



Plugs & Dottles

Official Newsletter of the Nashville Scholars
of the Three Pipe Problem

1st Quarter - 2024

Jim Hawkins & Dean Richardson, Co-editors

- Established 1979
- Meetings on 3rd Saturday of the month
- [Website](#)
- [Facebook page](#)

We held our final picnic meeting with Gael and Susun Stahl on March 16th at their home. They are moving to Indianapolis in May after almost 60 years in Nashville. This issue of *Plugs & Dottles* is focused on Gael and Susan's impact on the Nashville Scholars.



Bidding Farewell to the Stahls



The Nashville Scholars came close to collapsing in the early 1980s. Our founder, John Shanks III, left Nashville for graduate school, and membership and attendance began to dwindle. Fortunately, **Kay Blocker** kept mailing a newsletter to the list of charter members. Gael and SuSun had been on assignment in Germany, but upon arriving back in town, Gael enthusiastically began to put his energy back into the *Three Pipe Problem*.

(A note from Billy Fields)

Cliches seem to flow when there is a goodbye involved. Phrases like "We will miss you so much" or "I'm not sure how we can get along without you" flow so easily. The phrases flow so easily it sometimes feels disingenuous.

But as the Nashville Scholars of the Three Pipe Problem say goodbye to our dear friends SuSun and Gael Stahl, these phrases and others so similar are well meant but inadequate.

The Stahls, part of the founding parents of the Nashville scion society of the Baker Street Irregulars, shall soon leave our midst for a new adventure in Indiana near lifelong friends. Their departure has been a stunning blow to our close-knit family of truly irregular folks.

(continued on p. 2)

The Stahls are clearly proof that opposites attract. SuSun, a very special lady, hosts a grounded, earthy essence to all she meets. Gael, our retired Franciscan brother, fills the room with soaring ideas of spiritual ideals and hopes as he enters your life. Both, loving, humble and curious, have surrounded the Nashville Scholars with their amazing desire to show love, respect, and hope for others.

Since I first met them in 1987, we have traveled the many roads together with exciting visits to other cities and even a few walks in the woods. Both Donna and I felt adopted almost immediately when we met them.

SuSun desires to be in the open air, hiking, gardening as she generally improves our world. She steers toward folks who might feel left out to make certain their welcome is sincere and whole. As a teacher, she has enlightened our community through her kind instruction to our youth. She used her skills as the gardener at President Andrew Jackson's home, the Hermitage, when she served as "Rachel's Gardener" in that hallowed spot on the grounds. With Donna, she was a mentor of phenomenal knowledge of flora and fauna as they wandered in formal and informal gardens. As a hostess, her doors have always been open to us all. Her home was so very often our home as she lovingly opened her world for us to share.



Gael embraced me as a very "young" Sherlockian back in the '80s. He shared his wisdom on Sherlockian issues but added a touch of politics and journalism as well. We talked of both the Canon and the Tennessee capital doings almost daily as he served as editor of the 3PP newsletter and the *Tennessee Town and Country*, a widely circulated municipal county newspaper. He took me to New York to celebrate the Master's birthday among a new world of Sherlockians I never knew existed. He pushed and pulled me all over the city to make sure the visit was filled to the brim and more.

A time or two I lost him because I couldn't keep up, but he always made sure to come find me and scoop me up to keep me on our path. He opened up the treasures of his life and shared without a second thought.

When the Stahls shared with us their intention to move, it was a gut-punch (another phrase that can be hollow). In this case, it was a painful realization that time moves on and we must as well. I am really challenged to imagine my world without both of them always nearby. They bring comfort and peace to all of us. Speaking for Donna and myself, we painfully can let them go, but cry when we contemplate reality.

Speaking for the Nashville Scholars of the Three Pipe Problem, we officially as the Chief Investigator wish them a new world filled with wonder and excitement. We pray for peace and comfort. We ask for healing and longevity. We shall always hold them in our sweet Sherlockian memories. (continued on p. 3)

Donna and I hope they carry our love and respect with them always. We pray for their family to thrive and soar to new heights.

You see, there are no real words or phrases that exhibit and describe what the Stahls mean to each of the Nashville Scholars. Their generosity will live in our hearts forever and their memories will bring a happy heart to each of us. (March 30, 2024 — Billy Fields)



Gael Stahl's account of the 3PP beginnings [from the website](#).

“At the first meeting on Feb. 19, 1979, twenty-six Sherlockians gathered among the pewter and leather of the Cumberland Club and its Old London atmosphere. They'd been drawn by a three-inch announcement in a local newspaper, The Tennessean. They put their preferred noms (canonical names) and addresses on the register, paid their dues, and received the first newsletter in March.

The second meeting was on May 28 at the Showboat Restaurant and Lounge. By that time, the Baker Street Irregulars had received contacts and recognition in the form of postcards from Julian Wolff, the Giant Rats of Sumatra (Judge Robert Lanier and lawyer Walter Armstrong, BSI), and the Red Circle of Washington, DC (personally from Peter Blau). The Tennessee House of Representatives passed a resolution to commemorate Holmes's 125th birthday.”



A 3PP picnic at the Stahl's — 2019

←→
The first time Hawkins attended a scion meeting at Gael and SuSun Stahl's home, he noticed that the exit off Interstate 40 for the Stahl residence was most interesting: 221B! It was actually erected to guide people to Nashville Shores, a popular recreation facility on Percy Priest Lake, but it fit our purposes perfectly. Later, a group photo was taken with members standing under the exit sign.



←→
**Dear Gael and SuSun,
I have been blessed by your friendship, impressed by your knowledge of all things Sherlockian, and encouraged by your positive and humble example.**

David Hayes

All of us who have known Gael and SuSun over the years have oft-told stories about how the Stahls have influenced us. Not everyone had an opportunity to write a note, but here are a few from our Three-Pipe Problem membership, beginning with the note from David Hayes above.

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**Gael,
Even though Wanda and I are relative newcomers to the Nashville 3-Pipe group, several people, you included, have always generated goodwill with a spirit of generous welcome. Your enthusiasm and thorough knowledge of the Canon have been part of the heart and soul of our group, and it's been a fun experience! You are a skilled writer yourself and a man of wide-ranging literary interests, always making observant points with gusto during our meetings.
The outward manifestation of your inner happiness has simply been a gift to us all. You have solved the most important mysteries in life without even lighting up a pipe!**

Tom & Wanda Vickstrom

One of the most famous accounts in our 3PP history is about the John Bennett Shaw Sherlockian Workshop at the College of William and Mary in 1987, the 100th anniversary of Sherlock Holmes's appearance in print in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* of 1887. Nine of us from Nashville attended the event in Williamsburg, VA. Gael brought a proclamation from Governor Ned McWhorter "*that the people of Tennessee commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of Sherlock Holmes's first appearance in print.*"



Tomalen, Stix, and Shaw (and Stahl)

He organized a photo to mark the event by asking the BSI leaders in attendance to pose. Then he photo-bombed the shot by standing behind the trio.

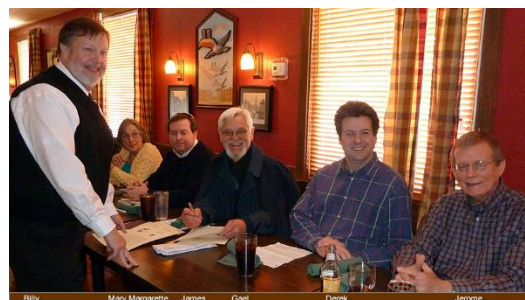
It was just one of those wacky, enthusiastic ideas Mr. Stahl always seemed to come up with at any moment.

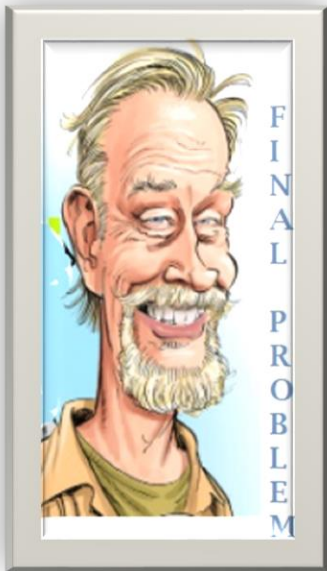


Stahl and Hawkins became friends in 1986 when they met in Gael's office. Both men worked in downtown Nashville: Stahl at the *Town and City* newspaper and Hawkins at the old Baptist Sunday School Board. Hawkins had just moved from Norman, OK, where he had founded the Norman Neruda Scion Society. It was in Gael's office that we started our website and our online discussion group, WelcomeHolmes.

The website has changed over the years, as has our online provider, but Gael will always be present on any site we construct. He has always been the glue that kept us together.

In the photo on the left, Gael, always in the center of things, joins other Nashville Scholars in the (then) annual Christmas feast at McNamara Irish Pub (December 2012). Billy Fields, the Convenor, keeps the conversation lively at all our meetings.





We established a correspondence with *MAD Magazine* artist Tom Richmond, who sent us a Sherlock Holmes line-up with several of the most popular Sherlockian actors on screen. We also engaged Mr. Richmond to send us a sketch of our illustrious “Final Problem,” Mr. Gael Stahl. Here is the result of that commission. It’s not that flattering, but it is authentic. Gael is always a good sport when it comes to our shenanigans.

Obviously, Stahl is much better looking than this cartoon, but it does give you a hint as to why he is considered a “live wire” in our scion society.

Gael,
 You’ve been a (make that THE) stalwart of the Holmes group forever... Thanks so much. Enjoy Indiana.

Bill (Schwartz)

For many years, Gael was the editor of a local political newsletter, writing his stories and taking photographs for the publication. Here, you see an example of his talent from a 2007 issue of the newsletter *Tennessee Town and City*. He knew how to write a story, so when he wrote for our Three-Pipe Problem newsletter, *Plugs and Dottles*, it was read by Sherlockians across the USA and in the UK.

www.TML1.org 10-TENNESSEE TOWN & CITY/JANUARY 15, 2007

Chief Justice Barker brings heart, humor, know-how to Supreme Court

BY GAEL STAHL
 Editor

Mention the name Chief Justice William M. “Mickey” Barker in legal circles, and you’ll hear about a shining example of judicial conservatism in Tennessee. Those who know him well describe the humor he privately brings to his colleagues on the bench. What President Lincoln famously achieved in cabinet meetings with tales, aphorisms and jokes, Barker does at the Tennessee Supreme Court with humor—keeping otherwise potentially contentious discussions collegial and productive.

Barker’s 28 year legal career

Photos by Gael Stahl

nessee Supreme Court decisions are, by and large, final. The U.S. Supreme Court reviews less than 1 percent of state court decisions, so taking the time to think about the practical, global applications of decisions is important. A decision that may at first seem to affect only the plaintiff and the defendant or the state and defendant, may actually have consequences for other litigants and the law generally. To the extent possible, I try to anticipate all the consequences of an opinion before I put my name on it.

I don’t mind telling you that, along the way, all judges make decisions that we later realize were not perfect. On occasion, we have the

Chief Justice Barker is one of the best writers and speakers on the Supreme Court. Commission. He also currently identical with each. One day, we... to the federal bench. Gov. Lamar

Gael,


It is an honor to have the association with such a learned individual.
Thanks for sharing your vast interests and knowledge these many years.

Dick Renfro



The occupants of 221b Baker Street, of Moore Elementary School, are grateful for the Stahls. Because of your love for the great detective, the Great Game took root in Nashville, and the Scholars were born. You two and the Scholars have been a great source of support as we learn to think and act like Holmes to do our best in school. May your Indiana adventures be singular ones!

With warm regards,
Shannon Carlisle and her Sherlockians



Gael,

On a snowy night in December of 1985, you welcomed me into the Nashville Scholars. You remembered Dr Verner from Kentucky when I returned to a meeting two years ago.
Best Sherlockian wishes on your move!!!

Alben Shockley



Gael and SuSun,

Your wisdom and knowledge of all things Sherlockian is exceeded only by your generosity and kindness. I and the rest of the Scholars are forever in your debt. May your new venture be as satisfying for you both as your time here has been for us.

Dean Richardson



Dayton Doings: A Report on the Holmes, Doyle & Friends IX Conference

by Dean Richardson

Dayton's Agra Treasurers can be relied on to prepare an outstanding weekend conference every March in Englewood, Ohio (outside Dayton), and this year's (3/22-23) was true to form.

After a crowded reception Friday evening, the main event began at 8:30 Saturday morning. Guests registered and swarmed the vendor tables, finding various Sherlockian and Doylean treasures, from books to magazines to jewelry, miniature figures, art, and even Irish sweet bread.

At 9:45 came a welcome and orientation by Lorraine Reibert, Chief Inspector of the AT, and Kydall Potts, Chancellor of the Exchequer of same.

First presenter was David Harnois, BSI, on the topic “Setting Up Camp: How I Build a Scene.” His podcast “I Am Lost without My Boswell,” begun in 2014, is dramatizing the entire canon. He described how he prepares an episode, employing voices scattered around the nation as well as himself portraying SH, and demonstrated how he edits and enhances (via sound effects) a recording digitally, as we watched on a large screen. Very interesting.

Kira Settingsgaard, a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor, posed the question, “We Love Sherlock . . . but Would Sherlock Love Us?” She outlined four types of relational styles (Secure, Anxious, Avoidant/Dismissive, and Disorganized/Anxious Avoidant) and considered which one best applies to SH. As descriptive as the terms are, can you deduce which is the one? (Her answer to her own question was a qualified yes.)

Tim Kline talked about games involving Sherlock Holmes, either as a character in the game or as an image suggesting the type of game. He showed many fascinating and intriguing pieces of game art, with examples from Russia, Italy, France, China, and Japan, as well as the US and GB, spanning the past century.

Madeline Quiñones, a print production designer, gave a lively history of Sherlockian podcasts, which began in 2007 with “I Hear of Sherlock Everywhere.” Since that time there have been at least 17 others, although not all have lasted.

After a box lunch, attendees were treated to a playlet, “The Mysterious Adventure of the Syntax” by Enid Langer, performed by David Harnois as Sherlock with a Watson whose alias I did not hear. It was a clever reworking of Abbott and Costello’s “Who’s on First” routine.

Ira Matetsky, BSI, who two years ago at Dayton described Rex Stout’s interactions with the BSI, discussed the appearance of the last six canonical stories (as well as his Professor Challenger novel *When the World Screamed*) in *Liberty Magazine* as well as giving a fascinating history of that popular publication.

George Skornickel, BSI, titled his talk “No Ghosts Need Apply,” Sherlock’s dismissal of the supernatural in “The Sussex Vampire.” Skornickel pointed out references to the supernatural in both canonical and noncanonical stories, especially “The Leather Funnel” (which we read back in 2014), and touched on ACD’s interest in spiritualism.

Max Magee, an aerospace engineer, humorously described the various levels one passes through in “Becoming a Sherlockian,” using Maslov’s Hierarchy of Needs as a model.

Burt Wolder, BSI and cohost of “I Hear of Sherlock Everywhere,” concluded the day’s presentations with an overview of Sir Arthur’s life as portrayed by the author himself in a drawing he titled “The Old Horse.” The drawing, a copy of which was given to each participant in the conference, shows him, as a horse, pulling a wagon piled high with items labeled as various of his experiences (Arctic, drama, historical novels, etc.).



After a break, the day concluded with an informal dinner of barbecue at a nearby restaurant. Other than toasts to the likely canonical suspects, it was a time of casual conversation and winding down after a long and satisfying day.

As always, the events were well planned, the presentations widely varied and engaging, and the schedule well maintained. The only complaint I might make is that my room in the venue, the Quality Inn Dayton Airport (formerly the Clarion Dayton Airport Inn), was a bit run down, with a broken towel rack, a tub that wouldn’t hold water, and some paint peeling from the ceiling. The conference room itself was fine, and the conference well worth any minor inconveniences. You should consider going next year.



Gael and SuSun,

Moving to Nashville in 1985 and meeting you dear folks when directed your way by John Bennett Shaw in a letter to Vickie Smith has been one of the great events in my life. Gael, between you and Shaw I have learned to value and appreciate the richness of the canonical stories about Holmes and Watson, and to enjoy the history of the development of the Baker Street Irregulars.

At one time I thought the stories were just light reading, a way to pass time. How wrong I was! You showed me and all of us how to dig deeper and find the hidden treasures within. You will be living in Indianapolis, but you will be in my heart and in every Sherlockian endeavor I pursue. Thank you for so many wonderful years.

**Friends for life,
Jim Hawkins**



One final word on our friend and inspiration, Gael Stahl, and his tireless helpmate, SuSun. It surely would take some courage and convincing to marry a former priest. SuSun has proven to

be as courageous and spontaneous as her husband. Of course, opposites attract. Gael has always been the boisterous, ready-to-rally-the-troops kind of guy. SuSun is the quiet, determined one. She always gave Gael plenty of leash in public but was ready to reign him in when the situation called for it. They are an extraordinary pair.

I vividly recall the time that several of Gael’s bodily functions stopped due to dehydration and some wrong medicine. As I entered his room at the hospital, I found Gael asleep (or worse) on his bed and SuSun softly crying by his bedside. “He’s dying,” she said to me, barely able to speak. We thought it was the end. But some miraculous doctoring brought him back from the edge, and he pulled out of his near-death dive. In fact, as I visited the next day and while SuSun was out of the room, Gael convinced me to go to the hospital cafeteria and bring him an ice cream bar, one he particularly loved. I did just that, figuring a guy this close to death surely could be granted a last request. I hid the bar in my overcoat pocket, got it to Gael, and we enjoyed an interesting conversation about life and Sherlock Holmes and our journey together over a decade of friendship. (April 3, 2024 — Jim Hawkins)

