



Voices from your Valley

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Writers this month

Devon Adams
Frieda Burston
Larry Christy
Merri Johnson
Shirley Neddenriep
Vicki O'Neal
Karen Ott
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Thank You

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Editor's note:

More than four years of
this publication are online at:
www.yourcountryneighbor.com

Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

My daughter will be making a brief visit here from Georgia when this issue of *Your Country Neighbor* hits the streets, or more precisely, hits the cash register counters of various businesses in the four-corners area. Unless the publisher has taken to simply heaving bundles of the publication onto the sidewalks of our communities as he drives through. But, I digress.

Some people view the infrequent visit of a distant family member as an occasion for leisure activities and possibly for planning mini-reunions with extended family members. If the loved one's visit coincides with a major holiday or milestone family event, it goes without saying that the visit will be a "visit," as in *visit Aunt Martha*, which happens to be the first example of the definition of the word in my American Heritage Dictionary. There's nothing wrong with visiting one's aunt. I myself was graced to receive a visit from a niece earlier this spring. But it's not the same as when the visitor is the grown-up version of the baby you used to diaper and rock.

In fact, none of the dictionary's 14 examples illustrating all the nuances of a "visit" possess quite the right connotation for the experience of having my one-and-only daughter under my roof for a few short days. Consider this definition: *to afflict or assail*, as in *a plague visited the village*. OK, I get that some parents (or more likely, children) view a visit from the opposite generation just this way. But that's not how it is in our family.

Or take this example: *an act of visiting in an official capacity, as an inspection or examination*. I know plenty of people who think of visits that way. They invest more time and energy preparing for the inspection, instead of anticipating the pleasure of the visitor's company.

But perhaps the least inviting definition is this: *to stay or sojourn as a guest*.

I don't want my daughter to feel like a "guest" in my house. And I don't want to feel that way in hers. I want to spend our time together behaving as if she lives next door and has come by to lend me a hand or just to chat a bit.

What am I to do about my dissatisfaction with this word "visit"? Perhaps that last definition offers an alternative. I think I shall begin using the word "sojourn" instead of "visit." One who sojourns is *staying for a time, residing temporarily*. One who resides somewhere is part of the ordinary, interactive life of the place.

I know I can make my daughter feel right at home – sojourning – even if it is just for a few days. Why, it will take no effort at all to involve her in the ordinary events of my life. The basement needs organizing. I could use a younger back to load and haul limestone for a landscaping project. There's a pair of shutters in the shop needing a coat of paint. And, nature lovers that we both are, there's a certain place in the country where I frequently walk that I know she'll enjoy.

So, so long visitor. Hello, sojourner. Come and be a part of my life for awhile.



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Poetry by Devon Adams

THINGS CHANGE

Just when days are bright
and nights are peaceful,
time turns around,
and things change.
Future plans fall apart, and
tomorrow seems so far away.
But our lives aren't set in stone,
carved from cold marble
by a master's chisel.
We are living matter,
warm and vibrant and alive,
with facile minds designed
to improvise and invent ways
of working through situations.
Instead of giving up, we should
be grateful for our fancy brains,
because, implicit in their intricacy,
is the unspoken admonition to use them.

APRICOT SEEDS

After the rain ran down the hill,
there were apricot seeds lying
in the soft dirt, and rusty square nails
scattered on the surface of today.
Underneath the layers of the years
are the souls of trees
who used to give birth to fruit
that my grandmother prepared
in delicious combinations for a large family.
But not all the apricots made it to the kitchen,
and many of the iron-hard seeds
remain under the soil, waiting
to see the sun once more, preserving
in their convoluted wood memories
of the old orchard planted and loved
by my grandfather. When I hold a seed
in my hand, I can smell the early blossoms
and then sit in the later shade, as I bite
into the fuzzy golden skin and
juice explodes and runs down my chin.

WHO ARE YOU?

Could it be that I was wrong?
Was I wishing for my dreams,
instead of knowing what was real?
Were there signs, so long ago,
that I ignored, and continued
to bury in the sand of my fear?
Now I'm asking who you are.
But the real question may be,
who am I?

Wheat Harvest was completed in July



ESCAPE MECHANISM

by Shirley Neddenriep

To escape, get on your rider mower. No one can get you. Don't pack a cell. Don't wear a headset. No one will call you off the mower to the land phone. You will not have to process the mail. You will not need to crunch numbers, or bake a cake, or make phone calls. Or anything but ride the mower and enjoy the scenery!

Everyone will leave you alone. No one else wants to ride. Grandchildren, 'cept one, no longer ride because there are too many objects to go around and they like having a straight shot to 'getter done.' Besides, they have their own lawns to mow. They have their own mates, they have children to raise. They have their own positions and houses, cars, responsibilities. With one exception, grandchildren are pretty much out of the picture as far as lawn mowing is concerned.

It's a good thing, having grown-up responsible, productive, caring, happy grandchildren.

But this is about lawn care, e.g. getting away from the daily grind! Sometimes while weeding, I toss stuff out onto the grass and later shred it with the mower blades. It may look trashed for a day or so. There is lots more to lawn care than mowing.

But mowing is about the only work that can be done astride a roaring machine oblivious to the world. There is a weed-eater hanging in the garage. Even if it had a wire, it would confound me and it is not self-propelled. There ought to be a law that the operation of all gadgets electronic or digital be reduced to the lowest possible input by the user.

Trimming that might be done with a weed-eater is done with offset loping shears or clippers. Either way, by machine or by hand, there is green, leafy residue to be carried off to a compost pile. Or there is brush and fallen limbs. The farmer carries lots of limbs dropped by the ash. That is what he and it do best. He can see what limbs need loped from his 40s era metal lawn chair on the front porch. He lopes off errant limbs to keep trees neat and out of my face while mowing.

I had a friend once who mowed on a regular schedule. She circled 10 or so Austrian pines, but she had corralled flower beds into one spot next to her patio. She only had to do a semi-circle and drive on. We don't try flower beds much, and do not own up to a set schedule, but there are patches of perennials, bunched here and there according to their need for sunshine. Location of red bud trees that sprout and grow rampantly? We mow around those. Never try to move a red bud once it has located itself; just leave it in whatever inappropriate place it has volunteered to grow and mow around it.

The reward is clouds of pink each Spring for six weeks or so. Riding the mower, the pink clouds can be viewed from every angle, without walking. Riding has the advantage of inspection. One trip past the tomato vines and you can make note of their need for water, fertilizer, bug spray, harvesting. One run around the corn patch shows how the stalks recovered from hard winds.

One trip with the mower showed startling news: the glorious red and yellow Lantana that shouted out beside its Silver Cascade companion had dropped every one of its fiery red and yellow petals, leaving a bland mostly silver bed of flowers. Nothing to do but wait for its recovery.

Digging up dandelions next to a little path one day I hit solid iron. There buried for a couple years was the missing clippers, encrusted with dirt and rust. Someone advised to soak them in Coca-Cola. They are. While the coke cleans up corrosion, the mixture stinks and draws flies. There is always a down side.

I like a turn-key mower because of horrid memories of those machines in the long ago whose engines were geared to start by pulling a rope. Back then the sons mowed. Exasperation and frustration were major results. Once the thing exploded into life, it had to be run dry because who wanted to begin again with trying to start it? I have to go now, and mow, before it rains. The answering machine is on.

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Ninety by Frieda Burston

I looked at myself at 90, and I wasn't impressed. My hair was white and shining, but every morning when I combed it, less and less bounced back. I asked the doctor about my thyroid, but he looked at my blood test and said it was fine. My hair kept falling.

I didn't ask about my being stooped. I knew that my scoliosis was worse. I did my exercises faithfully, but at night I fell asleep and curled up into a ball, and there went my posture. My dry eyes were a worry to my ophthalmologist, but to me it just meant I was going blind maybe next year. Not today. My blood pressure worried my cardiologist, but it only meant that he wouldn't clear me for hernia surgery. If the hernia strangulated, I'd just have to live with it—which of course wouldn't happen. I'd just end up dead. Oh well, because I was eating correctly again, and living a free life, I was cheerful anyhow.

I entertained myself reading email, and found myself on a site called "Patients' Ratings" Hello! There was my blood pressure medication. And guess what? Most of the patients who had quit it, had quit because their hair fell out, or their dry eyes were blinding them... Well, well, well.....

I asked my cardio if he would help me quit it; all the ads for it from the company said not to stop it suddenly, but didn't say why. He said OK, and gave me a schedule of when and how much to take, to get off of it. Two weeks into dropping it, I was pretty sick for some days. I lived through it and am now without a medication. Just natural foods and vites. The cardio sent me back to my regular doctor.

I refused other medications. Doctors don't argue a whole lot with 90 year old ladies. He just wanted to be assured that my family wouldn't be angry with him. I assured him. I went home happy. He was making notes in my folder when I left.

Two days later his nurse called me to say I had an appointment for a blood test for my B-12 shot. I said, "I don't get blood tests for that, I just get the shots." "Yes," said the nurse, "your record says you asked for it." "Well, I want the B-12, that's just a vitamin, it won't make my hair fall out or my eyes dry," I said. "But I definitely don't want a blood test for it, that's silly! I've never had to take one before."

"I'll tell the doctor," said the nurse, and a minute later she came back with "He says fine, if you don't want it, you don't need to take it. But he thought you might want to think it over again. You might not want to be surprised to find you're paying for the shot unless the test shows you need it. Insurance is funny that way. They're checking everything nowadays to make sure they aren't overpaying——"

Yay-uh. I'd better stick with that doctor. He's pretty young, only in his 60's, I guess, but he knows when to push, and when to let things slide by themselves.....

Got any ideas for growing new hair at 90? Natural or vites, of course.....No one else to ask.....my hair doesn't seem to have been insured——
 Regards, Frieda

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Hunting Night Crawlers

by Larry Christy

Grandpa was the flashlight king. He always kept an eye out for new an different flashlights... ones that would work better for hunting worms. I remember one flashlight he had, he'd gotten it at Radio Shack. He was always buying things form Radio Shack. He was into CB and Ham radio and so he was always modifying his radios, adding upper and lower channels to standard CB sets that it was against FCC rules for them to have. He had quite a CB set in the back room of the house. The Radio Room we called it. He had an old desk in there, situated in front of the rear window of the house, looking out into the backyard. The drawers of the desk were full of soldering guns, boxes of vacuum tubes and diodes, wires, microphones, speakers.... and on top of the desk there was a big tube powered Lafayette 23 channel base console, a standing wave meter with a long thin red needle that swung back and forth whenever he keyed the mic, a linear amplifier for boosting his signal beyond legal limits and a black rotary control box with a dial knob in the center of a clear plastic plate that was laid out like the face of a compass...North, South, East and West with all the degrees of increments in between.... The wires from this box ran out through the aluminum molding of the storm window frame, up the side of the house to the eve and then all the way across the backyard on a piece of high tension braided cable, up and up to the top of the 40 foot steel frame antenna tower that grandpa had erected in the backyard, equipped with an electric motor to turn the points of the antenna to whatever direction he wanted to broadcast.

He'd sit down at the desk in the evenings around 6:30 or 7:00 o'clock, turn the dial of the rotary control to a southwest setting with a ripping grind like the sound the knob of an old washing machine timer makes, wait for the arms of the antenna

out there in the dark, 60 feet above the lawn, to slowly tick around into position. When he'd flick the switches on the linear amp and key the big D-104 mic sitting on the desk top, the television playing in the living room would go black, right in the middle of "Happy Days". Then there'd be a series of lightning-looking streaks across the screen and the picture tube would all go to snow and static with the TV speaker overloading into a fuzz tone and Grandpa's voice booming through it, "BREAK 23! THIS IS THE NEEDLE NOSE, KWX-FIFTY FOUR SEVENTY ONE, BROADCASTING OUT OF SAINT JOSEPH MISSOURI, HAS ANYONE OUT THERE GOT A COPY...? COME ON?!"

And shortly after that is when the telephone would start to ring. It was usually Cleave Frisbee two houses up the street, telling Grandma, "Tell Lawrence To Shut That Damn Thing Off! He's Knockin' Out Our TV!"

To Be Continued Next Month

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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler
(Photo provided by Author)

Fishing:

The Missouri River is still running bank full from the recent rains. The Spring rains have turned into Summer thunder storms which are keeping the river pretty stirred up. Of course when the river is on the rise that means fish are foraging for food in the shallows. Thus the fish are biting so it's time to get out there. The Flatheads are hitting really good. And the Channels are coming on pretty good too. What are they biting on you ask? Chubs and goldfish for the big ones (Missouri River Rules – Big Bait/Big Fish), crawlers and dough baits for the smaller stuff. The time is now if you want to catch your limit in a short amount of time. Oh, and don't forget to bring the bug spray – between the biting flies and the mosquitoes I don't know which I dislike the most. But I'm telling you that you better spray down if you're going to give this a try for very long.

Hunting:

Fall and Winter deer permits are available now. New for this year:

From **June 8 to Close of season** this year - Areas are open to residents and nonresidents to buy any remaining antelope or deer permits and open to residents to buy any remaining elk permits. Just buy your permit at the Game & Parks Web page <http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/hunting/hunting.asp>

The Fall Deer Seasons are already set so plan ahead and use the flexibility to plan your deer hunt now. Once again there are bonus deer tags for antlerless deer to be harvested to control the Nebraska deer herds. It's a great opportunity to get some venison in the freezer.


Fishing is great now thanks to the warmer weather. And the river is the only place to be to beat the summer heat. So come on out and drop a line in. You'll be glad you did. 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 fishing picture is a 65+ pound Blue Cat landed by Doug Bohling - caught near Brownville, NE. Doug and John Taylor from Auburn shown with this monster.

NOTE – They transferred this fish to The Nebraska Game & Parks Schram Aquarium at Louisville, NE, and it is now on Live Exhibit at that facility.

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"Of Dreams and Unfathomable Things..."

By Vicki O'Neal



"6:30 a.m...The sun's peeking over the mountain..."

I sit by our campfire, scribbling in my notebook with a pen from La Quinta Inn...a prissy pen that's running low on ink. It seems overwhelmed by the task at hand....

So much rugged terrain to describe. So much grandeur.

Our vacation property is located where many mountain ranges converge. Row after row of mountains stretch before us...The Cascades and Sierra Nevadas. The Marble Mountains. Mount Shasta. Pilot Rock. Mountains rippling into the distance like waves on a vast ocean.

It's a view to die for...Or to wear out a pen, at least.

I give the pen a good shake before resuming my writing. Soon, my husband intervenes. "Take a break," Michael says, handing me a cup of hot cocoa. "We're on vacation, remember?"

We sip cocoa in companionable silence, gazing across the valley at the long morning shadows...Long dark arrows of destiny. The shadows all point westward—where the sun will eventually set.

"Look...!" Michael leans forward, studying the property below us. "We've got new neighbors. They're from the city. Flatlanders. Countryfolk-WannaBe's."

"Really?" I pick up the binoculars and squint at the neighbors' property. "WannaBe's?" I like that word. I scribble it in my notebook. "How do you know they're from the city?"

"There's a knack to Country Living," Michael says, "and these people don't have it. Their horse is locked up in a tiny pen the size of a postage stamp. Their dogs are untrained. The chickens flap around loose—easy prey for the nearest fox. The goats' hooves are untrimmed. See them hobbling?"

"Hmmm. Yes, I see." Shaking my pen, I scribble his words in my notebook.

My husband has stopped talking, now. He soon disappears down the lane without another word. I know where he's heading.

I perch on my lawn-chair, watching, as Michael approaches the neighbors' property. The WannaBe's have a makeshift homestead. They live in a tent and a strange little tee-pee. They have a garden plot. A bit of fencing. A shed or two. It's a homestead built on a shoestring.

I can see Michael conversing with the neighbors, now. They point at the horse, and gesture and talk for quite some time, then Michael trudges back up the hill toward me. He looks troubled, but there's a hint of amusement on his face, as well.

"What a name!" Michael says. "They gave their horse a weird title... 'Sir Raja the Rastapharian Sawhorse-Seahorse from Haight-Ashbury'... Something like that." Shaking his head, Michael stands staring down the hill. "They gave themselves weird names, too. 'Wolf and Xin.' But they're good folks. Just odd."

Something's bothering Michael. I can see it on his face.

"They have a mess on their hands," he says. "Just this morning, the seller backed out of the contract. Changed his mind at the very last minute. So now Wolf and Xin have to go back to the city."

"Oh no!" I say. "They must be devastated." I feel terrible for them, and wish we could go help them somehow. But Michael says No... We would just get in their way.

"They need time to adjust," my husband says. "Time to grieve the loss of their dream."

I try not to fret about the folks down below. I busy myself around our campsite, tending to the fire and cooking...enjoying the pleasantries of a sunny day...trying not to see the melancholy drama taking place down below. But it's hard to ignore.

Sadly, the neighbors dismantle their homestead. Down comes the tent and the tee-pee. The fencing and posts. Their scattered belongings are crammed into the truck. Shovels and hoes from the garden plot—a plot they won't ever harvest.

The horse with a long name is placed in a trailer and hauled away. 'Sir Raja the Rastapharian Sawhorse-Seahorse from Haight-Ashbury' doesn't look happy.

The WannaBe's spend their last day, here, tearing down everything they've worked so hard on. It takes much of the morning and afternoon. They have to make several trips to town before they're finished. By evening, Wolf and Xin are through.

The sun is sinking into the western hills. Long shadows of evening lie upon the valley floor below. Dark shadows of destiny. They all point eastward—where the WannaBe's will soon go. Eastward toward tomorrow's sunrise and the unknown.

We can see the neighbors standing there staring across the mountain ranges—looking so alone and vulnerable. This is not how it's supposed to be. In one day, their lives have been turned upside down.

Back to the city. To the heavy traffic. The din of garbage trucks and car stereos. Wall-to-wall houses and people. Jostling hordes of humanity...

God never intended for folks to live like that. All stacked on top of one another. Living shoulder to shoulder—'til at last they die. Then they lie prostrate in the graveyard, side by side—row by row. In the City of the Dead, with miniature skyscrapers for tombstones.

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The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



Every so often a peculiar message sent by a complete stranger with an unpronounceable name pops up in my e-mail inbox. Typically it's a wild story relating to Nigerian oil leases, or some such twaddle.....and I'm usually promised a bushel-basket full of money if I could see fit to follow a few simple directions.

Like most people I have a good laugh, wad the message into an imaginary paper ball, and toss it into the computer's virtual trash bin to await garbage-delete day, but today, after receiving an especially poorly written e-mail. I wrote a reply I'd like to send...if only I could be sure it wouldn't spawn additional trash. Here it is.

"Dear Mr. Kodjo,

Your recent message came as quite a surprise. Following your untimely arrest on money laundering charges I thought I'd never hear from you again; how reassuring to know you are alive and well..... and yes, it certainly was regrettable my effort to assist you with your international money transfer was unsuccessful. Had my experience in world finance been less limited I'm convinced things would have turned out differently..... but I'll always appreciate your confidence in me nonetheless.

I'm pleased, that with the help of a new partner from India, you were ultimately successful in transferring the bank funds in question. As you undoubtedly know Ms. Taj M. Hall is my fourth cousin twice removed. How well I remember the magical vacations (complete with elephant rides and tiger hunts) spent at her parent's river-side palace. They were kind and cordial hosts, and I am not surprised their daughter followed in their philanthropic footsteps; charity runs deep in my family. (The story of an assassination attempt is sheer nonsense..... Taj denies ever meeting the prime minister's wife!)

I am touched by your generous offer of \$500,000.00, but puzzled by your request that I contact your London attorney. Haven't we known each other long enough to dispense with an intermediary? I realize your feelings were hurt by my refusal to offer you an alibi for the morning of January 6, 2007, but I can scarcely remember what I did last week, let alone two years ago.

Really Kodjo, you can't carry a grudge forever.

As for the matter of the \$500,000.00: in light of the American dollar's declining value I'd appreciate your help in turning the cash into more tangible assets, precious gems perhaps, or maybe gold bullion. I am enclosing a self addressed stamped envelope for your convenience....all you need do is slip a blank, signed check inside. I'll take care of the rest.

I await your reply. Your American friend,
Karen"

I know the above differs from my normal weekly message, but stories about setting hens (we're just a couple weeks away from baby chicks), grasshopper invasions, out-of-control weeds, errant cows and a mild, out-of-character, summer seem so blasé tonight.

Everyone needs some excitement in their life, a smidgen of intrigue.... even if it's imaginary.

So have a little laugh.... and next time I'll be back to farmwife stories from the high plains... if I'm not tiger hunting in India.

Karen

Melinda D. Clarke, CPA

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