

Madison foursquare

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

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This is **Madison Foursquare #69**. *Madison Foursquare* was created using a Mac Pro with InDesign, Illustrator and Photoshop, all CC 2022, and printed on a Ricoh Aficio CL7200 color printer. All contents ©2022 by Scott Custis [SC] & Jeanne Gomoll [JG] July 2022 for *Turbo-Charged Party Animal #433*.

Covers

[SC] Jim, you keep spoiling us with lovely photos for emergency last-minute covers. You could try running shots of dog poop and curbside vomit instead to pressure us into doing more covers.

Lisa Freitag

[SC] Your experience with the inept criminal turned out about as well as could be hoped for. Hooray for the Android phone tracker web site, the young employee unafraid of computers and some good folks at the Rehab Center.

[JG] Hurray for the ineptitude of criminals!

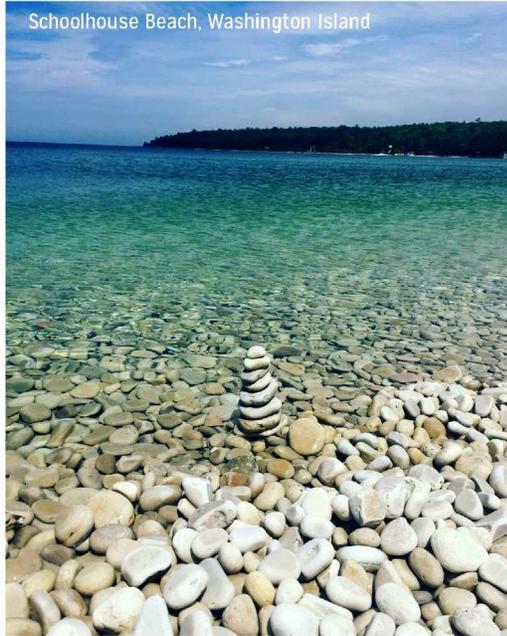
Elizabeth Matson

[SC] I really loved your report and photos of your Reunion Road Trip! It all sounded like so much fun and so refreshing. What a great time.

Looking back on my own college experience I have to say that I had a lot of good times and some good friends, too, but if I had the chance to do things over there is quite a lot I would change about my time there. I can't imagine there's very much that you would want to change about your time in school.

I think the thing about your article that struck me the most was your answer to the third "speed friending" question, "Share something about your MHC student self—and what advice would you give her now if you could?" Because you said you struggled so much with your major and with deciding what you wanted to do with your life. I did, too. I went to school having decided on a major, but I was not passionate about it. It was a purely practical choice and is the first of several choices I would change if I could do it over. Your advice to "be passionate" is so right and so true.

[JG] I found lots of echoes in your story about scrapbooks and reunions to my own experience reviewing my past writing and artwork and putting it all together in a book. The first part of my writing process actually occurred when I finally wrote my belated TAFF trip report and took copies to the convention, Corflu, in March 2020. Your excitement about bringing your scrapbooks to the reunion reminded me of how I felt when I was able to share the story of my TAFF trip with other fans. I also identified with how you failed to pay attention to what you were passionate about when you were younger, but recognized those important feelings when you revisited your scrapbooks and letters



many years later. Yeah, me too. What a wonderful, rewarding trip (including the inner journeys) you enjoyed this year! Thanks so much for sharing it with us.

Greg Rihn

[SC] Your assessment of the new *Downton Abbey*, *A New Era* movie seemed spot on to me. We enjoyed it, but mostly because we have been so engaged with these characters for so long. I also agree this movie had a better story than the last one. As for whether this is the last gasp for the enterprise, I hope you are right. It would be a perfect time to stop.

Thank you especially for the piece on your visit to Villa Terrace exhibit on Fredrick Law Olmstead. It was all very interesting. The Posters of Jules Chéret exhibit was also tempting.

[JG] Well that is certainly a mind-blowing idea that there are two universes—one moving forward in time and one moving backward. I will have to look up that *Popular Mechanics* article and read more.

Thanks too for the reviews of the Olmstead and Chéret exhibits. I remember reading quite a lot about Olmstead in college Urban Planning classes (I recall the notion that parks were a radical notion at the time.). But I have no memory of reading about his ideas about the Southern slave economy. Fascinating. I'd like to know more and I'd also like to see the Chéret exhibit!

Another episode of *Downton Abbey* might be interesting if the writers committed themselves to an accurate

narrative showing how fundamentally this family would have changed in the chaotic years facing them.

Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] I think you are quite right that wild turkeys ran to the cities during hunting season to hide. But once here, I think they like it and are unlikely to leave. What's not to like? Lots of organic, gluten-free and free-range grubs to eat. Interesting things to see and places to go. They are often treated as minor celebrities by the human locals instead of as targets. And for them, rents aren't bad. Why go back to the wild?

[JG] I nodded vigorously several times as I read your essay on this age of the easily offended. Yeah. What bothers me most about the frequent and mostly unexpected attacks on the language of well-meaning people is that there is too much energy being expended attacking allies, possibly because it is easier than going to battle against actually malevolent forces.

Walter Freitag

[SC] I'm looking forward to your first installment of "Age of Limits, 2014."

[JG] There is at least one book that provides some detail about the fonts used in *Star Trek* credits—*Typeset in the Future: Typography and Design in Science Fiction Movies*



Matt Powell

[SC] I think “The Mark” is a promising story. A lot of concepts are introduced that are not fully explained, but are intriguing. You do dialog well.

[JG] I loved your riff on the bigness of the universe (“[The Human Realm] was like naming an ocean after a mite that afflicted a flea that infected a mouse on one tiny island in that ocean, only much, much, much more ridiculous.”) And I was intrigued by the notion of substantiated vs unsubstantiated aspects of life in your story—especially the verbal politenesses around the notion, which echo the vocabulary of accessibility. But I mostly felt at sea throughout this story which felt like a novel fragment. I was constantly grasping for context.

Marilyn Holt

[SC] I have to congratulate you on your perseverance in getting your work published. Doing it yourself must be vastly more of a hassle than working with a publisher. Great news about the Freddie Bear covers.

Your uncle Jim sounds like a hoot. Are you holding on to your old guns because of their value as antiques?

[JG] I was thrilled with Sonequa Martin-Green’s portrayal of Michael Burnham in the first two seasons of *Discovery*. (I liked her a lot in *Walking Dead*, too.) It wasn’t the actor’s role that soured us on the show. Scott and I got progressively less thrilled about the writing and plotting of *Discovery*. So much so that

we decided not to watch it anymore after this year’s season. Same thing for *Picard*. The most recent seasons of both those shows had fairly simple and uncomplicated arc stories that had to be stretched, unconvincingly, through all the episodes. Each episode allowed the characters to take one tiny step toward the climax and the whole process felt artificial and clumsy. Resolution could not happen until the last episode, so each episode felt like it was constructed primarily in order to delay action. The story arcs of earlier *Star Trek* shows had more nebulous story arcs. *Next Generation*, for instance, circled around the issue of leadership; it was not an actual storyline, more character development. Individual episodes’ stories were the primary focus. I think that’s why I like *Strange New Worlds*. This show has a story arc—Pike’s foreknowledge of his horrific destiny—but it is a nebulous arc, similar to Picard and Riker’s on-going conversations and choices about leadership. *Strange New Worlds*’ arc is more interested in character development than a discreet story arc. The individual stories in each episode have been, so far, very well done—though as **Andy Hooper** mentioned, several of the recent stories have been re-written versions of famous SF fiction or films: one, a retold version of “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,” by Ursula Le Guin, and another that replayed *Aliens*.

Famously, Gene Roddenberry preferred that storylines in *Star Trek* not “continue” from one episode to the next; he didn’t want the show to be seen as a melodrama. He ordered each episode’s story to be self-contained, which led to many silly inconsistencies in which technologies invented in one episode were forgotten in



Rocky shore of Door County, Green Bay side

the next, and we had to exercise our imaginations to detect character development. I think *Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*, *Vcyager*, and *Enterprise* did good jobs diverging from Roddenbery's rule by allowing technology and characters to evolve episode to episode. But *Discovery* and *Picard*, in my opinion, tried to make each season into a sort of novel. But what they did instead was to stretch a short story far past its natural length.

I am glad to hear that you are making progress getting the second Stella book published.

Andy Hooper

[SC] Your profile of Hollywood horror host Ottola Nesmith was excellent. I really like these pieces on hosts who had personal connections, even careers, in the movies, including horror movies. She is not familiar to me, but I'm sure if I re-watch any of her old movies now, I'll notice her.

Regarding your comment to me, thanks for the suggestion. It's automatic for me to think of going online to look up something non-fictional, but it doesn't always occur to me that fictional material can be researched online just as well. I remember once some years ago I looked up a comic book character on Wikipedia on a whim and spent over an hour looking at article after article on comic characters I followed as a kid. I had no idea.

I thought Linda Blanchard's story was beautifully written.

[JG] I enjoyed Linda Blanchard's allegorical fanfic story. I doubt that I read it when it was published in *YHOS*, but I think Linda must have talked about the idea in

other places because I remember talking with her or maybe writing to her about it. I was then and am now a bit uncomfortable with the idea that the act of leaving fandom necessarily represents a regrettable transformation of a fan's life. It kind of reminds me of the legend of abduction by fairies: the abducted human spends a sort of mindless day in faerie world—dancing, eating, faerie-watching—but when they return to the real world, they discover that their family and friends are long gone, because years elapsed outside of the faerie realm. They no longer have friends, family, or work—nothing to show for their absence.

When I visited Ireland as part of my TAFF trip, I talked with Walt Willis in 1987 about how satisfying I was finding my life as a professional artist and how I had found ways to make use of my fannish sensibilities in my mundane work. A few years later, in *Whimsey 7*, I praised Willis' and James White's *Beyond the Enchanted Duplicator...To the Enchanted Convention*, especially the chapter in which Jophan used his fanzine editing skills to organize a grocery store.

One of the things on his mind had been the impersonality of supermarkets. They were a good idea for quick one-stop shopping, which was what most people wanted, but he was quite sure there was a sizable number of people who missed the corner shop, where you could get information and advice, and perhaps local gossip. It was already the practice in Jophan's store to attach little cards to some merchandise, with information like FRESH TODAY or GREAT VALUE, and Jophan used his little dot matrix printer to extend greatly the scope of these. Sometimes it was the place of origin, for

imported fruit and vegetables or information about the length of the season in the case of local produce. Sometimes it was simply the price per kilo, where competing brands of the same product were being offered in different sizes of containers. In the case of the new foodstuffs he had introduced, he offered simple recipes.

*When he was typing one of these out on his word processor, the thought came to him that there was now only one facility of the corner shop he was not providing, namely gossip. He took out the notebook on which he had jotted down the overheard remarks of customers and began adding them between two lines at the foot of his cards, like a fanzine interlineation. – Excerpt from *Beyond the Enchanted Duplicator**

Walt wrote a very flattering letter back to me, which sadly never saw print because *Whimsey 7* was the last in its series. Happily, I did not throw that letter out. It seems really close to uncouth bragging to print this note, but I've been wanting to share it with folks for years....

"You are entitled to no little credit for the things you liked about [Beyond the Enchanted Duplicator]. All the business about Jophan succeeding in his mundane job by using what he has learned in fandom was inspired by that wonderful article you wrote...about how you used your fannish background in your current job. When James [White] presented me with the first drafts of Beyond TED, Jophan was a mundane failure, occupying a lowly job like baggage handler. All the stuff about his rising in the world through using his fan publishing experience in a supermarket, was directly due to you: the supermarket came in because since I retired from work, I do the family shopping. So, arise Jophan, and take a bow. Actually, I couldn't

*have picked a better model for Jophan, because you seem to me in many ways to be the ideal fan. You are literate, you write like a dream, and you are very understanding on the human level." – Excerpt from letter from Walt Willis, commenting on *Whimsey #7*, April 11, 1993*

Carrie Root

[SC] This month so far I just finished *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Having seen Peter Jackson's movies several times, I feel much more familiar with character and place names this time around. I remember it being a lot to take in the first time I read it, and the Tolkien maps in the volume I read then and now were a little frustrating. Sometimes places that were the site of big events in the story were hard to find on the map. I'm also appreciating the fact that I've read *The Hobbit* since my first time through LOTR, which is very helpful. The story still grabbed me the first time I read it and I'm enjoying it even more now. It was fun to read about Tom Bombadil again.

Response to your comment to me regarding storage lockers, I think there might be a lot of reasons for the proliferation of storage lockers, but one possibility came to me from an odd direction. When my brother originally succeeded in buying out my father's 19-acre farm from my sister and me, he told me he planned to build some storage lockers along one stretch of level ground just off the highway. He said they were popular, cheap to build and easy to manage for income. He never actually did it, he's always had more ideas than I think he has time or energy to complete, but it may be another reason why there are so many.

Having a garage to park our car in every night was a priority for me when we were shopping for a house 33 years ago, and we've always used it for that



Spooky field



[JG] Water-permeable driveway surface? I need to look up info on that. My first question will be how such a surface would deal with extremely cold temperatures and snowplows.

I know people of my generation who have put their stuff in storage after moving to smaller houses. Their kids didn't want the stuff since their apartments were small, but the parents hoped that someday, someone would want the stuff they'd so carefully accumulated.

I read KSR's *Lucky Strike* and liked it very much. In fact I still own a copy.

Steven Vincent Johnson

[SC] Congratulations on continuing to make progress with your anxiety issues and your animation project.

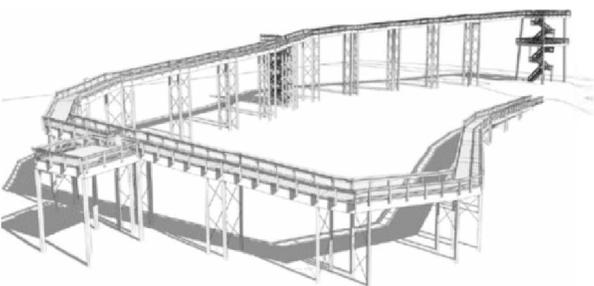
Jim Hudson & Diane Martin

[SC] We are reading *The City We Became* by N. K. Jemisin for our book discussion group this month. I can see why Diane was not fond of it. There is more than enough New York attitude for several books, which got tiresome by the end. It was imaginative, however, and was not what I call "elves in alleyways" urban fantasy. The characters were mostly interesting and I liked the overall workings of the plot. I will probably want to check out the 2nd novel in the series but, so far, I prefer her Broken Earth Trilogy.

I thought our first APT play, *The River Bride*, was excellent. Both Jeanne and I really liked it. Great start to the season! I love it when a story, whose description does not particularly appeal to me initially, ends up delighting me. I had great fun at *The Rivals* the following week. The cast was working very hard to make this fluffy confection of a play really click.

I'm looking forward to photos and details from your big trip.

[JG] I liked *The City We Became* more than Scott did. I was fascinated by how Jemisin handled Staten Island and its white, racist avatar. I liked how she resolved the situation. I had expected all the other borough avatars to help Staten Island's avatar to overcome her racism and bigotry, and to help her to understand that they all needed to cooperate in order to save the city. But that would have been an unlikely accomplishment. And I guess I have gotten tired of the quest for bipartisan compromise, both-sides-are-at-fault stuff. These days, I just want to jettison the bad guys. So, it felt refreshing when four boroughs pull in Jersey City to replace Staten Island. I liked the characterization of the borough avatars, and wondered a bit what kind of person would best represent Madison if our city came alive.



I have finished listening to Diana Gabledon's *Outlander* series, at least what she calls the nine "big, enormous books." Davina Porter is a wonderful narrator. I have listened to some of the novellas too, but mostly I am anxious to read what Gabledon says is likely to be the final book in the series, book ten, so far untitled. I'm also caught up on the *Outlander* TV series. With the text so clear (and recently heard) in my mind, I've found it interesting to see how the TV Series shifts around plot lines to make them compact enough to fit into single seasons, rather

than sprawling—as Gableton lets them—across two or three or more books. It’s been...immersive...and fun.

I recommend Nicola Griffith’s novella, *Spear*, which is a wonderful variation on the King Arthur myth. I loved it.

I also read a book written by our next-door neighbor, N.B. Hankes (or Nate, as he introduced himself to us)—*Waking Up on the Appalachian Trail*. Nate bought the large white house next to ours in mid-summer. The three sets of tenants had already moved out and the house itself needed (and still needs) a lot of work. It had deteriorated badly during the years we have lived next door to it. I think at one time, our two houses looked very similar. They were built in the 1920s and are both American Foursquares. While Scott and I steadily repaired and improved our house, the house next door went the other direction. So, we were delighted when the owner decided to sell. We hoped that a new owner would rescue the house.

Nate is a young army vet who served in Iraq. After being discharged, and he looked for a way to exorcise some of the demons that had attached themselves during his tour, and to think through some ideas and plan a future. He decided to hike the entire Appalachian Trail, from Main to Georgia, 2,163 miles. His brother Ben, who also needed to reevaluate his life, accompanied him. Nate wrote a book about their experience. He also works with www.veteranarts.org, a nonprofit that provides artistic residences for post-9/11 veterans.

Within a month after he’d moved in next door, Nate had the whole house scraped, painted, and re-roofed. Last week he was gutting the upstairs kitchen and sanding down all the inside doors in preparation for a new coat of paint. We are very happy with the progress. I made some cookies and offered a plate of them to Nate, who we noticed was working very late one night. We’d just returned from a show and could see him working in one of the upstairs rooms. A couple days later, Nate’s father arrived to help and introduced himself to me, saying that Nate had told him that we were “taking care of him.” Sweet guy.

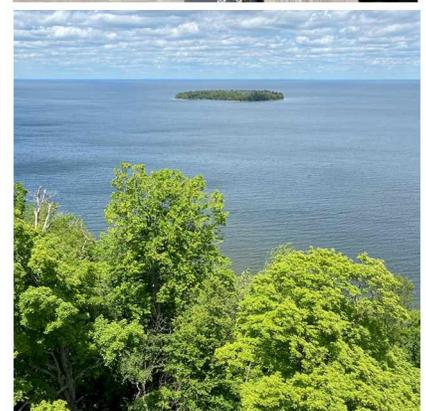
Nate told us about the book he’d written and I shared with him that I was shopping a book too. Nate eagerly suggested that we get together for coffee and talk one day soon. We haven’t done that yet, but he dropped a copy of his book in our mailbox and I read it and promised to send him a pdf of my books. What an unexpected connection.

J.J. Brutsman & Tom Havighurst

[SC] Who (where?) are the South Hants Science Fiction Group? Local? Online? How long have you been members? Our SF Without Borders group has also chosen Wells’ Murderbot books for very good, wide-ranging discussions.

I have never tasted Armagnac, either. Something to look forward to trying. Thanks for the tip.

Subaru owners seem to be very loyal in my experience. It was the first brand I looked at when we were shopping for a new car in 2019, but at the time I could not find a hybrid in a model that I wanted from Subaru. Toyota and Kia also offered safety features I really wanted. I think you be quite happy with your Outback.



Eagle Tower in Peninsula State Park. Page 6: view from a boat; diagram of new accessible ramp and tower. Page 7 views from the accessible ramp climbing to the top of the tower and the view from the top of the tower.

Wow, those cinnamon rolls look delicious.

[JG] Nerds with Words sounds like something I'd like to check out. I see that tickets are available via Eventbrite.

When the South Hants SF Group read Martha Wells, did any of your fellow-members listen to the audiotapes rather than read printed books? I ask because I noticed during our book group's discussion that people who had listened to the audiobooks (which are narrated by a man) all pictured Murderbot as presenting male. Scott and I read the books and I always imagined Murderbot as presenting more female.

Jim & Ruth Nichols

[SC] Jim, I was amused by your "politicks." I don't envy your CD's-to-computer files project, but I must congratulate you on being able to walk again.

Ruth, your abortion story was very moving. Thank you for sharing it.

We have been trying to follow the January 6 hearings. I'm pleased with the committee's presentations and the attention the hearings are getting. I'm not investing much faith that the Biden Administration or the Justice Department will do much in response to them or recent Supreme Court decisions.

I don't think we will see much of a change in the number of restaurants around here until there is an increase in the number of people willing to work in them. Most places I know of are hiring, sometimes desperately, or periodically closing or reducing hours for lack of workers. The photos of your deck were great.

[JG] Thanks for sharing your abortion story, Ruth. I remember planning out a similar excursion when I was in college—thinking that if I needed an abortion, I should research the situation ahead of time. But it was impossible to find out everything I would need to know without actually proceeding. That was before Google, of course, and abortion clinics weren't listed in the yellow pages. All I knew, really, were which states had legal abortions. I'd never flown on an airplane yet, so just the idea of *getting there* was scary, not because of any doubts I would have had about the decision, but because the logistics looked intimidating and very lonely. I was hugely relieved that I was able to get a tubal ligation when I finally got health care insurance through my job. I was lucky too, that I lived in Madison, where the Planned Parenthood offices provided

practically free birth control (on a sliding scale) to people like me with low incomes.

What a pretty, inviting balcony!

Karl Hailman & Hope Kiefer

[SC] Nice photos and thanks, Hope, for the trip details. I feel we were lucky when we were in Seattle last fall visiting Jane Hawkins that, although we were there nine days and rented a car for the stay, we managed to spend very little drive time on Seattle Interstates. I call that a win. A Dee Dee update is always welcome, too. She likes Seattle? No plans to move back to Madison?

Karl, you reminded me that I failed to mention to **Elizabeth** previously that I spotted some pelicans on Lake Monona near Brittingham Park on one recent bike ride and we noticed pelicans in a couple spots last week when we were in Door County, which might not be unusual up there. I don't remember seeing them in Madison much before.

[JG] Where are you planning to go in the Canadian Rockies? We visited the US Rocky Mountain National Park many years ago. It's gorgeous.

Pat Hario

[SC] I liked all your comments. I hope you are enjoying being back in Turbo, it's great fun having you here.

Regarding your comment to me, I read a bit about the Depp/Heard trial in the New York Times. I had less interest in their legal battle than in the coverage about how the trial, and especially Amber Heard, were being discussed in the press and online. It was all pretty frustrating to me how badly she was treated.

I get your frustration about the turnover in your office mate's job. When someone leaves that job, do you end up having to do more of their work since you know so much of the job? That would suck. I think a lot of organizations are having trouble with rapid turnover these days.

[JG] It seems like you deserve a raise for doing work that no one can do while you are gone. When I worked at the DNR, the only way we artists could get a raise under similar circumstances was to change our job descriptions so that our newly defined/revealed work qualified for a higher pay level.

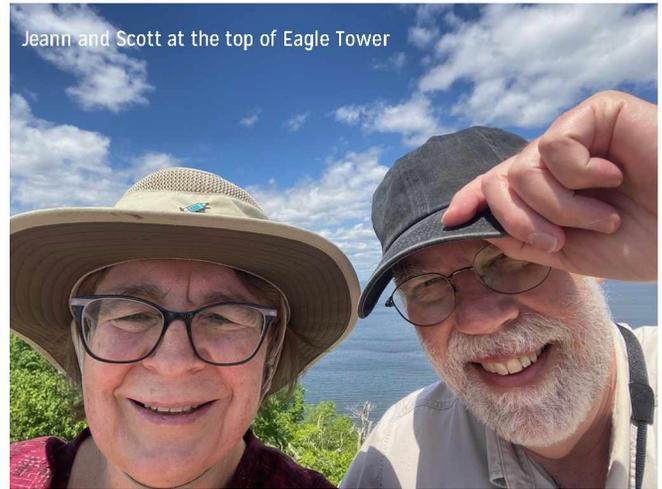
Vacationing in Door County

[SC] We took our first extended trip out of town since we visited Jane Hawkins in Seattle last fall. We escaped to Door County for five nights, June 23–28. We don't usually go to Door County during the summer high tourist season, but we wanted to see a play the Peninsula Players Theater was doing, *The Rainmaker*. Of course we have seen the famous Katherine Hepburn/Burt Lancaster movie version, but it was adapted from a Broadway play that we've not seen, so we decided to go. Jeanne bought tickets to the Sunday night show.

We left the day after the apa collation at **Jim and Diane's**. We left early enough to take a more leisurely route up along the east side of Lake Winnebago (away from I-41 and its endless line of billboards) while listening to the audio book version of N. K. Jemisin's *The City We Became*.

We have written about our trips to Door County many times and on this trip we did many of the things we usually do. We had Swedish pancakes for breakfast at Al Johnson's in Sister Bay and a fish boil dinner at Pellitier's in Fish Creek. We listened to free live music at the Egg Harbor city park along the bay which was a fine two hours of blues by Keith Scott. We drove through Peninsula State Park and walked up the ramp at the beautiful new Eagle Tower overlook.

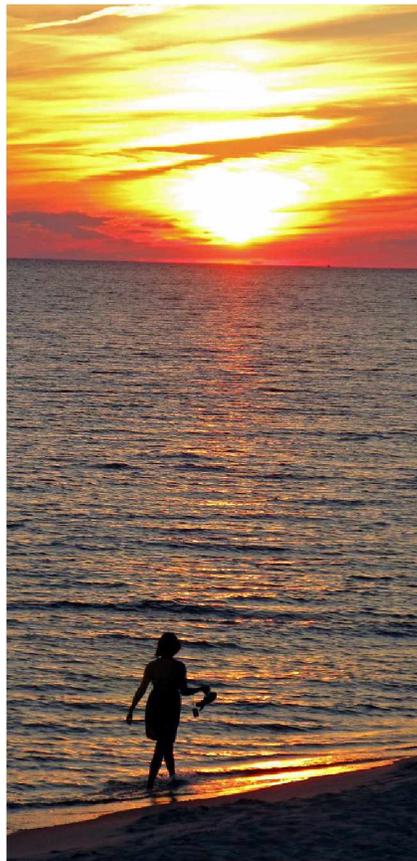
[JG] Eagle Tower had been condemned several years ago when its timbers were found to be rotted. We happened to be visiting Door County that year and witnessed the first of what were probably many community meetings attended by Door County residents and Peninsula Park friends. In the end, the group raised enough money to rebuild Eagle Tower. I imagine that when the state legislature required that the new tower be accessible, it must have felt like a wrench had been thrown into the planning process. I would have loved to have sat in on some of the meetings in which options were discussed. But we were astonished and very impressed by the structure they built. (See the ramp diagram on page 6, and photos



Jeann and Scott at the top of Eagle Tower

on pages 6-7.) The ramp's slope is very gentle and the views along it are gorgeous.

[SC] We spent part of a diverting afternoon making art at the Hands On art studio. We took an evening live music boat tour. We crossed over to Washington Island for a day relaxing at Schoolhouse Beach, Jackson Harbor and the Fragrant Isle Lavender Farm. Jeanne patiently accompanied me throughout our trip while I tasted beers at the Shipwreck Pub in Egg Harbor, Nelson's Bar on Washington Island, Door County Brewing in Baileys Harbor and Boathouse on the Bay in Sister Bay. We had ice cream from Wilson's in Ephraim.



Weather for our trip was very good. Sunny, warm, but not brutally hot, and no rain. We had one windy evening the night of our play, but it was still fascinating to watch the 3–4-foot waves crashing on the beach at the Peninsula Players Theater complex before heading in for our show.

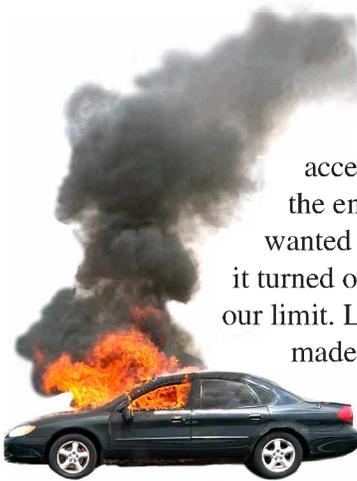
The Rainmaker was very good. The movie followed the play very closely. Although there is no racial subject matter in the story, Peninsula Players chose black actors for all the Curry family characters, while Starbuck and Deputy File were both white. The show's director wasn't making any political point with the choice; it was simply a color-blind casting. All the actors chosen to play the Currys were just excellent. Deputy File was fine, too. But Starbuck

struck us both as a letdown. The actor was fine as the boisterous con man, but he lacked sex appeal. Lizzie Curry's attraction to him seemed contrived to me. After we got home we streamed the movie version for comparison. It was clear in the movie that Lancaster's raw sex appeal was powerfully appealing to the insecure Lizzie.

We are still looking for a hotel or B&B to stay regularly in Door County since my cousin and her husband sold their cabin where we used to stay, outside Egg Harbor. On this trip we stayed at the Ridges Inn and Suites outside Baileys Harbor on the quieter Lake Michigan side of the peninsula. It was okay, but a bit too rustic. We will be trying something else next time. Before heading home on Tuesday, the 28th, we drove around to pick up smoked whitefish and whitefish spread, some provisions at a local fruit market (unfortunately we were too early for Door County cherries, we will have to come back again in the fall) and a four pack of beer from the brand new Peach Farm Brewery in Fish Creek.

On the drive home, we listened to the January 6 hearing featuring testimony from Cassidy Hutchinson. Since we'd streamed some shows on Jeanne's iPad a few nights during our Door County stay, streaming the hearings almost put us over our limit for cellular data. Halfway through Tuesday's

hearing, AT&T sent us a text message warning us that we might soon be cut off from high-speed access. But it was close to the end of the month and we wanted to keep listening. As it turned out, we didn't go over our limit. Listening to the hearing made the miles fly by. Not even the burning car we passed could distract us!



From the Book

Toast Master

Excerpted from Jeanne Gomoll's toastmaster speech at Corflu, Minneapolis, April 1989

When Fred Haskell invited me to be Corflu's Toastmaster, he made politically correct, concerned noises about the title. Did I really want to be called the toastmaster? he asked. Wouldn't I prefer the more generic honorific, "toaster"?

I told him that Toastmaster would be OK with me, but that I appreciated his sensitivity to my strident feminist inclinations. However, I failed to explain why I wouldn't pounce on this particular example of male linguistic privilege and demand instead, a humorous title like "Podium," or a revisionist one like "Toastmistress."

The reason I'm going with Toastmaster this weekend, is because of the dreadful "Gomoll Toaster Curse." I assure you that the thought—for once—of being a master of toasters would be thrilling to any member of my family, and I'm not going to miss this chance. Ever since I can remember, our family has owned defective toasters. No sooner is a new toaster purchased, than it develops eccentricities involving incinerated slices of toast, ear-piercing noises or downright dangerous side-effects. In fact, there's never been a healthy toaster in any Gomoll household that I know of.

For example, toasting bread at my parents' home has always been a game of chance. Some days your slice of whole wheat might pop up only slightly dry but not very warm to the touch. Other days a smoking cinder leaps out of the chrome machine, and when you attempt to remove it from its slot and give it a decent burial, it instantly disintegrates into millions of crumbs. "That's how aliens die," I once told my sister, Julie—then five years old. "They just disintegrate into a little pile of dust when they are killed."

"Alien bread!" Julie shrieked, and refused to eat toast for weeks. She was a little weird back then and reacted fearfully to many commonplace things. For instance, she always screamed whenever the egg lady delivered eggs to our house. None of us have ever found out what she imagined in the name "egg lady," but she cowered in her bedroom whenever the little old lady delivered eggs.



My brothers and sister all took the Gomoll Toaster Curse with us when we left home. Julie's toasters lost control of their noise-making mechanism. When your toast popped out of one of Julie's toasters and the wailing and screeching began, you might have sworn that some thief had broken into the elaborate kitchen security system. I used to expect sirens to start whooping and police helicopters to land on the roof within seconds. Breakfast time isn't a good time for shocks like this. (Breakfast time isn't a good time to be awake, is what I usually say.) But suddenly you're leaping two feet into the air and dashing into the kitchen to pull the toaster's plug to stop its unholy, cranking alarm. Julie got used to it eventually. She had to. Every toaster she owned before she moved down to Austin inevitably developed this otherworldly shriek. One time she attempted to harness the mechanism for good rather than evil. She attached a timer to her toaster to wake herself up in the morning. I can't remember if it worked, and these days—since she moved to Texas and turned into a morning person—Julie's particular variety of the Gomoll Toaster Curse seems to have evolved. One slice of her toast now takes upward of ten to twenty minutes to brown. By the time it's done, it's lunch.

My brother Steve is a highly skilled, highly paid, mechanical engineer who designs automated factories which clean up toxic waste dumps, but he has never conquered the Gomoll Toaster Curse. In the middle of a high-tech kitchen that looks as if it was outfitted

exclusively from the pages of a *Sharper Image* catalog—everything elegant, digital, and seamless—he taught me how to stand over his fancy toaster and watch the toast as it browned on the one side on which the element was working. When it was browned to my satisfaction, he demonstrated how to prematurely pop the bread and turn it over so that the other side could be browned. “It won't ever pop by itself; you have to watch it,” he cautioned, and then he shrugged fatalistically and went to work to design fantastically complex, computerized factories.

Since I've left home, my folks' toaster has taken to physically assaulting my younger brother Danny, popping with no warning and shooting toast in his eyes when he comes over to check on its progress. I wonder what his teachers thought when he showed up at school with a black eye and blamed the toaster. My brother Rick and I both have always owned toasters whose thermostats break down and must be wrestled with in order to release the toast inside them. I'm not surprised anymore when my toasters turn on me. I do get some measure of revenge by forcing bagels into the slots made for thin-sliced bread, which of course only hastens the inevitable breakdown.

Well, that's the Gomoll Toaster Curse.

And now I live with Scott who still owns the toaster his parents bought when they were first married and gave to him when he moved away from home. He hasn't unpacked it and I sympathize with his distrust. I wouldn't want risk losing a prize heirloom either. That toaster wouldn't last a month longer if he brought it into the kitchen and it came under the influence of the Gomoll Toaster Curse.

I hope that the Gomoll Toaster Curse hasn't affected this convention. I apologize if there have been any spontaneous combustions, alarming noises, or burnt-out elements. Thank you for giving me this once-in-a-lifetime chance to be a toastmaster, a master of toast.

