

# Union Street

A joint zine by Jeanne Gomoll & Scott Custis

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© Scott-free

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Scott was busy this month and so all comments are by me, Jeanne. Scott promises to return next month with comments.

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© Georgie Schnobrich

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Sorry to hear about that pinched nerve in your neck. I think I know what you're going through with constant (and stultifyingly boring) pain. I've apparently got a pinched nerve in my lower back (possibly caused by a fall I took down our stairway in the winter of 1997-98.) For almost a year now, I've been trying to deal with the resulting pain in my left leg — all the way down my hip and thigh, under my knee and down along my shin. I've been religiously doing my prescribed exercises every morning and evening, and I've been taking anti-inflammatory drugs, but none of it seems to helping much. Generally it's worse after I've been standing or walking for a while, but sometimes it bothers me the most when I go to bed. Sometimes it's hard to find a comfortable way to sleep, or not sleep as the case may be. Sciatica is the diagnosis, but my doctors are looking into other possibilities now, since the exercises don't seem to have made any difference. We'll see. I haven't yet made the connection between chronic pain and art, however.

I've also read a little of DeSade's writing, and agree that it's almost completely dispassionate . . . and rather boring, actually. Not what I expected when I picked up a volume of what's supposed to be one of the "forbidden" books of our culture.

My views shift on the subject of whether artists (or

loud opinions or popular TV shows) cause behavior . . . or whether cultural norms are to blame for the encouragement of violence-obsessed art and opinions and entertainment. At present, I think, it doesn't much matter which causes what, or what causes who. If we want our culture to change — if we want a less violent society, for instance — we have to start acting like it, on the theory that all behavior starts with a fair dose of pretense. We can't bemoan the casualness with which young children think about killing and mayhem at the same time we gobble up the violent fantasies of mass entertainment. On the other hand, we can't force artists to ignore the world they see around them, and to function as voice pieces for some publicly defined moral code. It seems to me that everyone has responsibilities here.

Fascinating thinking about Wilde's creation, Dorian Gray, and DeSade in one breath. An interesting play might be written about a conversation between the two of them. The idea reminds me of a play shown on public television several years ago, about the fictional meeting between Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. Sometimes I imagine unlikely or impossible conversations when I look at books that sit next to one another on our bookshelves because of accidental, alphabetic synchronicity. In **Mike Peterson's** terminology, we all sip different soups.

Thanks to you and **Jae** for the lesson on Pre-Raphaelites. All knowledge is contained in fanzines, for sure.

Is it "safe" to act a part only at work? Probably not for people like me who spend 40-50 hours of each week at that place. I don't think it would be possible for me to pretend for that much time, and still consider the behavior I've learned to be temporary. On the other hand, some of the stuff I've learned wearing that mask of work manners has rubbed off to good effect upon my other lives.

What a great drawing of you and Greg driving in England! Wonderfully funny AND completely recognizable.

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 © Vicki Rosenzweig
 

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I'm sorry you missed your trip to Paris and hope you will manage to go again on a whim not tangled by health crisis. It sure is lucky, though, that you were able to get your plane ticket money back and that no one else's travel plans went down with yours. Good luck, too, on dealing with the eye problem. I hope your vision is much improved by now and that the possible MS diagnosis continues to be merely latent. That's a scary disease and both Scott and I hope you manage to avoid actual MS symptoms forever.

If no one you know in New York throws New Years parties, you should plan on coming to Madison and joining us at ours.

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 © Lisa Freitag
 

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It's amazing how strongly Disney films influence kids. Sometimes I laugh at the religious right wing for its attacks on Disney's tolerant benefit package for gay employees. The films themselves present some of the entertainment industry's most pro-family messages (in the religious right wing definition of such things). You were mentioning *Hercules*, for instance. William picked up on "the big father" in the sky, which was certainly an image designed to suggest the one, male, patriarch of Judaic/Christian traditions. To tighten up the reference, the animated Zeus apparently heads a nuclear family. His social life gets cleaned up considerably by the Disney team.

Good summary of the reactions to your essay on gomers.

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 © Bill Humphries
 

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Congratulations on your new job, Bill! Sounds fun. I hope it turns out to be an excellent change for you. From what I read, three years is the ideal number of years to stay in any one position. It used to be that switching jobs every few years looked bad on one's résumé. These days, a resume like mine (20 years in one job) is the one that

would be problematic for a new employer.

I enjoyed your description of the problems you were having trying to do Alyson Abramowitz's service booklet. I found myself trying to solve the layout/type problem as I read. But it looks like you solved it in a workable fashion at the last moment. I hope Alyson was properly appreciative at all the work you did trying to figure out how to give her what she wanted.

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 © Maureen Kincaid Speller
 

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I mis-read the name of your favorite custom, "church-clipping." At first I thought it said "church tipping," and assumed you were referring to a very fannish custom that takes place whenever Chuch Harris gets drunk. And then I looked back and thought you had written "church-tipping," which lead to an amazingly silly image in my head. You see, we here in Midwest USA sometimes claim to engage in "cow-tipping." This is a sport practiced at night, when cows sleeping (supposedly on their feet) can be surprised on a grassy hill and tipped over. So I imagined a group of Brits leaving the pub at closing time and going off to tip a church over. Noooo, I must be mistaken. Only then did I read it correctly, "church-clipping." Some of the other ancient customs you quote are simply mysterious to me, as I don't know what shroves or collops or Fruttors are (surely not the fritters of Southern cooking?). And what is a Simnel cake?

I'm sorry you have such an impossible situation with your family. I've had some bad times, too, with my family. And in many cases, there are issues and behaviors for which my parents and I will never be able to find common ground. But things are OK now, I think because we've decided to sort of start over, to deal with one another as we are now, rather than as who we/they should be or should have been in the past. That means there are topics that we tend to drop like hot potatoes when they come up, and whole areas of each others lives that we simply pretend do not exist, but at least we have

For Maureen...

*"Wisconsin is one of those places that isn't there yet. It isn't that inexplicable funny New Jersey place, where people think it's funny without knowing why. It's sort of... People from sitcoms are from there. Of course the nice people are from there. And it's the only place in the world with The House on the Rock. Which is America; it's Americaland. It exists for the purpose of existing. I've been there with the kids trying to understand it, and it's not meant to be understood. It's a Zen creation. There are amazing things next to bad recreations. It's an artificially created Grandma's house that goes on forever, and whenever it occurs to them that it doesn't go on forever enough, they put up a giant new addition."*

—Neil Gaiman,  
interview in *The Onion*, 2/10/99

been able to enjoy the islands of common experience and familial connections in spite of some bad spots.

Those cads! Not to invite you to their New Year's Eve party. Well you and Paul must immediately make plans to attend Scott's and my New Year's Eve party at the end of the year!

This is going to be another one of those semantics paragraphs.... I have been thinking about the house across the way from your house, the place you say may have been a knocking shop. Not knowing what a knocking shop is, my mind has been imaginatively supplying possible definitions, some of them related to the U.S. idiom, "to be knocked up," which means, to get pregnant. Am I close?

I liked your comments about *Shakespeare in Love*. Besides all the wonderful references to his plays and theatrical traditions, I was also reminded in a weird way of John Irving's recent novel, *A Widow for One Year*. The characters in Irving's story are all authors, in one way or the other, and the story is about how they translate and manipulate the events and lessons of their lives and convert them into fiction. Similarly, Stoppard's story of Shakespeare mixes inspiration with real life and suggests an ironically fictional scenario in which Shakespeare might have finessed and re-mixed real life elements as he wrote. I liked that a lot.

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### © Tracy Benton

Clinton can't really be praised even for his role as a "walking VETO stamp." The "Don't ask, don't tell" policy has resulted in the largest number of gays getting kicked out of the military for their sexual preferences, of any year so far. In effect, the policy meant — don't ask the military what it's doing, and the military won't tell us—thus leaving us all able to assume things have improved. Hmmph.

Sorry, I didn't realize you were defining romance differently in fiction as compared to real life. I think my definitions aren't as far apart as yours. I'm often a sucker for romance, but I think I've always disliked *blindly* romantic stories. I dislike heroes played by actors who have only one or two expressions. Heroines fall in love with these "strong, silent" types because they can assume emotions and thoughts lie hidden beneath the guys' Rorschach expressions. If they fall in love but never talk to one another, I lose interest. And that reflects fairly exactly my own feeling about romance for myself. You may be right that it's difficult to portray long-term relationships in fiction (books or films), but I can think of some good examples. I think I more often prefer to read fiction about

complex, long-term relationships as I get older, more than stories of new love, requited or not. I never saw *Hart to Hart*, so no comment on that one, but what about Tracy and Hepburn in many of their films? Even *Guess Who's Coming for Dinner*, was much less a romance about the new love between the daughter and her fiancée, than between the old married couple (and the older liaison between actors). Stephen King surprises me often with his deeply moving portrayal of long-term relationships between women and men. It's my theory that this is element contributes significantly to the success of his horror fiction. He makes us really care for his characters because we believe that they love each other deeply, and in some cases have loved each other for a very long time.

Your comment to **Julie Zachman** about the often forgotten meaning of town names like Janesville, reminded me of the town I came from, a suburb of Milwaukee, which was named New Berlin. My dad frequently reminded me, though (as if it was a very important, not-to-be-forgotten fact), that New Berlin was not named after Berlin, Germany, but after Berlin, New York, which is accented on the opposite syllable than Berlin, Germany. I suppose this may have been a rather important distinction for a WWII vet.

The day I read your response to **Steve Swartz** about the appropriate role of a test group, I noticed Scott Adams' cartoon about Elbonian programming methodology on my Dilbert calendar at work, and it seemed appropriate. "*We hold village meetings to boast of our skills and curse the devil-spawned end users. Sometimes we juggle. At the last minute we slam out some code and go roller coasting.*"

It sounds like you had a great time in Las Vegas. You haven't convinced me that I'd like it, but it was sure fun reading your account. I don't think I'd have much trouble avoiding the gambling because that just seems pretty boring to me. And as you point out, there's lots of other stuff to do there. But I think I'd go crazy with no place to escape the relentless commercialization of the place.

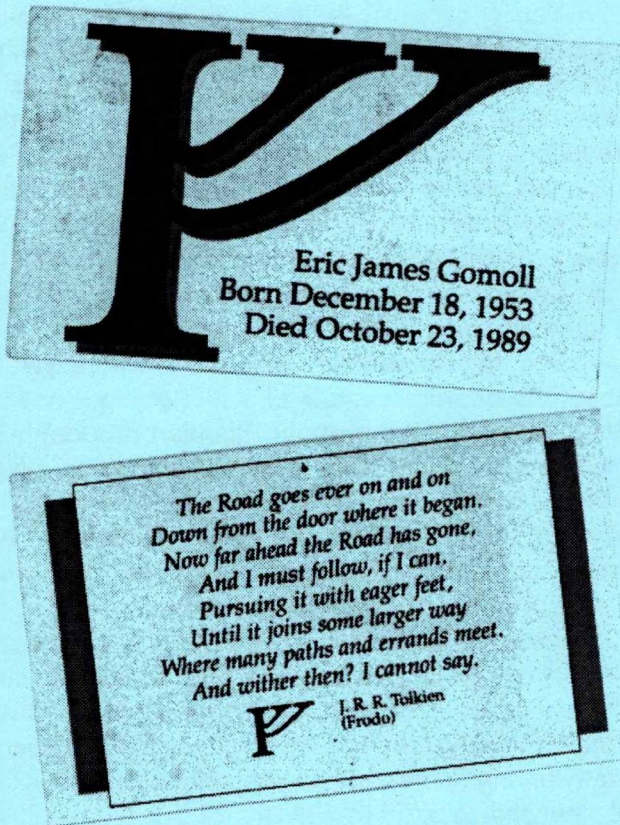
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### © Jae Adams

Thank you for the lovely Tolkienesque valentine card. I love the paper with all its sparkly strands. As often happens when I see some of your work, I feel inspired to try my own hand at some hand-made arts. I used to do block prints quite often, in the days when I needed (for financial reasons) to make birthday and holiday gifts by hand. I'd like to do some of that again. Maybe it would be a good opportunity to practice

enjoying art-as-it-happens and focussing less on art-as-planned.

I don't know if I've ever mentioned to you that I used the same Tolkien quotation for some cards we distributed at my brother's funeral as you used for the calligraphy you did at the time of Laura Spiess' death. It's a powerful poem, one that I read for the first time not in *Lord of the Rings*, but in a card that one of Rick's friends sent him a week before he died. I was with Rick at the time and read the card out loud to him, along with other pieces of mail he'd received that day. And I had a hard time not crying as I read it. Rick had always loved Tolkien, and had read and re-read those books many times in his life. He used Gandalf's symbol along with his own name when he signed the bottoms of pots



and pieces of furniture he made. So I added that symbol to the card for his funeral.

We got the holiday greeting card text from Mary Doria Russell who sent it as an email. She got it from someone else, and I really should have credited it. I was bad. Would you like her email address so you can get the reference?

No page counts? I think you should publish *character counts*. That way nobody's wide margins, big type sizes or short word choices will get in the way of a completely, anally, fair survey of *Turbo* output comparisons. Or maybe not. You're the Pirate Queen.

If you like the Red Green Show, you should try to see *Guys on Ice* someday. The characters are the same Midwestern guys that Red Green lampoons. It's kind of like a northern version of *Tuna, Texas*. I have a tape of this musical, though it is at present at my folks' house. I will get it back soon and would be glad to loan it out to anyone who would like to hear it.

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© Michael Rawdon

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Congratulations, again, on the new job with Apple, Michael. And thank you so much for all the work you put in during your last couple weeks in Madison, on the WisCon programming page. I hope you love your job and new life in California. (And I agree, it *does* smell distinctively different out there — very alive, all dense with vegetation — when one steps off the plane in the Bay Area. I think I could be blindfolded and flown to that place, not knowing where I was, and I would be able to identify it immediately by the smell alone.)

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© Pat Hario

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I share your impatience with businesses that make assumptions about my time and especially about my access to a car. So I cheered when you wrote that you insisted that the snowblower they'd failed to fix correctly be repaired while you waited, rather than agreeing to return the next day. My clinic insists that I pick up x-ray negatives whenever I go to a doctor at another clinic. "You can swing by here on your way to your appointment," they say confidently. I say, "I won't be driving. I'll be using a bus or my bike." There is a long pause, as if they can't imagine anyone doing anything without a car. I insist that they cab the x-rays over, if necessary at my expense, and each time the response implies that this is an outrageous demand. And of course we all deal with businesses that assume — despite the reality that few of us could afford their services if we supported a stay-at-home spouse — that we can easily arrange to be available at home all day on a weekday. And if that doesn't work out, they assume we can do it again the *next* day. Now, I *know* some of those folks are similarly inconvenienced by other service workers who do the same thing to them, so why haven't businesses developed a different system?!

I've been ignoring the Lockhorns for years. Usually it's pretty hard for me to avoid looking at cartoons, but that cartoon is so horrid, I've learned. In fact, having been able to teach myself to slide past that cartoon, it's gotten easy to skip past several others (most of which are more dumb than horrid, but an

equal waste of time). Nowadays I skip more than half the Sunday comics.

Being mistaken for a Canadian seems to be the compliment *du jour* for American tourists in Europe. The first time I heard of such a thing was many years ago from Suzy McKee Charnas who spent a couple months in a tiny village in Italy doing research. The local townspeople thought she must be either German or Canadian. Since then, I've heard other pleasant, polite Americans report with wonder that they had been mistaken for Canadians. Apparently the stereotype is, Americans = rude; Canadians = polite.

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© Mike Peterson

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Wow, what a *tour de force* zine, Mike! I was impressed by your perfect response to **Steve Swartz** — ambiguous, oblique (*very funny*) response to ambiguous, oblique comments. And I loved your comment to **Vicki** about keeping stuff out of your soup! Your metaphor was aptly illustrated by **Georgie's** comment this issue on how she stirred together Dorian Gray, and DeSade in her own soup. I think you've got a great idea there. We all mix up ideas and experiences in our head to make new works of art (or lives) and thus develop slightly different world-views from everyone else because no one else has exactly the same mixture in their heads as we do. My own metaphor of choice would more likely be a painting or a novel, but soup works! Your final paragraph, about Margaret Atwood's "Murder in the Dark," is like a handful of tasty croutons floating on top of a bowl of soup. Thanks, Mike. You can do that again anytime.

*Quando Omni Flunkus Moritati: When Everyone Fails to Die? When We All Live Forever?*

Re your comment to **Hope**, I think we'd have to plop Madison a bit further north than a few miles to get snow cover all through the winter. When I was a kid in the 1950s and early 60s, we really did have snow cover all through the winter more years than not. We'd get our first snowfall in late November and we wouldn't see the grass again till March. I can't remember how many years it's been since snowfalls were not followed by thaws and freezes and more snowfalls, all playing havoc with our driveway surface. And from my conversations with DNR staff in the field, most of central Wisconsin now experiences a similarly varied winter. Madison used to sit right on top of a climatic divider (a thermo- something or other. Ah it's been a long time since that meteorology class in college! Thermocline?) That line has moved pretty far north I think. I'd be really interested to see how global warming is redrawing our climate maps.

Excessive politeness works superbly as a powerful comeback to a rude person, but it's so hard to do! Ms. Manners used to recommend it all the time (in the days when we subscribed to the *Milwaukee Journal*, which carried her column. Does anyone know if I can find her on line anywhere?) I love to imagine myself using the excessive politeness strategy, but I when I'm really angry, about the best I can manage is sarcasm or icy silence.

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© Jim Nichols

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I'm sorry to hear what a hard and scary time you've been having with your diabetes! It sounds as if this past year has been like a long, waking nightmare. I hope you've woken up for real!

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© Clay Colwell

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Re-naming your zine something cute like "Kitten Particles" is not a very good way to make me want to read your zine. Luckily you're a real nice guy and an interesting writer, so I guess I'll just have to overlook the cute title....

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© Jim Frenkel

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The upcoming animated version of *The King and I* sure bothers *me!* It looks as if they're using much or all of the music from the Yul Bryner/Debra Kerr classic (one of my favorite musicals), and they're also getting rid of all remnants of its (admittedly minor) social commentary. Instead of the King accepting a concubine as a gift, separating her from her lover on pain of death, and adding her to his own harem, the animated King apparently will arrange a marriage for his son with an unwilling woman. The parallels to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* will get watered down, and I wouldn't be surprised if they omit the subversive play-within-a-play all together. But the main thing is, why was an animated film needed at all? The original film is still beautiful, still captivating and a fine movie for kids. Obviously the film-makers like the original too, because they've modeled the animated characters on Yul Bryner and Debra Kerr. Even the characters' voices sound like imitations. On top of that, the animation looks a bit shoddy from what I could see in the previews. A rip-off, a bastardization, and a cheap one at that. No thanks.

TV commercials that use classic songs and use them to sell product certainly must work; we hear them all over the airwaves. I bet golden oldies work better for selling than new music does, because of the subliminal messages conveyed to viewers who have emo-

tional memories connected to those tunes. Scott is constantly groaning about it, me less so because I listened to very little rock music in my youth, and those are the years that the commercials are mining most vigorously. But I get irritated sometimes when great old classical music gets used in commercials. The classical composers, however, can't be blamed for selling their music to vaginal spray companies, fast food, and car manufacturers. That music is in the public domain. But a lot of rock and roll musicians have obviously been quite willing to see commercials set to their music. Some musicians have even been willing to write new commercial lyrics for those songs. So, it's not completely the fault of the advertisers.

We're all looking forward to reading Vernor Vinge's new novel. You never mentioned in your zine what the title was, although I think you told us what it was when we saw you at **Jae's** collation party. I forget, though.

Congratulations for switching to something a little more easy-to-use than Quark Xpress for your zines. Are you using Quark for anything else now? If so (or if your staff uses it), you can ignore the rest of this paragraph. I would be willing to buy Quark from you if you don't think you're going to be using it in the future.

I really need to learn that program and want to have it at home, but the initial price is extremely steep — I think around \$1000. I'd be willing to buy it from you and then pay the much more reasonable price to Quark for the upgrade to 4.0. Let me know.

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© Tom Havighurst

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Good zine, Tom. I enjoyed reading your stylized chronology of your vacation, and admire your accepting attitude toward your family's religion. Short, but very evocative New Year's Eve party report. And a delightful response to **Julie's** question about why you passed up the stewardess' pass. I like you more (than I do already) for knowing you think this way.

You might consider telling your landlord about the invasion of ants. If they're carpenter ants, they are doing serious damage to the property, and you might get a near instantaneous response. That's one of the benefits of living in a rental unit, the big repairs get taken care of by Someone Else.

—Jeanne Gomoll  
3/18/99