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Legends Mall, Kansas City, KS

## *Voices from your Valley*

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## *Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha*

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

### Writers this month

Devon Adams  
Merri Johnson  
Shirley Neddenriep  
Vicki O’Neal  
Karen Ott  
Josh Whisler  
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Thank You

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## HAY SEASON ANGELS

by Shirley Neddenriep

One time when the sons were 4-H age, their dad and I took them sheep shopping. We drove north, and its so long ago, I can't recall the town or the name of the breeder.

I remember he was a friendly guy and proud of his line of Cheviots. This breed has a clean face, clean legs with no wool around their eyes and ears. We ended up buying one ewe for each son, but it took awhile.

The seller's enthusiasm for the clean white sheep was matched only by that of the buyer. Those two men could have talked "sheep" all day.

Tall Austrian pines grew at that farm. In a little while as the natives got restless, I called my sons' attention to that little forest of tall trees. "Listen," I said, "and close your eyes. Imagine you are in a high mountain forest. Listen to the wind blowing through the trees! Listen for an eagle to come swooping in, or little animals that live in a forest. Hear the wind sing a little song to you!" It worked for awhile.

At home we had a special pen for the five Cheviot ewes. We needed a picture of them. They didn't stand still, but ran from one side of the pen to the other. Finally they stopped, all facing the camera, and I clicked!

I remember those days sometimes out under our Austrian pines. Other pines have been added and a Blue Spruce. The wind sighs through them too. Some parts of the front yard are called perennial beds, but are really overgrown, untamed wilderness. A garden path went through the area once, but ground ivy, peppermint oregano, and wild columbine have crept in to smother each other with growth.

One day while mowing I tackled the overgrowth using the JD 345 rider as a kind of battering ram/weed eater. All went well until I found myself wedged between a Spirea and an old blue granite canner. I had used the canner as a planter and had forgotten about it. In the process of extricating the mower, the path got wider and wider! I dumped the dirt out of the canner and carried that rusted pot out to the windbreak. The guys do it, dump things there.

Now I needed wood chips, but had none. I was busily gathering fresh mowed hay to line the path when an angel came along bringing beautiful wood chips and spreading them too! It is a beautiful path now, and guaranteed to last two years!

During haying season sometimes inexperienced helpers come along who will work for food. One of them operated the IH commercial windrower four long hours in alfalfa. The next field, he was warned, had some blue grass. Hay people know that blue grass does not cut as easily as alfalfa.

Soon the man and machine were home from the field to unplug the grass, solidly wedged all along the cutter bar. When done and gone back to the field, a neat windrow of blue grass hay remained in front of the farm shop.

I latched onto that as soon as my tired old self allowed, loading it into the wheel barrow to use as mulch for Crimson Sweet watermelons just getting a good start. Enough hay was left to mulch a couple of Celebrity tomato plants, thanks to angels who wheeled the barrow piled high with grass hay. Thanks for angels. You know who you are.

# Poetry by Devon Adams

## DAY DARK

The roots of night dug deep  
into the earth and would not let go,  
as the day tried to come into light.  
Gray, wet clouds scudded over  
the folds of spring, weeping tears  
onto the beleaguered plains.

The thundering voice of the rain god  
bellowed deep echoes that rumbled  
and broke against the hills, shaking  
the ground like an earthquake, as spikes  
of lightning forked their tines into sodden  
soil with the force of atom smashers.

## FINDING THE MUSIC

The task was to find the source  
of some great music emanating  
from the dense lilac bushes.  
It had to be coming from throats  
with formal training in opera,  
or at the very least from genes  
that carried tunes across generations  
of singers who could project their  
resumes to discriminating audiences.

I looked for a large body wearing  
an elaborate costume worthy of all  
the flash and color of a rock star.  
But what I found was a nondescript  
individual wearing a dark brown coat  
of feathers. He was perching deep inside  
the top of the tall bushes, as if to keep  
his identity hidden, like an undercover  
spy wearing a camouflage of sound.

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The big bugs that fly high have pilots,  
and names painted on their skins.  
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at different altitudes, writing white lines  
across the blue, following sky maps.  
I wonder what the little bugs would think,  
if someone ordered them to file flight plans,  
and communicate with air controllers.

I'm guessing that gnats and wasps and  
bumblebees would argue that they don't bumble,  
bees and butterflies would collaborate on  
corporate replies that they don't collide.  
And if they voted to form a union in order  
to negotiate with management, they would  
propose that their system is more sophisticated  
than humans can devise or duplicate.

## *Pencil & Watercolor Portraits*

BY DEVON ADAMS



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## Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

I recently found myself captive to daytime television. Normally, I don't turn on the set at all, but I was at someone else's home and couldn't escape.

Of course, just because I don't watch daytime TV doesn't mean I have no clue about what's on. A certain member of my household, who shall remain unidentified, used to watch "Oprah" and "Dr. Phil" when given the opportunity. I know a lot of people think Oprah is a great humanitarian. That may be, but she isn't a god, although her fans may think she's the next thing to it.

And Dr. Phil. Give me a break. Is he in competition with Jerry Springer now for bizarre guests? You know the producers are out of ideas when they have to solicit guests on the air from the hordes of losers out there in order to put a show together. The program I was treated to the other day was nothing more than a shameless exploitation of tragedy. Unless, of course, it was completely made up. In that case, it was just shameless. Perhaps the invitation to "call us if you're involved in a school discipline lawsuit" will produce a more instructive program. The Second Coming in my lifetime is a better bet.

But Judge Judy may be even worse, if only because she has not one, but several losers, on her show every day. These people have to be getting paid to make such fools of themselves, acting like 8-year-olds tattling on each other over petty grievances. One of the "cases" on the program the other day involved two men who were in court over insults and taunts that one had text-messaged to the other along the lines of "Your fiancé is a slut; thought you'd like to know." Give me the days when men had the guts (if not the brains) to make such insults in person and then take it outside and settle it. What kind of sissy says that kind of thing in a text message? And what kind of even bigger sissy takes it to court, knowing he's going to be emasculated by Judge Judy on national television?!

An even more perplexing question is what motivates the viewers to watch this daily parade of participants in what I call the "nonsense du jour." I guess appealing to the baser instincts is nothing new: thus the former practices of putting miscreants in stocks for all to see and that other standby of "deterrence" in the justice system, public hangings.

But it blows my mind that elderly people tune in to this kind of drivel. I thought octogenarians were supposed to possess wisdom and a degree of propriety and dignity. My suspicion is that these programs vindicate their judgment of the shortcomings of "the younger generation," given that the lame guests appear to be generally under forty. Or maybe the viewers take comfort in the fact that *someone* is subjecting both the plaintiffs and the defendants to public ridicule and (monetary) punishment, thus reassuring the viewers that society is still enforcing some standards of behavior.

Let's hope the reason is something like that, because it's just too disturbing to think that the viewing public actually finds witnessing the idiocy of others entertaining.

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## Where Life is Good

by Marilyn Woerth

Organic garden is a wonderful thing (pause, silence) for the young. When I first started gardening I was all for organic gardening no pesticides, no herbicides, natural fertilizer. And life was good. Now-a-days when I hit this time of the year (within the gardening season) I hit a brick wall (and it hurts).

Anyone that has strolled through our gardens and yard and comment on all our hard work and are amazed that we have done it all by ourselves know that we never ever (ever, ever, ever) deny all the hard work (we're not crazy or are we?). Anyway, this time of the year my fingers start to rebel on me. I can't even make a pincher grasp (it's an index finger and thumb thing) much needed for weed pulling.

So as the years keep piling up and one artificial knee (working on another one) and every other joint aches, it takes its toll. So I have discovered a wonderful product called preen and another I use on my paths called roundup (ssshh they might cancel my subscription to organic gardening). I love these products (if used correctly and sparingly). I just might make it gardening through to my old age.

Continued on page eight >>>>>



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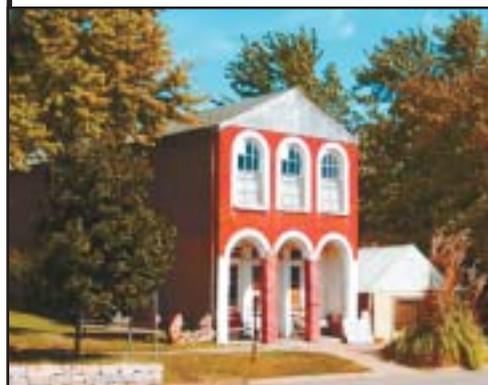
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Continued from page six

Now don't worry I still have my compost pile and hardly ever spray my plants (except the roses but hey their roses), and sometimes we still let nature takes it course (even if it means losing a plant or two).

But this getting old bit really makes you rethink things (like what are we doing landscaping and gardening three acres). Whenever I start complaining about all my aches and pain to my other wonderful half, he calmly tells me to hang in there he will be retired in a few years and can help me out more (if I live long enough). He has an aunt who is 92 and still maintains a large garden, little sympathy from him. Bless his heart he did build a corrugated metal and wood raised garden bed for me to sit on in the vegetable garden (blush he does love me).

There is a very good benefit for living out in the country, no one can watch how I garden (which is comical). With an artificial knee that has only a 105 degree bend, I can't take kneeling for any length of time, gardening gets well interesting and there are times it even gets scary. To the point that my hubby has asked me to carry my cell phone with me at all times. (Did I mention that I have been accident prone since birth?) So living out in the country spares me from watching my neighbors laugh hysterically.

So getting back to organic gardening, it was a good thought when I was young but man something has to give as you get older and I have already given all I care to at this stage of the game. So I raise my glass in toasting the young and idealistic me and then turn and drink from the glass of wisdom that comes only from experience (getting old). Moving on down the road of a very good life and still enjoying it (just at a little slower pace).

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# Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler

## Fishing:

The River conditions haven't changed much since last month's issue. It's hard to believe that much water can flow from levy to levy for a whole month. The amount of water passing by would have to shock you with no way to capture it for a dry year or for any other uses (like filling a lake maybe) – it's just gone, and none too soon for local fishermen. There has been plenty that have tried to fish the flood waters but I'm not hearing of a lot of luck. The flood water gives the fish a lot more refuge and a lot more bait to choose from. So if this month's article seems a little short it's for that reason – nothing to report. Only prayers that it quits raining three times a week so things will dry up, including the mosquito ponds. They seem to be the only thing having any fun this summer unless you like mowing your yard twice a week.

## Hunting:

Fall hunting seasons are coming back around and to think that squirrel season opens August 1<sup>st</sup> - WOW - where did the summer go?

Fall Deer Season Permits are still available over the counter or on-line until the close of deer season. And I can't say it enough that you need to know one of the BIG changes for this hunting year on tagging your deer in:

### TELECHECK

Telecheck was used some last year and looks like it took hold. Now you are required to telecheck your bagged big game on the internet - on all seasons except the regular firearms deer season. During the regular firearms season check stations will be manned – all other check-ins are to be performed by the internet. Need to check out the 2010 Big Game Guide. They got them available at Walmart and on-line at the Game & Parks web page ([outdoornebraska.ne.gov](http://outdoornebraska.ne.gov)).

Summer River Fishing is still on the back burner but there are the area lakes that can suffice your fishing fix satisfied until the river dries out a little. And again, don't forget to plan your fall deer hunt – permits available now. 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."

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# The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



I was absentmindedly skimming the pages of the latest Time magazine when I ran across an article with the intriguing title, 'Hanging out at a chicken swap'. A photo of a man cradling a scrawny looking bird against his chest took up a good chunk of the page leaving just enough space to describe a Pennsylvania gathering of 240 fowl fanciers who live by the slogan 'A chicken in every yard.'

Members of BackYardChicken.com (a website described as 'a sort of facebook for chicken owners') had come together to trade live chicks, eggs for incubation, and apparently stories about the glory of 'keeping' chickens....a practice, which according to the article, "can trace its roots to the flourishing sustainability movement and an increasing desire to eat local and all-natural."

This was news to me....when did hens/roosters turn into (quote) "Interesting, intelligent pets, with lots of personality", and the simple act of egg gathering became a 'movement' with political and social undertones? I've lived around chickens all my life and have yet to see an intelligent hen...although I did recently rid myself of a rooster with too much personality...the criminally insane kind.

He was a looker to be sure: sleek, rust-red body, shiny black-green tail feathers, and a comb like a King's crown, but he was uppity from the start. He intimidated a smaller rooster by stamping his feet and dancing in a circle, a menacing act aimed at keeping his cell-mate from food and water. If 'The King' caught Number 2 rooster creeping towards the waterer or feeder he'd fly at him in a rage, forcing the poor underling to snatch drinks and stray kernels on the run....or face a sound beating.

I knew something needed to be done about the nasty behavior before he killed the smaller bird, but I couldn't bring myself to send such a handsome specimen to the rural version of a French guillotine, so I ignored him....until the evening he decided I needed taming.

I had just stepped inside the pen when he flew at my legs, drawing blood with his beak and sharp talons. I gave him a good kick, but like a well-trained prizefighter he picked himself up, danced a tight circle, and stood his ground. Each time I moved he came at me...hackles raised, eyes narrowed, talons ready...it was the proverbial "Mexican standoff"...and I was unarmed.

After a few moments hesitation I got my right foot under his body and forcefully launched him towards the far side of the pen....where, unfortunately, he hit the springy wire fence and bounced off....in my

direction. I beat a hasty retreat, closing the gate just as the knot-headed critter slammed against it.... furiously flapping his wings in anger.

Apparently he spent the night planning his escape, as the following morning I found him outside the pen, strutting across the back lawn as if he owned the place.

He was a free-range rooster with a grudge.

The Time article didn't mention mean roosters, smelly chicken-houses, or the fact that hens instinctively establish a hierarchal society, a pecking order in which the last in line often dies from abuse....and is subsequently eaten by her upper-class sisters if the carcass is not promptly removed.

Perhaps the 'Movement' isn't old enough, or bold enough to De-Disneyfy chickens, but I suspect, sooner or later, once a woman's legs have been bloodied, or a screaming child comes running with a psychopathic rooster on his heels, that the newbies' will realize chickens aren't something (quote) 'between a goldfish and a cat'.

In the end....after he attacked my father, and acted-out against the little boys....I prepared to sentence

our rooster to death-by-sharpened-ax, but Dale favored leniency, and exile without parole to the river house where the guy could work out his manic aggressions chasing grasshoppers and dining on an infinite smorgasbord of defenseless bugs. "I suppose a coyote or raccoon will get him eventually," he said with some sadness.

I rubbed my wounded legs and smiled, "Probably...but it won't be without fight."

Postscript: I am the proud owner of 60 fryers, 24 laying hens and three roosters...one of which now follows me around the yard like a grateful puppy; Dale says he's gentle by nature...I think he's just showing his appreciation.

Karen

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# The Farm that Time Forgot

By Vicki O'Neal



I gaze about me at the rolling hills of the 'Funny Farm'. So much looks familiar...yet something is different.

But what...?

Grandma's maple tree still stands tall and erect. So does the old gasoline tank near the corn-crib. As the heat swells its rusty sides on sunny afternoons, the gassy old tank makes rude noises. 'Old Fartful' booms each day, its flatulence regular as clock-work. Year after year. Generation after generation.

The tired old barns are mostly the same—leaning a bit more to the south, perhaps. A dilapidated windmill creaks in the breeze with its blades long since sheered off by the winds of a forgotten storm.

The sun sizzles in a clear, cloudless sky...spinning across the expanse of heavens. It rises and sets in the usual directions—the same sun that I've seen rising over the Redwood forest for the past couple of years. I've been gone forever, it seems, living in a distant land behind the "Redwood Curtain" of northern California....

It all seems surreal to me, now.

Aimlessly, I wander into the garden. Picking an ear of corn, I strip off the silk and husks—sinking my teeth into the raw sweetness. Sugar drips off my chin. Incredible stuff. Raw sweet corn. For generations, my kinfolk have done the same thing. Crunching on raw sweet corn in the hot summer sun.

"Hey, Garden Girl...!" I can almost hear Grandpa's voice, and see his ghost standing near the fencepost, grinning at me. "That corn shore is good, ain't it?" He would laugh and clap his hands. Grandpa always clapped his hands. I do the same. It's a family trait. We clap our hands for no reason....for every reason. When we're happy. When we're mad or sad or glad. We can't help it. It's in our genes.

I toss aside the corncob and turn to leave the garden.

A dark shadow flits across the farmyard. In the coop, the chickens fall silent—even the noisy rooster. The cats turn wary and vanish. The dogs lift their heads and stare. The pigs cease their wallowing. A shriek rends the air as the dark shadow drops lower.

I run across the yard, shouting and waving my arms. "Go away or I'll have to kill you!" An idle

threat. I have no gun—but I sound fierce. The hawk continues to dip and soar, shrieking profanities at me. Eventually, he slides behind a misty cloud and is gone.

Thirteen cats come out of hiding. The dogs return to their naps. The cock crows, pompous as ever. The hens resume their clucking and scratching in the dirt. They have yet to lay a single egg, but they look industrious. The potbellies go back to wallowing in the mud. Fat. Lazy. Content. They live pampered lives. They can't be butchered for meat. They are family.

Yes, indeed. This is the Funny Farm, the Old Home Place—buried deep in these ancient hills. This is the Farm-that-Time-Forgot.

The screen door bangs on the farmhouse. I can see Mother sweeping the front porch. The stray cats entwine about her feet, but Mom isn't deterred. She remains spry and feisty for someone who's almost eighty years old.

Eighty! Is it possible?

No. Of course not. That would mean I am almost a half-century old, myself. And I know that's not true! I'm still young, swirling and twirling in my dreams, dancing across the barnyard as a full moon rises above these hills.

Dreamily, I wander down the old rutted trail with the trio of dogs by my side: the dachshund, the three-legged mutt, and the big black hound. Small, medium and large. They troop along in an orderly fashion, with the smallest leading the way. We climb the familiar hills, walking the trail that Dad has blazed through the timber—the infamous "Humpty Dumpty Road"—a trail that is as meandering as my father's thoughts. As whimsical and nostalgic as my own.

The dogs and I circle around to the pond, pausing to rest by the old farm wagon. I lean against the wooden rails, remembering hayrides in the fall, bonfires at midnight, scary stories, snipe hunts. Distant voices echoing across the dark waters...

I look at the boat waiting patiently on the shore. It fills me with a nostalgic longing. How often I've paddled those waters, soaking up sunshine, hearing the slap of carp, the splash of crappies. I was so young back then, so full of vim and vigor...and dreams.

Leaning over, I gaze into the watery mirror of the pond. Surely I will see her. The youthful eyes of

the farm gal who romped through these hills with a trio of dogs by her side. But no! She's not there. A crinkled gal is looking back at me, a gal with graying hair and wrinkles.

With a start, I straighten and stare about me at the distant soybeans and cornstalks, waving in the field. It has occurred to me, at last...This nagging thought at the back of my mind.

I realize that the Funny Farm isn't any different. Not really. It's me who has changed.

Each new experience alters us forever. The things we've seen and done. The people we've met. The joys. The disappointments. We may choose to think we are old and set in our ways, but as long as we are alive, we learn and grow and change.

My mindset is different than it used to be. I don't think like a Midwesterner any more. I've experienced too many California earthquakes and strange happenings. Too many odd folks with purple dreadlocks and multiple piercings. Two years of living behind the 'Redwood Curtain' have altered me, somehow.

But oh....!

How good it is to come home to these old hills...to regroup, and to romp with the dachshund, the black hound, and the three-legged mutt. To stretch my limbs and clap my hands—hearing the echo against yonder bank. It is the echoing clap of my father...and my grandfather....and my great grandfather before him. The sound makes me smile.

I glance at the trio of dogs who are looking at me expectantly, their eyes intent on my face. I say the words that they are awaiting. "Let's go!" I say. "Let's go, boys!" Like spring-loaded jackrabbits, they head for home. Small, medium and large...in that order.

Back to the thirteen cats and a pompous rooster. Egg-less hens and fat, lazy potbellies. The creak of a windmill. The rudeness of 'Old Fartful'. The thudding of walnuts on a shady lane. The sound of the wind in grandma's maple tree.

Back to the Funny Farm... The Old Home Place.... The-Farm-that-Time-Forgot.

Ah yes....It's good to be Home!

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