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# Country Neighbor



April 2006



### April is about...

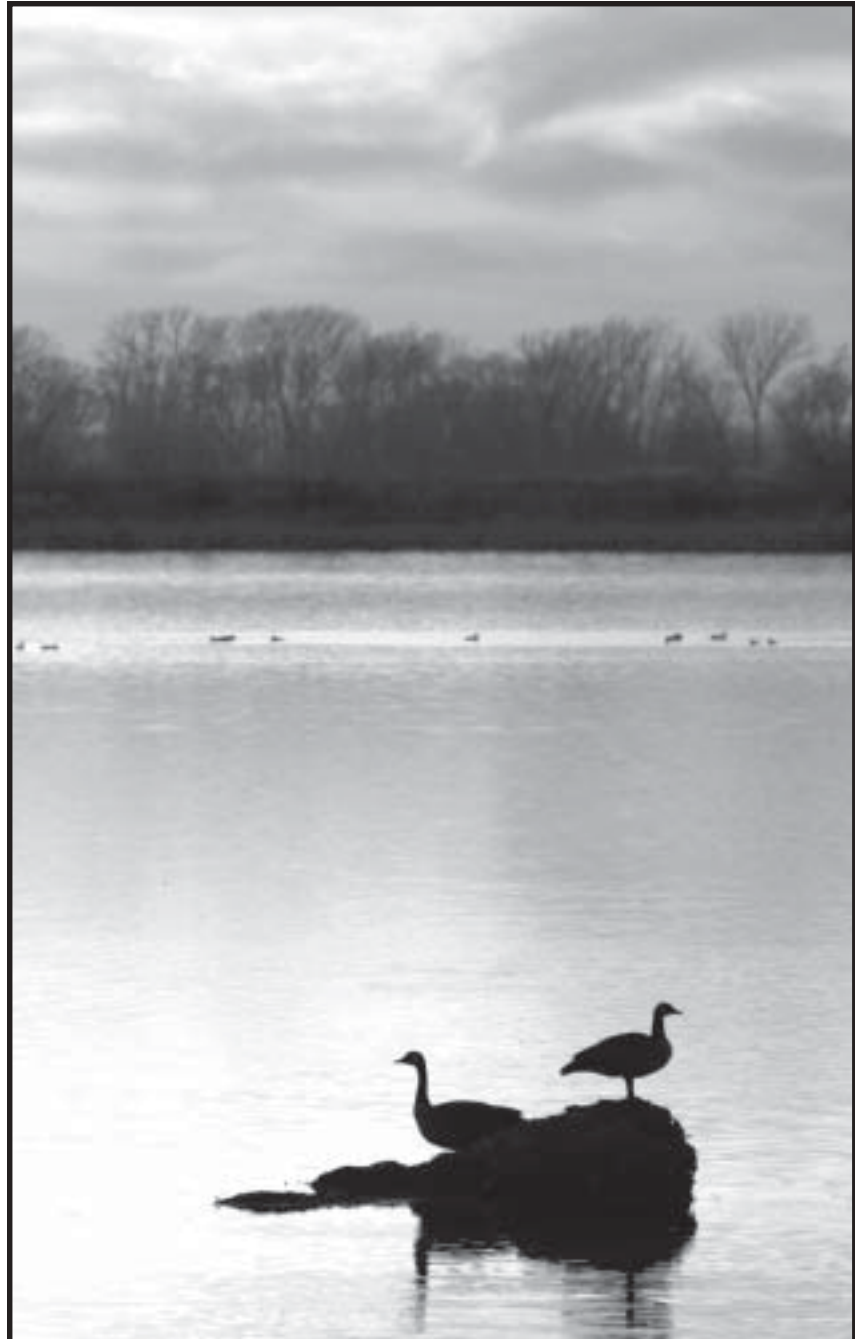
**April showers?** With the mild weather we have been having, we were a little surprised in to see white stuff on the first day of Spring. Old Man Winter waited until the last minute, and seemed to say, "Enough of these 60 and 70 degree sunshine days; I have a reputation to live up to!"

April is also about Bea's bedding plants, Roger's tomatoes, Ron's vineyard, Joe's retirement, and more writers for *Your Country Neighbor*. Their messages are for you!

## *Your Window with a Country View.*

### Inside This Month

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Serenity at dusk.

### Color Photos

at

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Your Country Neighbor, LLC publishes two periodicals. One is *Your Country Neighbor* which is delivered to the 4-corner area of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. The other, in publication since November of 2005, is *The Nemaha County Voice*. Some of your favorite writers for *Your Country Neighbor* also write articles for the 'Voice'. Subscription form is on page 15. And there are pictures like this in color!


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**COUNTRY  
NEIGHBOR**

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Thank you!

Your Country Neighbor  
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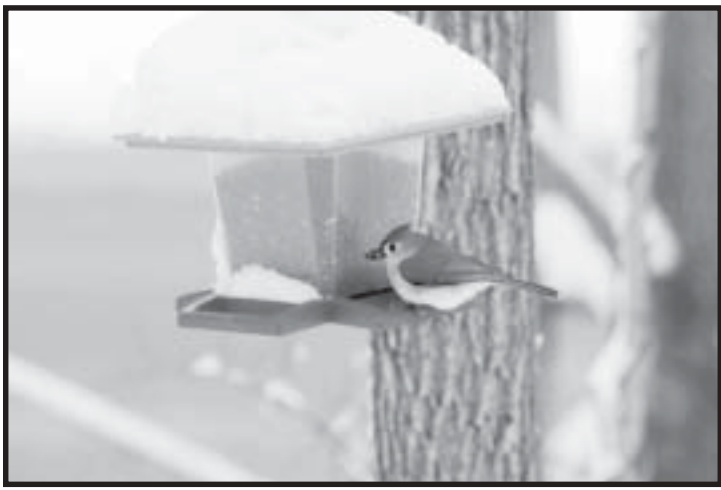
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## Window on Fifth Street

A long-awaited snowfall arrived just in time to allow Old Man Winter to save face. From here on out, any moisture we will receive will probably be rain, so I am happy with the ‘snow bird’ photos I was lucky to get just outside my window on Fifth Street, and I am thankful that one of my printers allows me to publish pictures in color in *The Nemaha County Voice*. I especially enjoy sharing photos of wildlife, and that includes wildflowers along country roads and the Steamboat Trace.

With Springtime comes long-awaited wildflowers, and I look forward to revealing the beauty of the world around us in the form of images recorded while on my country travels in the nearby corners of four states. You are probably too busy or otherwise unable to get out as much as I do, so let me bring you the pictures of this beautiful world. It’s even beautiful in black and white.

It may be hard to appreciate familiar surroundings, especially if you don’t travel much. It may be a ‘grass is greener elsewhere’ thing. Although the ocean beach is a desirable place to live, there are few bird varieties, and hardly any flowers. Mountain country does not have the wildflowers in the numbers we do here in the Midwest. And even with the abundance of animals and birds in the mountains, the migrations still come through here. We see a variety of waterfowl that few experience anywhere else in the world. The desert has a beauty of its own, but few want to live there.

From the very beginning, *Your Country Neighbor’s* mission has been to help its readers appreciate their midwestern neighborhood. I believe the biggest growth in appreciation has been for me. And I owe it all to my window on Fifth Street.

**PEGGY KUSER**

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## “No Foolin’...”

by  
Ann Onymous

April 1<sup>st</sup>

It’s the very best day of the year. Springtime is finally here, and there’s a nothing-can-stop-me-now scent in the air. You can be as carefree and outrageous as you want to be, and all is forgiven with two simple words: April Fools!

This is the day when a young man can propose to his gal without fear of rejection or loss of dignity. A smart gal can give him an answer, too, then change her mind if necessary—all in the same day. No fussin’ or cussin’ about it.

“April Fools, honey. April Fools!”

It is a wonderful day, and it covers a multitude of sins. And pranks. And no-no’s.

I have to confess that I’m the most reviled person on April the first. I am shameless and my reputation is deplorable. For days—even weeks, beforehand—dire warnings circulate amongst my friends and family. They think they’re prepared. “Look out for you-know-who,” they say.

When the day comes, they wait expectantly—eyeing my movements with suspicion, analyzing everything I say. Suckers! They are ripe for the picking. From then on, every word I speak—innocent or not—becomes a joke in reverse.

“Oh no!” I say. “You missed mailing that important letter, and the mailman just came.”

“Ha Ha! April Fools on you, too!”

“No, really,” I say mildly, pointing out the window at the retreating mail carrier.

“It’s true. No foolin’.”

The victim is crestfallen, of course. A reverse joke is hard to take. Much worse than the real thing. It matters not how grandiose or how trivial the reverse joke is, it catches them off guard every time.

“Oh my!” I say. “Look out at the garden. The cabbage is finally sprouting.”

“Yeah, right. Tell me another one.”

“As a matter of fact,” I say, “I just heard on the news that eating cabbage may help us fight off the Bird Flu. The flu’s spreading throughout the world, you know. Some experts say when the virus mutates, it could kill off a billion people. A billion!”

“Hey! That’s nothing to joke about.”

“Who’s joking? It’s the absolute truth.”

They stare at me with a deer-caught-in-the-headlights look in their eyes.

After a few more rounds of this kind of talk, they visibly begin to wilt...or else they go completely mad. Either way is fine with me. By the end of the day, they give me the what for, and then we’re all happy.

Hey! Try this sometime, will you?

Go to the store, and when the clerk isn’t looking, drop a \$20 bill on the floor.

“Well, looka there,” you say. “A twenty on the floor! Who could’ve dropped that?”

“Uh...” The clerk’s eyes get big and he starts patting his back pockets. “Hmmm. I think maybe...I might’ve lost that.”

“Really!”

“Oh yeah. I’m sure I did.”

“Well, maybe so,” you say gently, scooping the \$20 bill back into your wallet.

“And maybe not. Happy April Fools’ Day.”

I’ve only had one of my jokes backfire on me. It was a long time ago and I don’t remember the details. I just recall getting out of my relatives’ car and walking up to the door of a house to play a wonderful prank. As soon as I knocked, the carload of hooting, tooting relatives drove off and left me sputtering on a stranger’s doorstep. It was ingenious. I laughed harder than anybody. I’m still in awe.

You know, this year’s Fools’ Day could be the Granddaddy of them all. It happens to fall on a weekend, this time. Just imagine the mayhem that could take place!

I think I’ll stir up a little mayhem of my own, this year. Maybe I’ll elope with my Sweetie, or something. He’s been threatening to kidnap me for several weeks, now. Wouldn’t that confound the hootin’, tootin’ relatives! They gave up on the idea of us ever getting married a long time ago.

Hmmm. An April Fools’ elopement? Sounds intriguing. This might actually work. I haven’t breathed a word to anyone—nobody but you, that is. And you won’t tell. It’ll be our little secret—between you and me and a few thousand others.

Of course, I know what you’re thinking. You won’t know if this is a joke, a reverse joke, or the real McCoy. And come to think of it, I won’t know, either. Not until my boyfriend shows up on my doorstep on April Fools’ Day...or **doesn’t** show up, as the case might be.

Oh dear. This could get crazy. But any way you look at it, this is going to be a good one. Really good.

No foolin’.



New Community Building in Morrill, Kansas



## Woman with a Mission (or Three)

by Penny Zeller

Nan Bramhall, sole owner of Elsie Grace's, is on a definite mission!

Visitors to the Frankfort, Kansas, shop are greeted with the smells of hot coffee and sweet chocolate, a sense of warmth and friendliness, and a spring-flower-covered gazebo where wind chimes play an inviting tune. Browsing through the nooks and crannies of the building lead one to the kitchen corner, filled with cookbooks, gadgets, and Elsie Grace's own brand of dry food mixes; homemade fudge; antiques; a Bear Room (Boyd's of course!); gift items of all shapes and sizes for people of both genders and all ages; and country quilts, linens, and curtains.

Nan started in the dry foods business in 1993 and for many years operated a restaurant just down the street from the current store. "Homemade pies were my signature," explained Nan. "So I started making packaged pie crusts, added dips and gingerbread, all this while working a full-time job as a dietary manager.

"Then in 1999 I purchased The Gift Box from Margie Hacker; changed the name of the shop to match my dry mixes, Elsie Grace's, in honor of my Grandma Tilley; began expanding the gift portion of the business, and things have just exploded since then."

And exploded they have. On the dry foods side, Elsie Grace's products are now sold wholesale by road reps in Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Iowa, Wisconsin, North and South Dakota, and the Northeastern United States. In January of this year, 60 new stores were added to the distribution list and Nan and her staff of five full and part-time employees ship an average of 300 packages a week to both shops and individuals who purchase off the Internet.

The physical gift shop, now in two buildings and an upstairs, sees customers from Manhattan, Topeka, Marysville and Washington, Kansas; across the border from Nebraska and at some point has seen someone from every state.

"More importantly, Frankfort residents are very supportive," adds Nan.

"I just wanted to make a place that people would want to come to, it just keeps growing; I think I have an obsession."

Nan's 'obsession' comes partially from her heart and partially from a need to prove someone very close to her wrong.

"Four years ago I was in conversation with my husband Ron. He told me the store was a hobby for me. I was not worrying about paying the bills or the amount of effort it was going to take to make it a success. He made the comment that I 'would never be able to survive down there (at the store)' on my own. He knew this store was in my heart and I think he knew he had to 'nudge' me - use a little reverse psychology - to help me be successful." Thus, Nan is now on a threefold mission.

"I have a mission to prove to myself and to Ron that I can do it; I want Elsie Grace's to succeed; and, I want to help keep my hometown of Frankfort alive.

Nan's marketing phrase for Elsie Grace's is "once you visit, you'll be hooked." After looking into the nooks and crannies of both the shop and Nan's life, I know I am.

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## ELSIE GRACE'S

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Bill Myers & Shelia O'Neil work to package dry food mixes in the kitchen area at Elsie Grace's. These include pie crusts, soups, dips, and cookies. Come in and ask about the new "Drunken Chicken Rub."

***Mention this ad & receive a 20% discount! (Antiques excluded)***

## ELSIE GRACE'S

123 North Kansas Ave, Frankfort, KS 66427

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# Pets in Biz



Kathy is holding two of the hundreds of baby chicks sold so far during "Chick Days" at Orscheln Farm & Home in Auburn, Nebraska. It is likely hundreds more will be sold between now and June.



## The Hometown Touch

by Penny Zeller

The sign says Brickhouse Liquor and Party Shop, but anyone expecting just a liquor store is in for a surprise. This Axtel, Kansas, enterprise officially opened on October 1, 2004, and has filled many voids the small town had in products, including liquor, flowers and plants, and many gift and party items. But more importantly it has also become a community effort.

"In the afternoons the shop is operated by local community members and then the evening hours, which allow everyone to shop, are filled by family and friends. The products offered are also community driven and the Brickhouse has become an outlet for other community-produced products.

"Jared Koch displays and sells his handmade furniture here and soon we will be offering pencil drawings by local Axtell artist Val Schmitz," continued Ronnebaum.

The wedding planning and rental side has also helped others in the community. While the Ronnebaum's can provide the flowers, decorations, and advice on colors and other wedding arrangements, they subcontract other aspects such as being able to set the couple up with a cake maker, a DJ to provide the music for the dance and even a photographer.

"Several of us have come together (in business) and I think this is what it will take to see continued success."

One thing the Brickhouse prides itself on and one that Deb will come straight out and say is that, "we are not a Wal-Mart and we do not want to be." In explanation of this comment Ronnebaum says at the Brickhouse you'll find reasonable and competitive pricing on items but you'll find something more important – a 'hometown touch.' "Whether we are helping you create a gift basket for a friend or family member, working with you on a wedding or a child's birthday party, or you have simply come in for some beer and chips, you will hopefully get a sense that we are a part of your community, we want you to feel welcome and at home here and we are going to do our best to make you a happy customer."

Mary is shown holding Curly, her favorite counter assistant at "Mary's Emporium" in Brownville, Nebraska.



Maynard loves the attention he gets 'keeping store' at "The Added Touch Flowers & Gifts", in Syracuse, NE.

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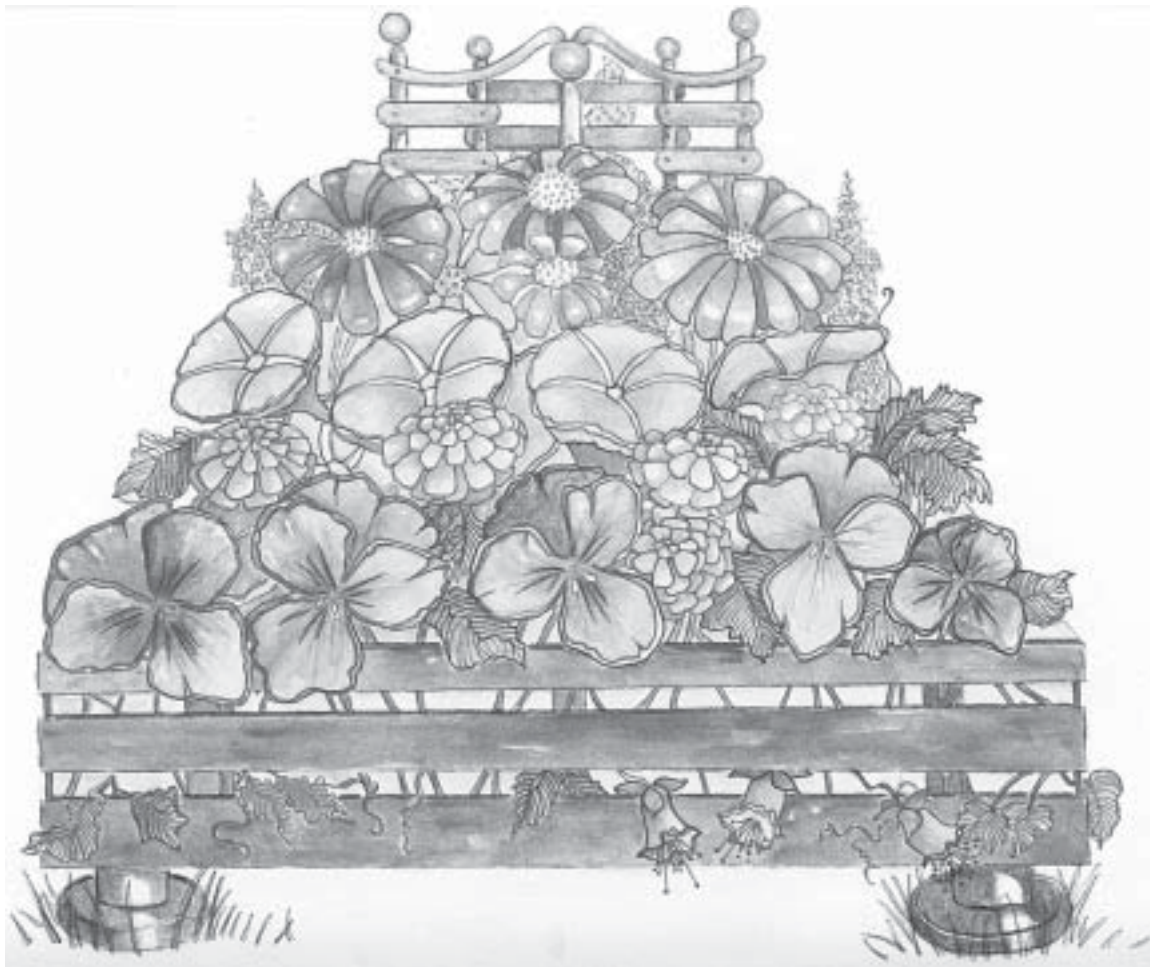
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**“Bea’s Flower Buzz”**  
**“Bedding Plants – Fast Food for Gardens”**  
 by Bea Patterson

Remember planting seeds? Remember waiting half the summer before they started to bloom?

Anxious gardeners don’t have to wait anymore. These days, large numbers of bloom-ready “bedding plants” are available.. For the price of an inexpensive four-pack of “bedding plants,” a garden, border, sidewalk, porch, planter, or container can go from no color to color, bare to blooming, instantly filled with pretty posies and greenery before the weather hardly gets warm – instant gratification.

Availability is no longer a problem either. Practically every place we already drive to now has bedding plants for sale. Grocery stores sell plants – because they are edible? Pharmacies sell plants – because they are medicinal? Hardware stores sell plants – because gardens need outside watering faucets? I can understand florists selling plants – at least flowers are their business, although how to grow them probably isn’t. Just drive up, make your selection, take them home, plant them, and voilla – instant color - fast food for gardens. The Pick-Me-Up Greenhouse partners prefer to believe that patronizing an actual garden store makes more sense (knowledgeable clerks), and easy stop and shop is still an option.

Some may ask how I would define “bedding plants.” Bedding plants are generally annuals that are born and bred to last one growing season. One can sprinkle in early blooming perennials, but then they are spent until next spring. So “bedding plants” are defined and selected on the basis of their ability to bloom more or less consistently throughout the spring and summer and into fall, hopefully. Typically, they aren’t used to **fill** a garden but to **fill-in** a garden, added accents among bigger plants or as transitional color between plants blooming at different times, or fillers in small places (often still in their pots), or to provide color while bulbs or other plants are gradually filling in the garden.

Just to throw in a little confusion, some annuals reseed themselves and so grow the next season, or they are hardy enough and the winter is mild enough that the plant doesn’t die and they overwinter. But, I wouldn’t count on that happening in our zone very often.

What should you look for? Always look for healthy plants and have some knowledge of what to expect from specific plants. Are they sun or shade lovers? Do they like sandy soil? Do they like morning sun but sun protection in the afternoon (when the day is the hottest – so means plant them on the east side of the house)? Do they thrive bunched up with other plants or do they prefer their space? When selecting flowers in early spring, remember these are usually the annuals that like cooler weather to begin with, and that’s why they are blooming right now. Although they will bloom throughout the growing season to some degree, most of these varieties will thrive again when the weather gets cooler in later summer or if we have a cool summer. Pansies are an example, as are Dahlberg daisies and allyssum. So don’t give up on them just because they slow down through the hottest part of the summer. Just plant other colorful, warmth-loving annuals amongst them or let the taller perennials provide some protection until then.

On the other hand, a few featured spring annuals will bloom early, but really thrive when the weather gets warmer, like marigolds and rose moss (portulacca). I have come to realize that the hardy and very popular petunia has its quirks along these lines. Petunias are forcibly encouraged to be blooming by the start of the season, but then they languish and get leggy. If you have the courage to prune them back rather severely when you first get them, which allows the plant to bush out and regrow during the cooler part of the spring, you’ll be rewarded by the time the weather gets warm. The petunias will have had time to become reestablished and really pop. And, try as I do, I haven’t found a petunia that likes (thrives in) shade.

Hanging baskets, too, need to be selected with the idea in mind that just because they are blooming in April, doesn’t mean all plants in the basket are going to thrive all summer. Plan on replacing some of the plants at some point to keep the basket looking fresh. Geraniums can’t hardly be beat, though, but if you are tired of the red geraniums (gorgeous and classic), try another color or unusual hybrids (simple to fancy blooms, variegated greens to leaves with color or ruffles).

A Sunday afternoon feature new to the Pick-Me-Up Greenhouse this year will be the “Build It Yourself” option. Folks can bring their pots and/or containers (or you can pick from our selection), your potting soil (or we’ll sell you some good quality potting soil), select plant material to meet your needs and color palettes (from our shelves, mixing and matching, getting one or six, etc.), and pot everything right there in our new potting shed area. Fast Food for the Garden(er). What could be easier than that!

Oddly, as I sit writing this piece, snow is drifting down on the already white covered landscape outside my studio window. But I know spring is just around the corner because the robins are home, the daffodils and tulips are four inches above the ground (some blooming), the bud bumps on trees are showing, and the brown ground is growing a green beard.

I know you are out looking for signs of spring, too, so keep thinking flowers - those wonderful colors, that special smell, getting our hands in the dirt.... ah-h-h.

For lucky me, all of that wonderful plantness is super concentrated when the greenhouse gets packed full of plant material, and then I get to open the door and take it all in. On warm, rainy days (water gently pit-patting on the glass roof), and it’s quiet, I enjoy just sitting there among the hanging baskets and other plants and imagine what it must have been like in the Garden of Eden.

How’s your garden growing?  
 Bea Patterson  
 bp15624@alltel.net

**Pick-Me-Up Greenhouse**  
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Beautiful Hanging Baskets  
 Unusual Perennials  
 Healthy Bedding Plants  
 Water & Shade Plants  
 Memorial Day Baskets  
 Potting Soil

# Gardening Thoughts from Nemaha Gardens

by Roger Moerer

## Thinking tomatoes!

Which varieties and why? How many to plant and when? How many plantings? What to use for fertilizer, weed, disease and pest control?

### First, a brief history of the tomato.

Tomatoes originated in western South America (now Peru area) thousands of years ago and grew wild on long vining plants with very small fruits. As the inhabitants migrated north through Central America and into North America, tomatoes went with them. Different tomatoes became crossed and were hybridized/domesticated having larger fruits. A hybrid is the crossing of to varieties whether accidentally or on purpose. Tomatoes were found to be raised by the Native Americans when the Spaniards came to the new world in the 1500's and seeds were taken back to Europe. The Germans thought they were of the nightshade plants and would be turned into werewolves if they ate them. Tomatoes later were brought back to the American Colonies and were known to have been served at Thomas Jefferson's table with French fries.

American seed companies in the mid 1800's started cross breeding for better varieties for marketing to consumers, but marketing of tomatoes didn't really get started until canning and juicing came into play. In the 1920's Joseph Campbell found a market for canned tomatoes and made millions. As the consumer markets grew and fresh tomato demand grew for a year-round product, commercial growers started picking mature green tomatoes (when tops turned from dark green to light green), then shipped and ripened by spraying with ethylene (a natural product produced by fruits and vegetables) but as tomatoes ripened they became soft and didn't have the shelf life desired by large chain super markets, so the process of "tweaking" began. Tomatoes on the vine naturally soften as they ripen, but by "tweaking" (deactivating the softening gene,) tomatoes ripen on the vine and stay firm/solid indefinitely.

All modern tomatoes have been crossed/hybridized at one time or another. For an example, the Brandywine, OTV is a natural cross between a yellow brandywine and an unknown red tomato. There are 5 other strains of Brandywine tomatoes.

The definition of heirloom is an item passed from one generation to another for 50 years or more, so Heirloom tomatoes could be either open pollinated or hybrids.

### My choices to plant this year:

My choices were based first of all on quality, delicious real tomato taste, size, smoothness, roundness, crack resistance, disease resistance, drought tolerance, some for early maturity and cold tolerance, some new varieties and one test variety.

Hybrid disease resistant terminology for tomatoes is ( V ) verticillium wilt, ( F ) fusarium wilt, 3 F's would mean all three strains, ( N ) nematodes, ( T ) tobacco mosaic virus, ( A ) alternaria.

Determinate plants have vines that make little or no growth once fruit is set and have a limited production time. Indeterminate vines keep growing and setting fruit throughout the season.

- >> 1. Brandywine Red (Landis Valley Strain) originated 1885 in Chester County, Pennsylvania, red, 8-10 oz, round, smooth and loaded with intense tomato flavor. 78 day, indeterminate.
- >> 2. Ball's Beefsteak VFFT hybrid: 8-12 oz, smooth, sensational old-fashioned flavor, no cracking, highly disease resistant, indeterminate, 76 days.
- >> 3. Bush Champion VFFA hybrid: A special variety to honor Ball's Seed Company's 100th year, meaty, excellent flavor, 8-12 oz, plants thrive in most types of soil, 24 inch tall compact determinate, 70 days.
- >> 4. Big Beef VFFNTA hybrid: Impressive yields of, 10-12 oz, smooth tomatoes with real old-time flavor and great disease resistance and long season production, indeterminate, 73 days.
- >> 5. Better Bush VFN hybrid: 48" plant with 4" mouth watering, sweet, meaty real tomato flavor, determinate, 68 days.
- >> 6. Bush Early Girl VFFNT hybrid: 18"-24" plants, 6-7 oz good fla-

vored fruits, compact determinate, 54 days.

>> 7. Siletz: 8-10 oz, full flavored slicers with excellent interior quality, yields well in cool weather, determinate, 52 days.

>> 8. Oregon Spring: Medium-large tomatoes with full bodied tomato taste, nearly seedless, cold tolerant, compact determinate, 58 days.

>> 9. Ace 55 VF hybrid: Produces a heavy crop of deep-red, meaty, medium-large fruits, even in arid conditions, well suited to mid western gardens, determinate, 80 days.

>> 10. Ultimate opener ( new ) hybrid with strong disease resistance including VF: luscious tasting, large, bright red, crack-free, high yielding indeterminate, 57 days.

>> 11. Romeo, Giant Red Roma: 1-2 lb fruits for those who love the big and Roma, surpasses all other giant red roma varieties for earliness, size uniformity, kitchen value, disease resistance, indeterminate.

>> 12. Goldmine: A beautiful, productive, sweet-flavored, extra early, golden roma type, determinate, 55 days.

>> 13. Persimmon: Golden orange, 1-2 lb, rich delicious flavor, vigorous indeterminate plants, 80 days.

>> 14. Hardrock VFN hybrid: 3 oz, old-fashion tomato flavor for those that prefer a smaller tomato, compact determinate, 80 days.

>> 15. Early Big Red: Experimental, this all I know about this one.

I am raising my own tomato plants from seed and will be planting them as early as possible. I might have to cover and/or water them with a sprinkler on cold nights.

I will have approximately 400 plants in the first planting and plan to plant a couple of more times.

I tried about 20 different varieties of heirloom cherry (white, red, black, orange, wild cherry, currant and yellow pear), regular sized (white, black/purple, red zebra, green zebra, multi-color, multi-color ox heart and orange) last year and found out why these tomatoes are NOT in main stream production.

I also plan to plant sweet corn, onions, potatoes, cucumbers, cantaloupe, Acorn and Butternut squash and watermelon, I think that is all I can handle.

Fertilizer: I used 10-20-10 last year; I will use lime and 12-12-12 on most crops.

Pesticides were known to have been used at least as early as 500 BC. The first known was Sulfur then Organic Mercury, Nicotine Sulfate (from tobacco leaves), in the 1930's to 1960's DDT. The modern pesticides are very mild in comparison (Pyrethrin, Rotenone, Neem Oil, etc) and are regulated by the government at 100 times below toxic levels.

Teflan Pre-emergent weed control has been used for 30 year on most garden crops and is worked in the first 2-3" of soil and does not leach on down farther into soil, but one must be very careful to follow directions very carefully.

My high blood pressure and cholesterol have both normalized in the last few years from very high levels and I feel a lot of it is to be credited to my gardening. So if you have any spare time get out and do yard and gardening instead of sitting in front of the tube!

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## View from the Vineyard

by Ron Heskett

Hello from the vineyard of the Heskett Tree & Berry Farm where we're pruning the grapevines!



In January, thanks to the unusual warm spell, we handset the line posts, end posts, and anchors in preparation for adding 800 plants this Spring.



Most of these grape plants were started from cuttings last May. They spent the winter dormant in our back yard in their growing containers under a blanket of leaves swept up from under the mighty elm tree. We also started 300 cuttings of the Frontenac grape cultivar under grow lights in our basement. It took four weeks for the first buds to start swelling, but today (March 14) there is now 8 inches of growth on the most vigorous cuttings which brings me to the current events.



As I mentioned earlier, we're now pruning. I've been scurrying (to the amusement of the ground squirrel ahead of me that has stopped momentarily to view the intruder of his domain) to prepare approximately 2,000 five and seven-year-old vines that should be mostly in full production this summer. Last year we had difficulty harvesting. So this year we are converting to a VSP (vertical shoot positioning) system versus the Four Arm Kniffen (four branches trained to two wires) that I had started. Hopefully harvesting will be a more enjoyable event and pruning will become more simplified in years to come with this system of vine training.

As dusk approached, I stood soaking in the sights and sounds surrounding the vineyard. The wind was now calm. As the sun sank below the horizon, a full moon was ascending in the East. Robins were chirping in the windbreaks as they settled in for the evening (beautiful sounds now, but birds' voracious appetites are not welcome later in the season). The first killdeer of the season were calling to each other from the alfalfa and soybean stubble fields.

With this serene note I leave you for now.

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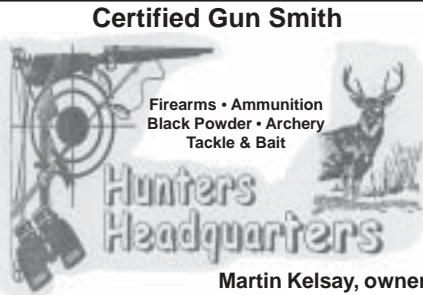
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# Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report

by Josh Whisler  
Photos provided by Author



## Fishing:

The Missouri River has stayed about the same for the last month. Not as low as it has been but not bank full either. It's good to see some water back in the river though. The Corps of Engineers shut the river down to barge traffic in October which is a around a month earlier than usual and little if any water has been let loose from the dam since. With the rise in level we got a month or so ago, local fishermen have been hitting it pretty regular and having success with small ones, which is enough to keep them coming back. Like I said in my last article "the night crawlers are up" and that seems to be what they're liking the most right now. I tried some wax worms that I bought for ice fishing with some success. Nothing big but got plenty of action. It's looking better all the while. Spring fishing will be here soon enough.

## Hunting:

I thought that some fellas might have braved the cool temps and wind to go out in fishing boats last weekend when I went to the river via the Peru Boat Ramp. To my surprise there were several trucks parked there in the parking area with empty boat trailers attached. Then something came to mind and that is the Light Goose Conservation Act Season that runs from February 1<sup>st</sup> to April 16<sup>th</sup>. They weren't fishing, they were hunting! This season has been going on for several years now and is an attempt to lessen the light goose (Snows, Blues, & Ross') population. Research has shown that there is an over-abundance of these geese in the nesting areas in Canada, where it is affecting other species of migratory birds' nesting areas. Thus their numbers are declining while the light goose flocks are increasing. How can a guy hunt them? This is the basics that are needed and the some of the rules that apply to this particular season: Permits needed are a resident hunting license, a HIP number, a Federal Waterfowl Stamp, and a Nebraska Waterfowl Stamp. If you have all that you'll also need Nontoxic shot shells. There are no daily bag limits during this season and possession limits are unlimited also. During this season the hunter can use an electronic call to lure they flock into shooting range. And our hunting zone "Zone 3" is open to hunting seven days a week. It's a good way to get some meat in the freezer and have a lot of fun doing it.

The 2006 Spring Turkey Season has been set and permits are available over the counter or on-line. You can obtain your Spring turkey permit starting January 9<sup>th</sup> through the end of the turkey season. This year you can bag two turkeys (one per permit). The seasons are as follows:

Archery Season————— March 25<sup>th</sup> thru May 21<sup>st</sup>  
Shotgun Season————— April 15<sup>th</sup> thru May 21<sup>st</sup>  
Youth Shotgun Season———— April 8<sup>th</sup> thru May 21<sup>st</sup>

There are a few changes this year that you need to keep in mind. All of the seasons above are statewide. There is no DRAW anymore so that means that there is no limit of permits that can be sold. That means you don't have to worry about NOT getting a Spring permit. Just go buy one! There is also a change this year in which there is only ONE shotgun season – NOT an early and a late season, as has been in the past. This year the Youth Shotgun Season allows for youth archers to bag their turkey also. All permits are still one bird per permit, but you are allowed two permits for the 2006 spring season. The Game & Parks has estimated that in the last five years the Nebraska Wild Turkey population has risen 300 percent. It's not hard to see them right now but soon they will be splitting up to breed. You may not see them as often but that's the time hunting is the best. Split up with not as many ears and eyes protecting them works to your advantage "Big Time".

It's getting closer and closer to Spring and all the good things that come with it. Soon the fishing will open up and turkeys will be strutting. And that's a refreshing feeling after winter, I don't care who you are! Or what you're doing! It's great to kiss old man winter good bye! Remember I'm not an expert but I have my share of luck. I wonder if the experts are having any luck today? So until next time "Happy Hunting & Fishing."



This month's river picture is an evening shot of the river flow.  
Water temperature is 46 degrees.



This month's hunting picture is of turkeys gathering near the Steamboat Trace biking and hiking trail. None are strutting yet, but they are still plenty wary and keep their distance.

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North of Seneca, Kansas.



East of Joe's Smith's place, (west of Johnson, Nebraska).

## Diary of an Unemployed Housewife

By Merri Johnson

I was vacuuming under the sofa today. That, in itself, is noteworthy around my house, but not particularly intriguing, unless a person finds something interesting under there.

Most women get lucky and find some spare change, or a lost house key, or the mate to their favorite pair of earrings that worked its way out one night long ago as they snuggled with their honey during that romantic DVD....(sigh) but, that's another topic.

Back to vacuuming. The dark underside of our sofa wasn't hiding any long-lost possessions, but it did yield a cache of sunflower seeds. My husband is an ex-smoker. I think most ex-smokers take up gum chewing, but he likes those salty seeds. Anyway, the seeds in the sofa crevices and on the floor underneath could serve as an emergency food supply if we actually have to quarantine ourselves during the prognosticated bird flu pandemic. Or at least they could have before I vacuumed them up today.

My husband's penchant for seeds has earned him the nickname "Euel," as in Euel Gibbons. You remember him: one of the early proponents of organic food. I think he was the spokesman for Grape Nuts. Or maybe it was pine nuts? Or peanuts? Some kind of nuts. He was always out in the forest, nibbling away on twigs or something, and being friendly with the birds and squirrels.

Unlike Euel, however, my husband detests squirrels. About five years ago, he acquired a live trap in his war against the raiders of our bird feeder and peach tree. Heck, if we just left our front door open, he could lure the squirrels under our sofa and catch them with even less effort. Heaven knows, his presence in the sofa recliner wouldn't scare them off. He pretty much blends into the leather upholstery once he gets horizontal in front of the TV.

But don't go calling the animal rights activists on him. He only traps and transports the squirrels to an alternative neighborhood. According to squirrel migration experts, you need to release squirrels at least three miles away to prevent their return. So, each time he catches one, my husband drives three miles west of town, pulls off onto the gravel road, takes the trap from the back of the pickup, sets it in the road facing *away from town*, rubs his hands together gleefully, and opens the gate.

Normally, the squirrel shoots out of there as if it had been spring-loaded and heads immediately for the plum thicket just down the road. But one time the silly thing turned around and ran back out onto the highway directly into the path of a semi. My husband was tempted just to release the next one in the middle of the intersection by our house and save the gasoline. But, he would never do that intentionally. Unless he was sure it would work. He wouldn't want to have to catch the same squirrel all over again.

He's pretty good at trapping those critters. So if the bird flu hits and we run out of sunflower seeds, we can always turn to squirrel stew. I hear it tastes like chicken.

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## TURNING EARTH

by Devon Adams

She longed to crumble sun-warm earth  
and to plant her seeds and sprouts.  
But the planting that was coming due  
would be too soon  
and nothing green would come from it.  
The blooming Spring was hidden  
in plain sight outside the window.  
It was too far for her to reach.  
Unlike the leaves and buds  
that were growing toward the light  
her love was looking toward the dark.  
He had no options.  
Waiting was his only choice,  
and she helped him savor seconds  
in the falling days.  
Then one day she closed the door  
as she walked away from death.  
Her yard became a testament to life  
as she planted hope in all its colors.



## THE SEWING FACTORY

by Devon Adams

Deep in the blue of the morning  
are voices carrying Spring from  
south to north across the prairie.  
Forging into the wind are fragile  
feathered bodies flying on deadline.  
These geese with wings of steel  
stitch seams in patterns making  
arrows that point forever north  
to breeding grounds where  
their lives will make new lives.  
The silk scarf of the sky  
is embroidered with a million  
moving birds rippling in the wind.

# Poetry, etc.



## Hymn to Sandhill Cranes

by Jan Chism Wright (c) March 2003

Oh ye trumpeters of spring,  
red capped and silver winged,  
Mercuries through millennia,  
avatars over a nascent Nebraska,  
Oh ye sylphic Sandhill cranes!

I stood, blinded  
by the night and  
rough wood hide  
straining to see  
through openings  
of chill silence  
the sleeping statues.  
As darkness faded  
to deepest grays,  
throats were cleared  
and feathers shaken.  
As roseate rays  
touched a far spot  
on the river Platte  
and then swept east  
toward and past me,  
the river itself  
seemed to rise,  
and I with it,  
in one continuous

wave of flight,  
of sound and sight,  
a feathered fury,  
with voice huge,  
a Bach brass fugue.  
And I whose  
westward expansion  
annihilated so many  
out of arrogance,  
both man and animal,  
suddenly felt small  
and stood in thrall  
of this brief glimpse  
of nature's magnificence.  
For if they should  
from this earth entirely go,  
would we not lose  
one sliver of our soul?  
Thus in worship  
this hymn do I sing.

Oh ye trumpeters of spring,  
red capped and silver winged  
Mercuries through millennia,  
avatars over a nascent Nebraska,  
oh ye sylphic Sandhill cranes!

# The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott

It's a classic prairie March..... each and every day an adventure in weather.

Following Sunday church Dale and I worked in the yard. Besides pruning back rose bushes and edging flower beds we cleaned up corn husks....thousands and thousands and thousands of corn husks. I was determined to get them all before hosting a garden club meeting on Tuesday so we raked and forked and burned all afternoon. It was a good feeling to be out-of-doors and working together under a gorgeous blue bowl of a sky, chit-chatting about this and that, laughing at each other's jokes, getting reacquainted after a busy week of hit-and-miss encounters.

By the time we finished the hens had gone to bed, the dogs were snoring on the lawn, and the stars were out. We were dirty and tired and smelled of smoke but the yard looked great. It lasted one day. On Tuesday morning a surly wind blew in, by early afternoon I swept the corn husks from the front door to clear a path for the arriving garden club members, and by nightfall the areas we had cleaned on Sunday were drifted with tangled piles of husks, leaves and stalks. The life of a Nebraska gardener, like those of its farmers, seldom runs smooth.

Schizophrenic weather aside it's been an ordinary week full of usual things, which, when added together, make up the drama of a family's life. A grandson's first steps, a club meeting with friends, the ordering of baby chicks, a mother-in-law's surprise visit with pizzas in hand will never make the front cover of *People* magazine but the ordinariness of it all is what provides sanctuary against the chaos of the outside world.

Through the years I've chronicled the common, and not so common, events of our lives in handwritten diaries, jotting down the day's activities, political happenings and any other little tidbits of news I found interesting at the time. Some diaries are filled with oversized writing on every page, the words sprawled across the paper, while others are sparsely written, the penmanship perfect, the sentences short, and to the point. They are poignant reminders of a time when my dreams, and my family, were still young.

Wednesday, May 5, 1971

Rain, rain and more rain. Rained three inches today, everything is full of water, especially the corrals. Dad brought two calves home that were just born. They were wet, muddy, and shivered all the time.

Thursday, May 13, 1971

The Platte is really high, the highest it has been since 1926. One of the Croft fields is completely under water. Whoever is letting all the water out of the dams should come down here and see what a mess they are making.

Friday, March 17, 1972

I went to church tonight to practice Easter music with Diane M. Dale went see his parent's new International tractor.

Wednesday, March 29, 1972

Mom and I went to a meeting concerning the river flooding of the past two years. Ralph finished plowing beet ground. I walked to the river today to look for a cow Dale thought might be having a calf. I didn't find her but I did find a stray dog. It followed me home.

Wednesday, January 9, 1980

Cold. Our water pipes were frozen when we got up this morning and after the men finally got them thawed the pump started leaking. There is six inches of water on cellar floor. Dale worked day putting in a new pipe but when he finished the water was full of rust. I fill a glass, let the rust settle to the bottom and drink the top half.

I guess it won't kill us.

Sunday, March 9th 1980:

We loaded up the kids and went for a drive this afternoon. The older two just about drove us nuts but baby Adam slept the whole time. We stopped in Scottsbluff for supper and had a difficult time deciding where to go....with the two older kids it is really getting expensive to eat out. The prime interest rate went up to 18 percent on Friday, the highest it has been in history. Cows have been having new babies ...I guess spring is on its way."

Friday, March 14, 1980

Three-year-old Matthew found two fish worms and carried them around calling them his friends. He showed them to his Grandma and told her not to mess with them because they were dangerous.

The president gave a speech on how to stop inflation...he is going to balance the budget and raise gas prices. Yeah...I'm sure that will do it.

The prime went up to eighteen and a half percent today.

Friday April 25, 1980

Got up this morning at 5:30 switched on the radio and heard that an attempt to res-

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cue the Iranian held hostages has failed...due to what the white house is calling 'Bad Luck.' I spent the day wondering if the US military has the strength to pull something like this off.

Thursday, March 1 1984

The kids and I are sick, sick, sick. Doctor took a throat culture and told me to call back on Monday for the results.

Friday, March 2, 1984

Dr. called us today...we have Scarlet Fever. Dale went into Lou's Drug in Morrill and picked up medicine for all three of us. I didn't know people could even get scarlet fever now-a-days.

Friday, March 16, 1984

Started snowing about 8:15....the wind blew like crazy. I stayed in the house and quilted while Adam sat by my side and colored (and talked). He is so sweet, and I don't know what I will do when he goes to school. I will be very lonely. Matthew won the prize in his class for

spelling.... for the second time....Andrew was a little jealous and didn't have a very good evening.

Saturday March 17, 1984

A gal who had a baby girl the same day I had Andrew died yesterday....she was only 32. I remember eating my meals with her in her hospital room. It doesn't seem possible that someone so full of life, so happy about having a new baby, could have died just a few years later. It reminds me of my own mortality.

And here I am, all these years later, still writing, still wondering what I'll do when the little ones start school, still worried about rivers and rain and Wyoming dams....and yes, my own mortality.

The more things change the more they stay the same.

Karen

## SALE BARN DRAMA

By Dorothy Rieke

Sale barns, at one time, played important roles in the lives of those who lived years ago. Nearly every town of any size had a sale barn positioned on the outskirts where additional land allowed for pens and vehicle parking. Today, sale barns continue to exist in some areas.

Sale Barns not only provided a market for livestock but also allowed space for onlookers. My dad often attended sales in the Auburn or Nebraska City Sale Barn when farm duties were not occupying his time and efforts. He enjoyed seeing cattle and horses in their holding pens, visiting with neighbors and watching stock sell.

At times, outside tables held household goods, eggs, tools, bales of hay, and other items for sale. Our family took old furniture that cluttered our attic to sales. These items did not bring much, but, at least, we got rid of things we no longer used. Before the animals were sold, the auctioneer roamed along outside tables, taking bids.

Of course, commissions were charged for every item or animal sold. Smaller items were more expensive to sell. Slaughter cattle were sold by the pound; breeding stock and horses were sold by the head. There was one exception to this rule. At times, someone brought in a litter of dogs which scampered about delighting the crowd. These were free and did not require auctioneer services.

Besides Commissions, additional charges for water and hay would be added if stock was brought to the sale barn the day before the sale.

Farmers prided themselves on accurately gaging the usefulness and ability of horses to be auctioned. A good work horse needed to be trained, healthy with a good disposition and possess a willingness to work. A bad disposition meant problems for a busy farmer. Dad tried to locate the owner of horses at the sale because he felt he could judge the horse partially by the owner's reactions and comments. I always felt Dad was a good judge of horses, but occasionally, he'd patronize the horse traders that came to the farm knowing that he might find himself owner of a horse with "broken wind."

Those attending these sales enjoyed seeing different kinds of animals sold and the excitement of selling which included the behavior of the animals in the "ring." The crowd never knew what would be put on sale or how it would react in the ring. All kinds of farm animals in different shapes and colors were sold, and their behavior was just as diverse. The mildest of horses might kick and snort in view of a noisy crowd. A rambunctious bull often caused

men to exit through gates or rapidly scale high sale ring fences. Even an "out of sorts" goat could clear a sale ring in short order.

Auctioneers were a different breed of men, friendly to all and especially knowledgeable with weights and current prices. Some wore "Indiana Jones" type hats often touching the brims if a lady appeared. People had confidence and faith in an honest auctioneer's spiel. Most were so good at their jobs that the members of the audience often felt a hypnotic pull toward buying. Of course, a really good auctioneer could talk people into buying, no matter what.

Spectators, experienced in determining prices, often purchased animals and then resold them hoping for a profit. In fact, these men made their living speculating on animals.

Some people, hooked on sales, relishing the excitement, the noises, the different animals, the crowds, never missed attending one. Others, attending sales because they had nothing else to occupy their time, sat on hard backless wooden benches intermittently watching the action and visiting with those sitting nearby. In a way, the sale barn was a social club where farmers visited about prices, livestock and weather. A few wives and children attended.

Most farmers with horses to sell wanted to be in attendance because of price fluctuations. Sometimes if a large number of animals sold, those sold later brought less than the first that entered the ring. If a horse brought \$20 less than the owner thought she was worth, he could yell, "No sale!" Of course, he was responsible for payment of the commission and transporting the

animal home.

Sad to say, at that time, there were no guarantees for purchases at sale barns. Occasionally, sick cattle and horses were sold. Later, animals were vaccinated if they returned to a farm; if sold on the market, vaccinating was not mandatory. This practice practically eliminated Black Leg, Cholera, and other livestock diseases.

Many sale barns had cafes on the premises. Menus varied from sandwiches, pie, ice cream, and drinks to "large portion" dinners. Occasionally, I was given a nickel for a "two dip" ice cream cone. I recall that wonderful feeling of intense expectation and anticipation as I entered that small space smelling of cigarette smoke and fried food. I sat at the counter while slowly licking that creamy cold chocolate confection watching harried waitresses fill coffee cups and fry hamburgers on a grease-stained grill. Sometimes, Dad joined me eating a piece of raisin pie.

Sale barns of those days as well as existing sale barns today evoked emotions, some too complex to be analyzed. Buyers felt disappointment when an animal sold for more money than they could afford, anguish if a newly purchased animal died, and elation if the purchase was right for their farm or brought profit. Sale barn gatherings encouraged the exchange of ideas and built knowledge as well as providing stock for breeding, food, or for reselling.

It is true that those sale barns in Nebraska City and Auburn no longer exist, but those of us who visited those early marketplaces still recall the excitement, the variety of animals, the smoke-filled atmosphere, and the auctioneer's voice calling out to crowds of buyers.

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## Retired Life

by Joe Smith

I've been retired a couple of months now, and can't tell much difference from when I wasn't retired. Just the fact that I don't have to do anything is heart warming. Just sit on my butt if I want to. I haven't had time for that yet, too many things going on. Been running the 'dozer some and putting in some tile in a couple of waterways. Sold the combine and now I am trying to figure out what to do with the equipment. Been thinking about having a sale late this summer. Then I have to think about which tractor I want to keep.

We have several Conventions lined up to go to and several speaking engagements to take care of. Going to Arkansas next month, Colorado in May, and Vermont in June. All of these just to teach dowsing and healing. Later this summer we might just take a trip overseas to see our granddaughter and kids. That is on the burner if we don't run out of gas first.

We have a meeting of the local dowsers coming up next month also. That will be somewhere close to Johnson, Nebraska. Our club is called *The Mid Rivers Dowsers*. There will be a notice in our *Johnson Rag* paper, and some mailed out to anybody interested in coming. We will be teaching the basic dowsing course and a few other things. There will be people from all over the state coming. It will be on a Sunday. Basic dowsing will start in the morning around 10:00 - 10:30 a.m. Meal will be pot luck I think. I could get voted down on that, but anyway, there will be some eating going on. Just think; I did all of this before I decided to retire. I wonder what I was thinking of?

But I will say that being "Retired" has a different feel to it, to say the least. I have to watch where my money is going a little more than I used to. As long as our health holds out we will be just fine. The loss of our son did not help at all, but things are returning back to an even keel now and that is good. It takes a little adjusting, that is for sure, and a lot of loose ends to get taken care of. But it is coming along real nice now.

Maybe, I'll have time to do a little fishing or play a little golf. I have a set of clubs I haven't used more than a dozen times since I got them 20 years ago. Golf is no fun playing by yourself. Guess I'll have to buy Marta a set so she can beat me. I used to play with Leo before he died. He was good. He could drive that little sucker a long ways. Maybe somebody will feel sorry for me and ask me to play with them. I would have to get the clubs out and blow the dust off them. I still have a driver I bought from Leo way back when.

I might even get in some trout fishing this year. Now that is something I really enjoy. It is not as much fun as it used to be when I was younger. I used to dream about moving to the mountains in Colorado and building a nice cabin so I could fish and hunt. As time goes by you lose those feelings and change your outlook on life. This may sound strange to some of you, but what I really want to do with the rest of my life is help others. The welding shop is one way, finding wells for people is another, hands on healing is another. (Ah, I saw a few eyebrows raise about that last comment.) Teaching dowsing is another way. But I have to admit I do want to help people in many ways, if they want to help themselves. I'll try to help others if they ask for help. Writing these articles gives lots of people enjoyment. Makes them think a little.

Marta and I have been studying the bible though the book, "The Purpose Driven Life" by Rick Warren. It sure won't hurt me to learn more about the bible and "What on earth am I here for?" Just maybe I'll find out that I should be a fighter pilot. Joe Smith



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6:00 p.m. - Whiskey Run Creek Vineyard & Winery - 7th and Main. Wine tasting, appetizers, art display.

6:45 p.m. - 7:15 p.m. - Tour of Carson House.

7:15 p.m. - Music and Seating - Town Hall - Opera House.

7:30 p.m. - Sherlock Holmes Readings/Sound Effects, Costumes, Intermission - Dessert/Bufferet Victorian Dress and Hats (optional).

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