

# Your *Country* Neighbor

April, 2016

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**A Magazine for  
Small Towns and  
Rural America**



House Finches are common, and melodious.



Cedar Waxwings pause during migration; Courthouse Square, Auburn, March 5, 2016



LEFT: In several Southeast Nebraska communities, this publication is hand delivered to senior living facilities.

BELOW: The waterfall is picturesque at the winery in Brownville.



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## ***Your Country Neighbor***

*A Voice and a View From the  
Valleys of the Nemaha*

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

### **Writers This Month**

Devon Adams  
Carol Carpenter  
Stephen Hassler  
Merri Johnson  
Lee Nyberg  
Marilyn Woerth

**Thank You!**

### **Your Country Neighbor**

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View Online Version at  
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## **Cover Comments**

I think the Cedar Waxwing is the most exotic bird in Southeast Nebraska. It is frequently seen with Robins in early Spring, because during migration both are attracted to trees with berries, like the crab apple trees surrounding the Nemaha County Courthouse in Auburn, Nebraska. If you google “Robins and Waxwings” you will find more facts about this interesting camaraderie.

The song of the House Finch reminds me of the Wren’s.

This ‘high rise’ in Nebraska City is one of the more recent destinations for this publication. Thank you residents, for your appreciation.

The waterfall at the Whiskey Run Creek Winery in Brownville, is one of the earlier signs of Spring.

Have fun in April!

Stephen

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## A Different Way of Thinking

Stephen Hassler

Recently I was visiting a friend at a home for seniors. It was one of those rare, warm days before the first of Spring, so we decided to have our conversation outside in the sunshine. There were a few small trees around the perimeter of the courtyard; the largest was a crab apple tree which would soon become a "red-bud" in bloom. We sat in metal, outdoor chairs in the sunny center of the courtyard.

We had not been there long, when a woman with white hair approached in a wheelchair from a door on the other side of the courtyard. Seated, but 'stepping along', she slowly rolled toward us, her hands folded in her lap. She paused as I moved a chair out of her way, so she could move into our 'circle'. "Is that going to bloom?" she asked, pointing at the nearby crab apple tree. I said that I thought it would within a few weeks. Then I asked her if she knew my friend. She looked at Ron for a few seconds before quietly replying, "I don't know." Ron mentioned that he thought they ate in different dining rooms. After introducing Ron, I asked her name. "Clare," she said. She spoke low, her voice an even tone. Then Ron informed her, "He does the Country Neighbor." She replied, "Oh! I used to get that, but they don't do it anymore." I said that I still do it and that I would bring her a copy next month. Ron, always prepared, had a current copy in the 'seat compartment' of his walker, and gave it to her. She commented favorably on the photos on the front page, especially the Robin.

At some point in our conversation she brought up her age. "I'm in my nineties," she softly spoke. "I'm almost 100. I don't know how close. They'll tell me on my birthday." I smiled inside when she said that. Once again she pointed at the crab apple tree. "Is that going to bloom?" Again, I said I thought it would in a few weeks.

Clare rolled over to a shaded area on the patio. She didn't want to get sunburn. Politely, Ron and I moved our chairs as well, but I remained on the edge of the shade because I wanted to sit in the sun. She noticed some rust on the metal patio table. "They should paint that or it will rust," she said, "I always liked to paint things. Things look so much better when they're painted." She looked around at the trim on the building. "It looks so nice when it's painted."

An attendant appeared at the door where Clare had entered, informing her of 'lunchtime'. "Oh, I better go," she said, turning her chair around. I said that it was nice meeting her. Half way to the door I heard her reply, "It was nice meeting you too."

It was time for Ron's lunch as well, so we headed back toward the entrance on 'his side' of the courtyard..

I glanced at the crab apple tree as we walked past. I'll be back when it's in bloom, and make sure Clare sees it.



## Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

My daughter-in-law posted on Facebook, Saturday March 19, "Go home Mother Nature you are drunk." I don't know what she was expecting. It was March and Mother Nature loves to play Russian roulette in the Midwest in the spring. I have noticed that when we have a really mild, late winter, well, you can just about expect a blast from the past before the last (possible) frost date. Of course that frost date is relevant only to the area you live in; for instance I live in a zone 5 and Kansas City is zone 4. Of course that means they get spring blooms a week or two before we do. Anyway, all of us here in zone 5 can expect the possibility of a frost or snow until mid May around the 10th or 15th.

Today, blood root and Lenten roses are blooming in the woodland. Forsythia, daffodils, hyacinth, crocuses and windflowers are putting a smile on my face. I planted my spinach, lettuce, and kale in the salad bowl garden box mid March. Then I started some broccoli and Brussels sprouts inside about the same time. Green onions and beets will go in soon, and then there will be a wait for the peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, and squash. My husband has weeded the strawberry/asparagus bed. I can almost taste them both.

Steve was cleaning out the pond waterfall and was not thrilled with the latest surprise. A mass of root material has grown under the lining and up the waterfall and into his bio filter area. He's had to chop it up to remove it thus pushing back the date for turning on the pond. Oh well, now that he knows this is happening he will keep more of an eye on it and look for a safe solution.

Do you know what I hate the most about Easter in March? It leaves little to look forward to in April except cleaning out more of the flower beds. So why did I develop a new one this fall? I must have felt a few minutes of energetic youth or regrettably, insanity. And I plan to enlarge that bed this spring at least that's what I told myself last fall.

Hubby and grandsons are planning on putting a zip line over the gully. My young nieces have put their two cents in on how to build it as well, everyone is an engineer around here. I play in the dirt.

Today in church I prayed for all my family, those with us and those that are not. I also got a little selfish and prayed for more energy and less arthritis. I hope that's okay with Him.

Been thinking about the elections a lot lately, feeling depressed. Why can't they all just live by the Ten Commandments? Sure would make my burden a lot less. I have also been thinking that the Midwest is changing. Use to be we were all so friendly. The mass migrations to the big towns seem to be changing that lately. I mean here in my little county people are still friendly but when I go to the mega cities seems like friendliness is a hard commodity to find. I wonder if people are losing themselves in all that noise and business.

Think I will unplug this week, kick back and enjoy the peace and quiet where life is good. Hopefully, there will be a bit of sun on my face as well. Please Mother Nature no more drinking.

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HIDDEN WINGS

The subtle rustle of feathers  
makes ripples in sweet spring  
air. Busy birds are building nests  
and waiting for the eggs. Summer  
is coming, and it will bring long light  
and green growth. Hidden among  
the criss-cross patterns of wrens  
and jays, cardinals and finches,  
hawks and doves, and the flashes  
of blue indigo, are other wings.  
They are always there, waiting to  
fly to those who need help. When  
a fawn steps too close to danger,  
something bumps it out of trouble.  
A newborn calf watches a figure  
flap his iridescent wings to scatter  
coyotes, before his mother can find  
the strength to charge at them.  
A person stumbles from a totaled  
car, with no injuries, and he feels  
the caress of wings on his cheek.  
A child is gripped by strong arms  
that grab him before the speeding  
truck makes contact, but bystanders  
only see the boy tumble backwards.  
There are forces in the spaces  
between what we can see,  
and they are always close enough  
to help when we can't help ourselves.

DECISIONS

Thoughts bubble and seethe  
inside a troubled mind, and  
no solution seems simple.  
There is only confusion when  
emotions clash. Wants and  
needs and former choices come  
together in a bloody battle. Add  
to the mix delusions that cloud  
our judgement, and our minds  
can manufacture reasons that  
seem to make sense. So we  
make a decision. The hard part  
is driving down the road into the  
future, hoping we haven't laid  
out land mines that will blow  
apart our hopeful plans.

Poetry by Devon Adams

SKY DANCERS

Eagles soar and flirt and mate  
in circled spirals, twisted flips  
and daring dives. With bodies  
made for flying and for killing,  
their streamlined muscles and  
telephoto vision also let them  
play in games that humans can't  
imagine. The sky belongs to  
them in ways that even other  
birds can't own.

FAST LIVES

Every year the bulbs  
explode with stalks  
that punch up through  
the soil to grab the heat  
and light. Flowers form,  
from memories written  
in the roots, and drink  
the rain and touch the  
bees that come to kiss  
them. Then they fade  
and fall away, leaving  
only perfumed ghosts.

DO I KNOW YOU?

Faces used to be familiar when  
school was every day, and tomorrow  
didn't mean forever. Then time took  
us on a fast train ride. Now we meet  
on the street, or at reunions, and we  
aren't sure. Forget the bodies, which  
have changed too much to care. But  
underneath our masks of time, we are  
still the children that we've always been.

SUN DAYS

The long sun is coming back  
again, and sleepers will awaken  
early. Evenings will be lit with  
lovely glows that make the stars  
impatient for their turn to shine.  
Another planet couldn't be much  
more different than summer is  
from winter. The soft shell pink  
that arches overhead after heat  
and storms, diffused with colors  
reflected from the earth, is far away  
from frozen skies set with sun dogs  
howling at a cold-fired star.

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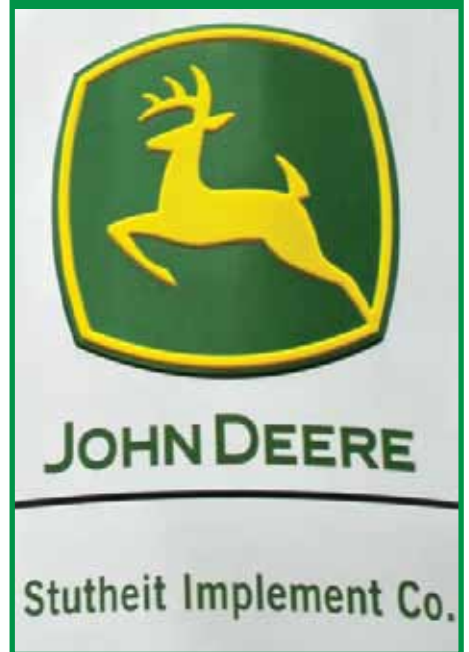
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Waxwing with crab apple 'berry'.



I'm beginning to notice more green out in the country.



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## Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

Moss Creek Plantation, Bluffton, S.C.: I feel like a foreign correspondent, writing to you all from the Atlantic Coast of South Carolina. Hubby and I arrived here two days ago for our official retirement celebration trip.

Our daughter and son-in-law live nearby, so this area isn't completely new to us. But making an extended visit is a new experience. You know the feeling you get on vacation: your everyday world ceases to exist. Even if you just stay home, it feels as if you don't have a job at all. You are totally free to spend your days however you choose.

You can just "be in the moment." At least that's the theory. Hubby's thinking is still under the influence of planning for the next project or deadline. Yesterday, we were sitting at a sidewalk café just soaking up the warm air when hubby said, "I have to remember to get signed up for Medicare when we get home." I ask you, is that the sort of conversation couples are having in those resort commercials?

I shouldn't give him too hard a time about practical thinking, I guess. I'm the one who had misgivings about being gone during peak spring gardening time. We got most of the yard clean-up done before we left. We even planted lettuce and spinach, anticipating that it will be ready when we get home. But, we're going to miss out on the asparagus. Neighbors will get the benefit of that. And I guess we won't plant potatoes this year. But that leaves room to spread out the tomatoes and maybe even plant something new.

I'm missing out on enjoying my own daffodils and iris and crab apple and redbud blossoms. And I think this year will be the best yet for my service berry and dogwood blossoms. Sigh. I guess the azaleas and magnolias and wisteria and all sorts of other blooming trees and shrubs here will just have to do....

Our home-away-from-home here is located in a development that includes salt water marshes and ponds as well as oodles of mature loblolly pines, palms and live oaks. Sitting on the patio yesterday we discovered three bright green tree(?) frogs perched up under the patio umbrella, along with several geckos and gray squirrels to entertain us. A short walk yielded sightings of herons, anhingas, a turtle, wharf crabs, and even a small alligator. I plan to spend a lot of time with my binoculars and nature field guides.

By the time our sojourn here is over, we'll probably feel right at home. We may even regret that it's time to turn the car around back west again. But I know that once we cross the Mississippi River, the cornfields and open spaces will be welcome sights. We won't just feel at home, we'll be home.

But until then, I plan to "be" in South Carolina. Happy Spring, y'all!!



# Photography & Poetry by Carol Carpenter



## April

April seduces me  
fingers of wind  
comb the sky  
dressed in blue and pink  
the sunrise writes her poem  
while in the west, the sudden  
danger of purple lightning crackles

As I stand in the garden  
and face the wet wind  
my hands full of daffodils  
their goblets fresh  
with rain  
and I  
succumb

## June

June blooms  
joyous and lusty green  
twigs burdened by dark leaves droop  
rain glittered pearls drip from serrated edges

The wind gathers  
birdsong of orioles  
and buntings  
Great blue herons claim  
the pond fringe beneath  
scolding red-winged blackbirds

Lazy daylight lingers  
hanging feathers  
under the Milky Way  
Campfire and grill smoke  
drape across the night  
while barred owls  
hunt constantly for  
their rapidly  
growing twins



## May

Drink of live water  
and wild plums blooming,  
stand between the singing trees  
where bright birdsong breezes  
pour over the hills  
between branches of light.

In a torrent, an old tree catches  
in the culvert, overflowing the road  
and I catch a crappie at  
the end of the driveway  
while the cats chase crawfish  
flushed from their underground huts.

In the golden mist, a rainbow  
droops from the bottom  
of the clouds. The olive green  
finches turn gold and  
the house wrens  
begin to warble.



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# Alzheimer's Affects Us All



## Dementia is not the same as Mild Cognitive Impairment

By Lee Nyberg

Did you forget where you put your keys lately? How about your glasses? You've probably had a few secret conversations with yourself about how "with it" you still are and I don't mean "hip." I'm talking about the nagging fears many people have when they believe they are becoming forgetful.

Most adults in the 60+ group are concerned about developing cognitive difficulties which could lead to dementia. These understandable fears may in part be due to concerns about hereditary forms of dementia, as well as the growing numbers of parents, spouses, and friends living with dementia. In 2014, around 12% of Nebraska's seniors had some form of dementia. This percentage is expected to climb to 21% by 2025.

Normal aging is not helping the situation. From our 20's and on, mental function slows, we forget more, pay attention less, and take longer to think. Despite that, we can still learn and function at very high levels.

Consistent changes in thinking ability make people nervous with good reason. Mayo Clinic recommends a neurological examination if you or others notice:

- Increased forgetfulness
- Great difficulty multi-tasking
- Inability to follow a movie or a conversation
- Forgetting important appointments or events
- Decision making overwhelms you

These changes could be signs of Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI), which is altered cognitive ability beyond normal aging, but not so extreme as to be considered dementia. Important to note about MCI:

- It does not necessarily lead to developing dementia; only half of those with Mild Cognitive Impairment progress to dementia
- It is reversible when caused by medication, a vitamin B-12 deficiency, thyroid abnormalities, or depression
- Since doctors believe much of MCI is caused by vascular problems, they recommend addressing artery diseases, blood clots, and aneurisms to slow the progression of MCI
- Researchers believe a healthy lifestyle, including exercise, a Mediterranean-type diet, and continued learning, helps people maintain brain health and cognitive functioning.

People with MCI work and function very well in their daily activities, and are able to manage their own affairs and money. To help cope:

- Get enough sleep. If you have trouble sleeping, have a sleep study done. (National Library of Medicine confirms most older adults have trouble sleeping due to a variety of causes, including heart disease, pain, and/or bladder issues.)
- Use a calendar and carry it with you.
- Practice remembering; tell yourself what you're going to do before and during the action. (I am going to call John now. Now I am calling John.)
- Store things in routine places so you can find them; declutter
- Practice focusing and paying attention; such as listening and connecting during an introduction and turning down extraneous noise while reading instructions
- Challenge your brain; learn a new language or discuss books with friends
- Eat for brain health; choose the Mediterranean or MIND diet
- Exercise more: ask your doctor how much exercise you should be getting and then do it.
- Maintain a healthy weight to avoid diabetes and hypertension. Both conditions are connected to cognitive declines.

Make the most of your brain health with diet, exercise, and mental engagement. Your mind is worth it, isn't it?

Lee Nyberg seeks to help families and those living with Alzheimer's through education and her company, Home Care Assistance. 402-763-9140

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