sake of the Tiptree Fund. She declared a very brief time limit on raising \$500, but said that if it were raised, she'd shave her head bald. And she did, right there in the room where the auction was held. I have pictures and plan to put together a little progressive diorama for benefit of, you guessed it, the Tiptree Fund.

This year's fund raising at WisCon was the most successful so far. Together with T-shirt and bakesale income, the auction raised well over \$5,000 dollars for the fund. Whew!

There was a lot of Tiptree stuff at WisCon in spite of the fact that the award wasn't presented in Madison this year. There was a great panel about the process, with 4 chairpersons out of the 6 Tiptree judging teams participating as panelists. There was even a Tiptree business meeting, disguised under the name "Secret Mistresses of Tiptree Luncheon." And there was a reenactment of the famous Tiptree ceremony from the Florida conference, where (in honor of the Catholic themes in *The Sparrow*), Pat Murphy, Karen Fowler, Ellen Klages, Delia Sherman, and Mary Russell sang and performed Tom Leher's *The Vatican Rag*. Janet Lafler, who chaired the 1996 panel of judges but who was unable to attend the Florida conference, joined in the fun this year. It was absolutely hilarious.

Nobody can give you an overall feeling for programming quality, because there was so damn much of it, though I heard lots of good comments. I certainly enjoyed all of the panels I was on or was able to attend. The "New Tiptree Cookbook titles" turned into a mini-workshop and we created an alarmingly long list of often disgusting puns based on Tiptree stories, which we will eventually use as chapter titles in the next Tiptree cookbook. (Cookbook planning will go into full gear after the Tiptree quilt is finally done, which I think and hope will happen sometime this

summer. I had the quilt in Scott's and my room for a while and was able to bring a number of people there to show them the work in progress. "Hey, you wanna come to my hotel room and see my quilt?!" No one seemed disappointed that there really was a quilt.)

I moderated the panel called "Jane Austen is as Alien as Mars," and had a lot of fun at both that panel and the Tiptree process panel. I also got to hear Kelley Eskridge read her new novella (not yet in print) and was absolutely mesmerized. Mary Russell's reading, as I said, was wonderful too.

But there were another 130+ programs that I wasn't able to see, and I'm looking forward to reading some of the comments about those, both here in *Intercourse* and in the surveys that people filled out at the convention. Things went pretty smoothly from the point of view of program ops. There were a few no-shows among the panelists, not many however, and the substitutions we made actually improved the panels in some cases. No panels had to be switched in time or space, which I think was pretty amazing.

Those who went to parties however, probably were able to taste a little of each. We have a unique deal with our hotel: they give us all the suites (not the sleeping rooms) on the 6th floor for free. There are no other large party size rooms in the hotel. So we turn around and lend them to anyone who wants to throw an open party on one of the nights of WisCon. We ended up filling all but three rooms on Sunday night, and so the sixth floor, as it was last year, turned into a rocking place after programming ended. The thing that has impressed me about parties at WisCon 20 and 21, is that everyone parties together. We certainly encourage it by doling out the party suites to open party-throwers only, but I don't think that explains it entirely. The people that attend WisCon don't see themselves as a subgroup within another convention, so they don't seem to feel that they need to stake some space outside the official WisCon spaces to be together.

When I think about this, and the many other things that distinguish WisCon from other traditional conventions, it makes me feel like we're creating a temporary sanctuary here every year ... a little utopia ... that inspires and invigorates us all. I'm very happy that so many great people come back year after year and I'm really proud of my part in making it happen. Thanks to all of you that helped make it happen again!



Karen Summerly

Spring may have been under way for you in El Cerrito as you wrote your zine for the April *Intercourse*, but for us up here in Wisconsin, Spring has been oh so slowly unfolding since March. In fact, WisCon was timed just right for the height of lilac and morel season. Programming may have been too hectic for most people to escape into the woods and hunt morels, but these rare delicacies were available at the farmers market on Saturday morning, just a block away from the hotel. And lilacs abounded. Diane Martin and Jim Hudson brought bouquets of them into the con from their yards; I made bouquets for guests' sleeping rooms from the lilac trees in Scott's and my yard. Their lovely scent was everywhere. It's been a stretched-out Spring here, with the temperatures staying in the 60s far longer than usual. This is fine with me. The longer we avoid hot weather (in the 80s and above), the longer the first mosquito hatch is delayed. And it's very pleasant to ride to and from work on a bike in this kind of weather. I've been riding since late February with a few days off here and there, for the surprise blizzard or thunder shower.

And then suddenly, last weekend, a week after WisCon, summer burst upon us with a few sultry, almost hot days. The lilacs immediately started turning brown and wilted. Scott and I snapped up the last of the morels at the farmers market, and the air conditioner came up in conversation (as in, "we'll have to think about taking the air conditioner down from the attic one of these days."). If the weather offers any metaphor to me, it has something to do with this dramatic shift into a new season. With WisCon behind me, it's time to get busy on Other Things.

You asked how I thought the metaphor embedded in my zine title might wear if it was extended over time. "*When one has enough information about another person to perceive the 'mirage,' it's easy to become rather inattentive, which can result in some alarming surprises, later on.*" I agree. No matter what translation table one uses to try to understand ones friends, misinterpretations are bound to crop up if we believe we've "captured" their essence and need pay attention no longer. (It would be as if I said I had a real good picture of my friend from ten years ago, and failed to notice that she had changed since then.) Extending the grayscale metaphor, and assuming that I pay attention, it seems to me that the Grayscale metaphor works pretty well to describe the way I learn about people around me over time.

As with a large, high resolution photo, I'm more apt to view behavior changes in someone that I've known for a long time as glitches. (I guess I won't use the graphic term for minor imperfections on a photograph, which is "hickies.") Most of us have had the experience of knowing and caring for someone over a long period of time, and—as a result of that history—being able to give that friend some slack when they're in crisis. On the other hand, people who get to know us for the first time when we're in crisis are more likely to let the behavior they observe dominate their images of us. It takes some time before one can be sure that the image one has built about someone represents an average of their behavior over time, or is a picture of the way they were like in one or two, possibly unrepresentative moments. On the other hand, shifts in behavior patterns that happen gradually sometimes catch us by surprise.

You asked what I meant when I said that "*society as a whole should invest in the invention of new and better medical care.*" I meant that I thought good medical care should be considered a service due to all people in society, in the same way as we (ideally) view education in this country. For example, when a company invents a new kind of high-tech communication device, few would defend the notion that the gizmo should be available to everyone at a price anyone could afford. No, the high tech toy is made for and bought by those who can afford it. On the other hand, when a discovery is made about a new way to teach or learn, it is shared among all education professionals. In that same way, I think, discoveries about how to stay alive longer/better should belong to all of us, and not only to the rich. We should all be required to invest in health care (as we do in the education of children), and we should all benefit from the results of the research.

Where did Scott learn his conflict resolution skills? I think he learned a good chunk of what he practices from his experiences working within prisons, where resolving conflicts is a higher stakes game than most of us have to deal with on a day-to-day basis.

Arthur Hlavaty

I had to laugh in recognition several times at some of your succinct and funny summations: Like hiring a band to encourage interaction at a party being like "helping people appreciate an art museum by shining lights in their eyes." I've often said similar, (though less succinct) things about socializing in loud

bars. The places actively discourage conversation, shriek. I realize I must be missing the point.

Berni Phillips

I'm sorry for the loss of your friends, Seth Goldberg and Jeanne Garson.

Fascinating stuff about your sleep apnea and the CPAP machine. My Dad uses one of those at night too. He's always been a heavy snorer. After I left home for college, I would sleep in a room at the far end of our house when I came home for visits. Mom and Dad's room was a long way away—the length of a large ranch house with two closed doors between my ears and Dad's vocal chords—but I could still hear him loud and clear. I sometimes wonder how mom dealt with it, without using earplugs. Anyway, Dad and Mom have both mentioned the problem to his doctor over the years, but it wasn't until he actually had a little heart attack earlier this year as a direct result of his apnea that the doctors took it seriously and sent him for a sleep test. His apnea is much improved now, and he's got a doctor that pays more attention to what he says about his health.

He's having other health problems now, but the doctors don't think it's connected to the apnea. We were all celebrating Mothers Day at my brother's house when Dad had a sort of attack that looked a lot like a stroke. He was staring off into the distance, unable to hear us, and lost control of his muscles. By the time the emergency squad had arrived we'd moved him onto his back onto the floor with his feet elevated and he was better, but we insisted that he go to the hospital, where he had three of four more attacks that evening. All the doctors can say is that they weren't heart attacks or strokes. His blood pressure just got very, very low. It hasn't happened again since then. Dad is convinced it happened because he was drinking more than usual that day and has sworn off of unwatered martinis. And the doctors—though they're certainly not discouraging him against drinking less—don't seem to think that's the problem. But they have no other theories.

I'm glad you weren't offended at the Tiptree miniprogramming lunch at Potlatch when you and I discovered our diametrically opposed tastes in fantasy fiction. I've got another friend here in Madison with whom I share a similar mirror-opposite taste in fiction. We laugh about it sometimes, and have had some interesting conversations about the different things we look for when we read.

Janet Lafler

I very much admire the way you are handling your diagnosis of diabetes (as well as how you're handling the disease itself). You certainly looked really healthy and slim, even glowing at WisCon. And your goal of looking at diabetes as a challenge rather than a misfortune, is something I want to hold onto and think about for myself in other contexts.

I share your impulse to talk about physical problems in ways that don't alarm people. I usually prefer to tell people about health problems AFTER I've finished dealing with them, in fact, which is of course an option you don't have. I'm aware of the downsides to this kind of behavior and it was interesting to see my own behavior patterns played out in front of me by my Dad when he collapsed last month. It was especially interesting because I realized I wanted Dad to stop sounding so unconcerned. As soon as he regained consciousness, he spent a lot of energy trying to convince us all that nothing had happened and that he was perfectly fine. Only days later was he able to admit that he had been scared out of his mind and that he was glad that we ignored his admonitions not to worry. On the other hand, my Dad's mother was a person whose whole consciousness used to be focused on her various ills. I remember visits to her house as a little girl as being pure torture. She would sit and cry and complain the whole time about how bad she felt and how no one cared, and I determined then and there that I never ever wanted to be anything like her. I wonder now if Dad and I might have the same counter-model for our own behavior around talking about our health.

I loved reading the musing you did in the last paragraph of your zine. *"...you shouldn't make an important promise unless it's superfluous; unless you want to do what you're promising to do and can't imagine not doing it. The promise, then, isn't an statement of intention, but a way of acknowledging and confirming what already exists."* Minus the admonition that a promise should be superfluous, that pretty much summarizes the how and why Scott and I made promises to one another. The promises weren't at all pledges aimed at forgoing or depriving, which is the place where the discussions about monogamy always seem to dwell. They were recognitions of how we felt and what we were already giving to one another. Great zine, Janet.

Steve Swartz

You asked why I think it's "hypocritical to develop religious feelings when you have kids." I don't think that, actually. What I perceive to be the case among most of the people I know who have started going back to church at the same time they have kids, is that the adults' beliefs about God haven't changed at all, but they think it is better for the kids if they pretend, at least temporarily, to care about religion. Rather like Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy. If their beliefs had changed—if they started talking about, for example, how the miracle of having children had given them a whole new perspective of the world and the experience had opened a spiritual side of reality to them — well, I wouldn't have brought this subject up. Of course its possible that people just haven't talked to me about spiritual revelations sparked by childbirth. I'm probably not the most receptive person for a conversation like that. On the other hand I have heard lots of declarations along the line of "I was brought up in a family where we went to church every Sunday and I want my kids to have that too...", or "How else can I be sure my kid is taught right from wrong?" More frequently, I believe I've heard a subtext in conversations that the parent doesn't want to deal with questions from their kids, like "Why don't we go to church? Don't you believe in God?" As far as I know, some of these friends (including my brother Steve) never changed their mind about the nonexistence or at least the highly questionable existence of a god; nonetheless, they somehow seem able to divorce the notion of God from the benefits of a church and the meaning of religion. I couldn't do that. And looking at it from the perspective of the kid, I would think that it would be better if the parent declared honestly what they did or did not believe in, rather than let the kid discover their parents' dishonesty down the road.

Your definition of the word "kludge" certainly fits with the way I've heard it used. But I'm curious now whether Varley just made up the source of the word for the story, and if not, what its etymology is.

I wonder if there has ever been an apa in which two such verbal people as you and Jane worked out important issues between themselves in a public forum? It's sort of amazing to read. Sometimes—when I have no insights to offer—I definitely feel like a voyeur.

Maybe non-monogamous relationships aren't quite so much in the spotlight as you think. You write, "I don't see people deciding that monogamy doesn't

work every time a monogamous relation comes apart, but the outcome of a particular non-monogamous relationship seems like it always wants to slide into an indictment of whatever relationship structure they embody. "I don't know how many times I've heard—after the breakup of a long monogamous relationship—"How could you [they] break up?! You [they] were my ideal of a good marriage!" Every time a couple breaks up, they have to deal with friends who feel their own relationship is threatened simply by having to acknowledge the possibility of failure. I recall that you heard this at least once when you let it be known that you and Elk were breaking up, and justifiably, you were offended by this selfish reaction. Some people just seem to have this need for *other* people to maintain relationships so that they can interpret that stability as some sort of personal guarantee.

I think I'm more interested in political forms, and in political interpretations of literature and community than you are. Do you think this is true? Many times it I recall that you were less than interested in pursuing a discussion about a book's or idea's political themes. I've even heard you react to a political interpretation of an interaction between a group of friends as if that interpretations were by definition a criticism. (As if, I mean, a "good" community doesn't have politics; only "bad" communities do.) Maybe I'm completely off base on this, but I'd be interested to hear your take on it. It seems to me that the potential for complexity within governments, local or larger, are just as great and often greater than the complexity of a relationship between two people. The potential for equal complexity exists because both the personal and the political stem, in the end from the same thing: relationships and power. The stakes are often different, but if the skills of individuals to improve personal relationships increase, then the skills available to build stable communities also increase. The potential for power manipulation gets magnified, the larger the group is, but the mechanism is the same no matter what the scale.

Kimberly A. Cline

Welcome to the apa! I look forward to having some discussions about type and design with you.

Lisa Hirsch

OK, now I have to know. What is *the globolink incident?* How kind of you to offer me an opera ticket if they're available when I next visit. It makes me realize that the next time I visit San Francisco or New York City, I would really like to plan ahead and try to arrange to see an opera. Once, in the mid-1980s, I visited my brother Rick in San Francisco and was able to arrange for tickets to see *Aida*, and it was a wonderful experience. I actually have a friend, through Rick, who works in the Opera ticket office.

As for Puccini's tendency to kill off his heroines which you find annoying, I always felt that he was interested in what happens when women act untraditionally, but was unable to play the idea out without having to kill them off in the end. But he finally found a way for one of his untraditional women to survive in *Turandot*, though of course, since he didn't actually write the conclusion of that opera, we can't know for sure if Turandot would have escaped a Bad End at his pen. But I rather think she would have survived. *Turandot* is a very modern story, to my mind: about a woman whose female ancestors and self have been terribly abused by men and whose anger spills into revenge. (Rather like the theme of Suzy Charnas' *The Furies*. When I first saw *Turandot*, I imagined that all those wronged ancestors were really Puccini heroines from his other operas..) Turandot escapes the horror she has made of her life and for her community by finally recognizing that an equal division of power and risk with another person is the only possible way for her to find love, and to heal her wounds, which finally enables her to turn away from revenge.

Douglas Barbour

Interesting stuff about Alberta politics. I've been trying to follow the news about the Canadian election, though that's difficult in this country whose media rarely pays attention to anything that happens north of the border. (My interest has coincided with my reading of Atwood's *Alias Grace*, which is a fantastic novel with lots of assumptions about and references made to Canadian history, which reminded me how little I know about Canadian history. I loved *Alias Grace*, by the way, especially for its many-layered references to all the kinds of aliases that people use to obscure themselves or others, and

which leads to a situation where no one, really, is fully *seen* by others. The quilt motif worked in well with the idea, since one can look at most quilts in at least two ways—seeing the dark or the light portions as dominant.)

Jane Hawkins

The story of IFusion is a sad and really frustrating one. It sounds as if the big capital investments in Internet development are being handled much like loans to 3rd world countries were handled in the 80s. The risks were huge, but the potential returns were enormous, and most banks took big falls for the bad risks and the lack of follow through on those risks.

I'm sorry you had to go through the experience of being laid off and am glad that you didn't have to deal with unemployment for too long.

I'm sorry that you and Steve are having such a hard time again. I remember that both of you were optimistic that the absence of geographical distance between you and the chance to deal with communication problems face to face, rather than via email or phone, would make it possible to work out your different communication styles. I'm sorry that didn't turn out to be the case.

When I've heard the aphorism, "It is better to beg forgiveness than to ask permission," I've assumed it was a statement true for dysfunctional relationships. I agree with you that the idea is deeply offensive when considered in the context of a relationship between two people who treat each other with mutual respect and trust. However, a lot of relationships don't have those things as their basis. Unfortunately. In dysfunctional relationships, the aphorism may describe a reasonable strategy. For example, in a relationship where the person with the most power does not trust the other person, and would automatically denigrate a plan offered by the less powerful person—it might feel reasonable to the less powerful person to simply do something without first asking permission. If they fail, they'll get the same dressing down they would had they merely proposed the idea. If they succeed, the powerful person might be forced to admit that they have some skill after all and maybe the relationship would change. I resorted to behavior like this for a while when dealing with my boss at the DNR. As I've already told you, she tended to act on the assumption that her staff were all lazy, undependable cheats and would look with extreme prejudice on any suggestion made that challenged her. On the other hand, if I or

one of the other artists simply acted without checking with her, and the action elicited praise from her boss, well she would simply take credit for the act. In this situation the aphorism was a reasonable rule-of-thumb.

The *really* unfortunate thing is that if someone is most familiar with the dysfunctional relationship rules, they will tend to apply them when they are involved in a healthy relationship as well.

You've got an Ur Apple story (which you told in a comment to Lisa). I've got an Ur Peach story. Scott and I hardly ever shop at Whole Foods Grocery Store. It's amazingly expensive and on the other side of town, to boot. But we looked around when it had its grand opening this past summer, and when we walked in, the first thing I noticed was a strong, enticing smell of peaches. I was drawn to the produce section, and there, in a huge display, were hundreds of absolutely perfect, enormous peaches. I had to have one; I carried it to the checkout counter and was charged \$3.50 for that one peach. It was worth it. I have never eaten a sweeter, more delicious peach in my life. The juice dribbled over my chin but I tried to retrieve every escaping drop with my tongue. I was so *good!* I didn't go back to Whole Foods for more, though. I started thinking about why that peach cost so much. I thought about the fact that every peach in the display was at the peak of ripeness and that there were no blemished peaches. None. I realized that Whole Foods would have to throw out unsold peaches only a day or so after they achieved optimal ripeness in order to maintain that display of perfect peaches. And I realized that this system probably also accounted for the other displays of perfect fruits and vegetables which were all priced 2-3 times more than their costs in other stores. Still, I might break down this summer if I happen to be in the neighborhood when peaches are in season again.

Avedon Carol

It's good to be in the same apa with you again. I gather that I've missed a few really important chapters in your life, but I still recognize your

typestyle and the look of your zine from *AWA*, which is sort of amazing.

Debbie Notkin

I sit out the bouquet-throwing game at wedding receptions too. The last time my parents urged me to get up and join the "girls," I turned to my dad and told him that I had a long-winded, detailed explanation for why I wasn't interested in doing that, and did he really want to have that discussion right *now*? They dropped the notion. I hadn't thought about the bouquet-throwing being about women on the hunt, so much as the passed down notion that is still being pressed on women, that the most important and best thing that can happen to a woman in her whole life is getting married. This pro-marriage message almost seems unchanged from the days of Jane Austen. We escape many of the dire warnings of what will happen if you *don't* get married, but in any wedding celebration, the bouquet-throwing game acknowledges the assumed desire on the part of every unmarried woman in the room that she might be the next to marry. Ugh.

You asked me if I remembered "*the article [I] wrote many years ago about how good writing doesn't need emphasis to point out the important bits.*" I do. And I'm still just as turned off by those little sidewise faces that are used to soften the apparent blow of statements that might be read too harshly. (I understand why people use them, and I'm not about to start a crusade against them or the people who like them. But I prefer writing which strives to find the right words and phrases.) I prefer to limit my use of exclamation points and use all caps as little as I would resort to shouting during an intimate, face-to-face conversation. I do find, however, especially when I am paraphrasing in print a conversation that happened out loud, that it's more accurate if I use italicized emphasis to indicate the way people vary their vocal tones to emphasize certain words.

—Jeanne Gomoll