

Your

Country Neighbor

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August 2007



Pleasant farm scene just west of Seneca, Kansas



Nebraska Longhorns



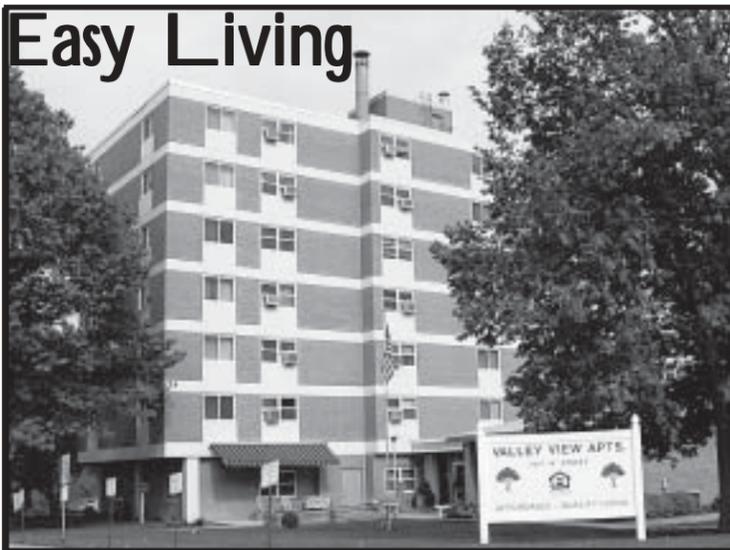
July was a month of warm days and parades. Here's Brownville's annual 4th of July parade.



Auburn's Rotary Lake is an ideal spot to have a picnic, fish from the bank, or to take a walk.

Voices from the Valley

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It's a good summertime feeling to see friends fishin' on a riverbank.

Your Country Neighbor is a publication that promotes the American value of "rural living" by presenting country and small town life in photos and essays from people who live here. Their columns include stories, poems, and an occasional editorial or news release.

A notable presence is the photography. Plus there is a web site that shows off more photos, and contains an archive of the recent two years of this publication. You can view it at:

www.yourcountryneighbor.com

Your Country Neighbor

**Delivered to the 4 corners of
Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska
in the following cities and towns:**

In Nebraska: Auburn, Avoca, Brownville, Cook, Dawson, Dubois, Falls City, Humboldt, Johnson, Nebraska City, Nehawka, Nemaha, Otoe, Pawnee City, Peru, Shubert, Stella, Syracuse, Table Rock, Tecumseh, Union, Verdon, Weeping Water.

In Missouri: Mound City, Rock Port.

In Kansas: Axtell, Baileyville, Beattie, Centralia, Fairview, Hiawatha, Home, Sabetha, and Seneca.

In Iowa: Hamburg, Riverton, Sidney.

Your

COUNTRY NEIGHBOR

Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

Publisher, Editor & Photographer: Stephen Hassler

Writers

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Vicki Harger
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Joe Smith
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Thank you!

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One of my favorite subjects to photograph.

VISIT

Dramatic Expressions Photography

on the 'web'

by *Your Country Neighbor* Photographer,
Stephen Hassler

www.yourcountryneighbor.com/photography.htm

Diary of an Unemployed Housewife

by Merri Johnson

July sure was hot for awhile, wasn't it?

How hot was it?

It was so hot I considered cleaning my refrigerator just to be able to stand in front of the open door. But then I remembered you're supposed to turn off the fridge while you clean it to save electricity, so that pretty much eliminated the incentive.

It was so hot I started listening to Christmas music trying to pretend it was winter, but then I'd make the mistake of looking outside and being reminded it was still July. How do people who live at the equator manage to get in the mood for Christmas with the thermometer reading 100 degrees?

It was so hot I tossed the bedding in the dryer instead of hanging it on the clothesline. It's pretty hard for linens to soak up that fresh-air scent when the air is as hot and stale outside as it is inside the dryer. Ditto for drying cleaning rags and old work clothes. I just couldn't get excited about the "opportunity" to be outside.

It was so hot, the room-darkening shades in the dining room remained pulled for days on end. We had to use the lights in broad daylight to see what we were eating. Talk about adding insult to injury: it's bad enough that the air conditioner is sucking all that expensive electricity without having to use extra electricity for lights on top of it.

It was so hot the dog couldn't go outside without falling over from heat exhaustion. She's 15 years old and experiencing congestive heart failure. Turns out those heat warnings for the elderly apply to dogs as well as people.

It was so hot, I actually regretted daylight savings time. Who wants another hour of sunlight when the air is so stifling you wish you could have more hours of moonlight instead?

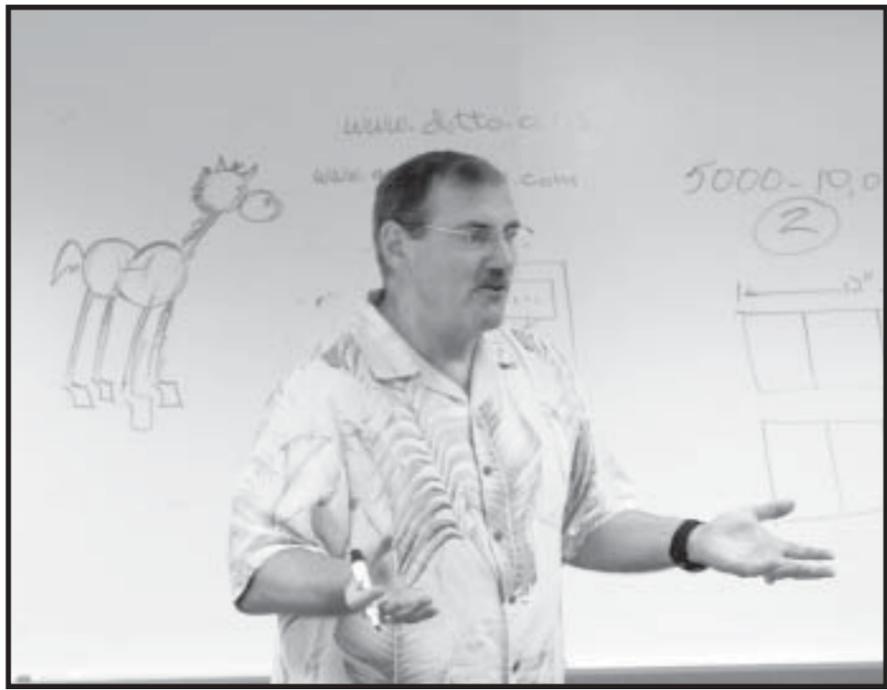
It was so hot that a bat that thought he was escaping to the air-conditioned interior of our house, got caught in the slats of a west window blind and ended up suffocating... or maybe baking... I'll spare you the rest of the details of that episode.

Yes, it was hot. But mercifully, the humidity was relatively low, giving us a sample of that "dry heat" that people in Arizona are always bragging about. "Sure, it's 100 degrees here," they say, "but it's dry, so it doesn't feel nearly as hot." Right.

I'll concede that lower humidity means you can go outside without beginning to drip with perspiration the instant you open the door, but as far as I'm concerned, 100 degrees is 100 degrees, and that's too darned hot.

Editor's note: You can read previous articles by Merri online in Your Country Neighbor archives; just click on "publications" when you go to:

www.yourcountryneighbor.com



Paul Fell, editorial cartoonist, taught a workshop in Auburn, recently.



Youths and adults explored drawing as a career or hobby.



Everyone engaged in practicing the basics, and even one accomplished artist said, "I learned something!"

Paul Fell operates his own cartoon studio in Lincoln, Nebraska, where he creates numerous illustrations for a wide variety of clients. One of his books is the popular "You Know You're a Nebraskan..." with "CBS Sunday Morning" personality, Roger Welsch.

Publisher's Comment

Joe Smith introduced me to Frieda Burston more than two years ago while she was still living in Israel. She became a frequent writer for Your Country Neighbor, and her earlier articles can be found online in the "Publications" section beginning with March 2005. They include a series of articles relating a smart little girl's memories of pre World War II and the depression years in St. Joseph, Missouri. Personally, I was reminded of "Scout", the character in To Kill a Mockingbird. Frieda moved back to the USA last year and is near family in California. Israel's loss is our gain.

Big Print, Small Print

by Frieda Burston

Over here in Ol' Folks' Land, the first line goes, "My name is Mary, what's yours?" And the second is, "Where you from?"

I had a problem with that because if I said "Israel", everybody thought I was a native-born Israeli with a perfect Mid American accent, acquired here in the last few months. So I started saying, "Born and brought up in Missouri, married and had two girls in Texas, taught in San Diego, and spent the last twenty years in Israel."

That usually got a whistle and "Well, you've been around, haven't you?" I learned that my fellow oldies here had ridden camels to the pyramids in Egypt, glided in gondolas in Italy, and stood in line to meet the Dali Lhama in Outer Mongolia, but these were their headlines. Their small print was about working behind a counter and wiping ends of babies. They enjoyed it, but were a little ashamed of spending so many years in small print.

Well, I had no headlines. Been nowhere but Israel. Done nothin' in big print. And my small print was about working in front of a blackboard and wiping ends of babies. But I remember the exciting things that happened in small print, and all the other Marys here didn't notice theirs. That's all the difference. Noticing and remembering. Their lives were just as eventful as mine, because life is. They just didn't notice. If they wanted to remember, they'd have a lot to talk about too.

Missouri stretched from childhood to university, from deep Depression and years of Drouth and Dust Bowl, to boy-friends and Leaving Forever. Every bit

of it in big print, because it all is, when you're young. As time goes by, the ink runs low and the print shrinks.

Texas stretched from marriage and motherhood to a work-life. I stood in the wrong line at College Station when I was registering for Abe in the Engineering line. It was the first year women were allowed to enroll there, and the enthusiastic clerks enrolled me in Education. That's how I became a teacher. By mistake. From wrong line to headline. Big print.

There was a flood on the Blue River above Kansas City, and the waters of the Blue and the Missouri flooded over the Ozarks. Our train (to leave the girls back in Kansas City with Gramma) was the last train out of Texas into the water-washed north, and it went with people holding hands and praying, with a man riding outside on the cow-catcher, poking with a stick to make sure there was still a track on the trestles above the torrent. We lived—that in itself was big print to us. (We were on the first train out of K.C. when the waters fell. I wasn't making that trip twice!)

California stretched from D-D's first grade to Lulu's teaching degree. It was full of headline living—the girls had come packed with extra ink. I went back to school again. Lots of small print and drudge work, but I sat next to an African princess at San Diego State. Her life was forfeited if she went back to her country. I tutored a daughter of the Korean royal family. Ten years later she had her face on Fortune magazine as top investor of the year. Lulu migrated to Israel, a big print event that generated a lot of salt water at our house.

The swallows that were supposed to migrate back to Capistrano on March 18 got tired early on, and ended up building above our back door in San Diego. I went out to hose down their mud nests, and got into a super-big black plastic bag to keep myself dry. The minute I went out, a whole cloud of birds mobbed me, beak and claw. I dropped the hose, ran back into the house, and tore off the black bag. Out again, I washed the mud off the walls. Now the birds sat quietly in the trees and waited. When I went in, they flew quietly down and rebuilt. No diving maniacs, just nice quiet, messy, dirty tired birds.

We built a house in Texas, a nice little block house. Definitely a small print affair. Problem was, in wet weather it

was great. In dry weather, the land sank down, the foundation sank down, and the block house sat alone above a big empty crack between the house and the foundation all along the south. We protested to the contractor. He shrugged. "Your lot," he said. "If you didn't know your land, you shouldn'ta built there." Yes, sure, we knew that our lot was just two short blocks from the Chisholm Trail of western song. So?

But we had never heard the story of Pancho Villa and the quicksand. Seems like the famous bandit loaded up 20 ox-wagon-loads of loot stripped from Mexican churches below Brownsville, and sent them to be sold in Texas via the Chisholm Trail—but not quite. Like about 500 feet north of the trail, to avoid other bandits. It had rained heavily; the land was sodden and had turned to swamp and quicksand. The men, the oxen, the wagons, the treasure—all went down and were sucked below. Years passed. The surface dried. People built on what seemed to be dry land. Every storm since, house foundations float above the swamp, every drouth the foundations shrink. Okay for frame houses like everyone else builds, nobody notices—but a block house? Oh well...pretty big print, that was—

All the old folks here have lived in houses. How do they know whether they lived above buried treasure, maybe guarded by ghosts of men and animals? And almost all the old folks here have worked with others. How do they know whether they worked with princesses, with runaways, with terrorists, with lottery winners? Did they ask?

Do you know the past of the place where you live? Or who lived there before you? Or the past of the building where you work? Or who your neighbors really are? Did you ever ask? Or do you, like the Marys here, lament that Life Has Passed You By?? Do you spend your vacation money making headlines, when the small print is really just as exciting, if you would only read it?

Stop the presses! Something new is happening all the time — Look for it!

Regards, Frieda

Previous publications can be viewed and read at this web address:

www.yourcountryneighbor.com



A Tribute to Darrell Dean Ensor 1952-2007
by Vicki Harger

News of his death struck hard in the Heartland last month. It happened on a day of celebrations -- a day when words of freedom rode every breeze. Old Glory rippled proudly in the wind. Patriots paraded on Main Streets across America.

Darrell Ensor was all about that.

In fact, if he'd been born in the 1700's, Darrell might have been one of our Founding Fathers. The Declaration of Independence might have been inscribed with his name. And the words: "Give me liberty, or give me death!" could well have been coined by Darrell, himself.

But Darrell wasn't born in that era. He fought for our freedom in different ways. He didn't like bureaucracy. He didn't like the way the Feds handle things nowadays, but he was a loyal countryman -- true patriot.

He died on the 4th of July.

Darrell was a big man, bigger than life: a mover and a shaker, a transporter of homes and barns and bridges and windmills. If the task was difficult, or well-nigh impossible, you called on Darrell; he would find a way. He invented things when necessary -- ingenious devices full of levers and cogs. He tackled mammoth projects and engineered mechanical wonders.

Darrell was a clever, funny man -- an outspoken Christian. He did countless acts of kindness, rescuing country folk from farm mishaps, and townsfolk from their citified debacles. He gave advice even when you wished he didn't, and remained a voice of reason throughout long friendships.

He was a character, in the very best sense of the word.

When Darrell's plane plummeted to the ground on Wednesday morning, it sent shock waves rippling to the furthest reaches of the countryside -- from the Heartland's Four Corners region to Amish country beyond the river. Shock turned to grief, then dismay, and eventually self-pity. What would we do now? Who would intervene for us when life gets troublesome? And who would make us laugh when we felt like crying?

News of his death rode the breeze from farm to farm, from town to town. Darrell Ensor was dead? No, it couldn't be true!

On the morning of July 5th, I went to the area of the plane crash near Johnson, Nebraska. I wandered about feeling dazed. The FAA inspectors had just left, leaving a long trampled trail through the cornfield where the plane went down -- a narrow corridor leading to tragedy and heartbreak. I could see the tail fin of the Piper sticking up out of the cornstalks, and I felt drawn down that sad trail to the sacred spot where Darrell's life had ended.

I didn't intend to get so close, but suddenly there it was, rising up before me: a broken plane, half-hidden in the forest of waving corn. Startled, I tripped on a cornstalk and sprawled headlong in the dirt. I lay there dazed in the cornfield jungle, staring at the burned remains of the plane.

Then I jumped to my feet. Dear Lord! I had to get out of here.

But tears blinded my eyes and it was hard to see. It seemed like there was something I should say. "Um..." I said. "Goodbye, Darrell. Thanks for everything you've done; and for moving my house, and all that you did for my dad and everyone else." I was rambling, but it didn't seem inappropriate. Darrell would've understood.

I stared into the skies above. They were a brilliant blue just like they were when Darrell had buzzed over his farmstead a final time the day before. His family had gathered there for 4th of July festivities. They'd heard the plane as it dipped low overhead.

But no one knew he was saying goodbye -- least of all Darrell, himself.

The plane had swooped, then begun its final climb toward Johnson, the community Darrell had loved for so many years. Beyond the town, a patchwork of farms and fields stretched toward the horizon: a huge quilt stitched with rail fences and country lanes, with neighborly kindness and good will.

It was the last view of earth that Darrell saw that day.

Then came the sound that marked the end of Darrell's flight and his life. A sudden bang in the skies on the 4th of July -- a sound that heralded the passage of a darn good pilot into the blue beyond. A neighboring farmer witnessed the demise of the Piper plane just a mile from Darrell's home. He saw the wing break off and the plane make its downward dive less than a half-mile from the heart of town. Darrell had been checking out his new plane when it crashed. It had been scheduled for a safety inspection the very next day. In fact, that's where Darrell was headed when the plane went down.

Oh, the irony of it all -- the tragic loss of a good life!

I stood amid the cornrows, staring at the wing of the Piper lodged in a distant cottonwood tree. I listened to the whisper of the katydids, and the sad voice of a mourning dove. I stared at the vacant patch of sky where Darrell's plane had broken apart. The stretch of blue looked just like any other, yet it held in its expanse the last words and prayers of a doomed pilot.

I wondered what he'd thought, and what he'd said.

My mind wandered back to that day, years ago, when Darrell had taken us for a plane ride over this very countryside. It seemed like eons ago, now, but I re-

member how the plane had been buffeted about in the wind like a small boat on rough seas. Fear had overwhelmed me as I teetered between heaven and earth in that wisp of an aircraft.

But Darrell had just grinned and hollered encouragement at me, waving toward the town far below: The tiny buildings lined up in rows. The teensy people wandering in and out of their doll houses, driving their toy cars to their minuscule destinations. A picturesque world in miniature. The scene made me forget my fears of flying and I stared with fascination at the bird's eye view of earth.

It was a scene that Darrell had loved, a view from God's perspective. That's why Darrell enjoyed flying so much. Up there, he felt closer to his Creator. He got to soar with the hawks and eagles. He got to mingle with unseen angels.

I thought about that as I stood staring up at the patch of blue sky where Darrell's plane had fallen apart. At that point, he'd only had moments to live and he knew it. In those seconds, his life had surely flashed before his eyes: A good life, full of good people -- a host of loving friends and family. Likely, he'd bid us all farewell, shouting words of encouragement like he'd always done. He was probably issuing final instructions and giving us advice with his last breath -- telling us not to fret -- that he'd died doing what he loved.

That was Darrell!

I sighed and turned to go, taking one last look at the crumpled plane and the Piper's wing in the cottonwood. High in the sky above, a hawk circled on a thermal breeze, soaring higher and higher until it was barely visible in the azure haze. Then abruptly, it was gone and there was nothing left but a shimmering blue that stretched on forever.

Brushing back tears, I left the crash site, retreating down that long corridor of waving corn toward the world of the Here-and-Now. Life would go on. It always does -- but life just wouldn't be the same without that man from Johnson.

Darrell Dean Ensor. What a Christian and an adventurer and a patriot. He died as he had lived -- full of faith, with the hope of a better tomorrow. He'd ascended to the clouds and soared with the eagles. He went out with a bang on the 4th of July.

And we will never forget him -- we never will.

Editor's note: You can read previous articles by Vicki online in Your Country Neighbor archives; just click on "publications" when you go to:

www.yourcountryneighbor.com



It was "standing room only" on Brownville's sidewalks for the 4th of July Parade.



The shops in Brownville treated the public to a party one summer evening, including wine, cheese, cream puffs, and music.



This rider paused during the 4th of July parade and allowed greetings to be exchanged.



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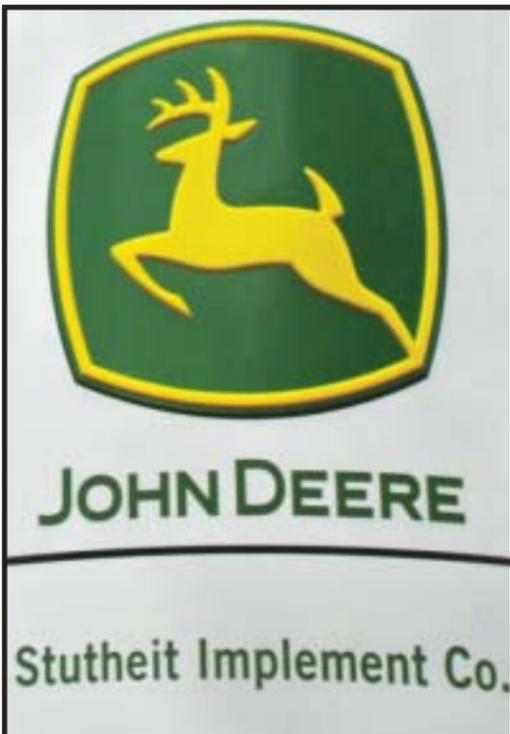


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Among the artworks displayed are two award
winning photos by *Your Country Neighbor*
Photographer, Stephen Hassler.



Water lily in bloom on the goldfish pond beneath the waterfall at the Whiskey Run Creek Winery in Brownville.



This butterfly was photographed late in July in one of the gardens at Whiskey Run Creek Winery, appropriately, on a 'Butterfly Bush'. The Buckeye butterflies are more common around here in August.



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Friends who live beyond your '4-Corners' region can view *Your Country Neighbor* on the internet, just send them this address: **www.YourCountryNeighbor.com** (Capital letters optional.)

Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report

by Josh Whisler
(Photo provided by Author)

Fishing:

The Missouri River steadily dropped last month. The piling and riprap rock formations are easily in sight. The sand bars for the most part were washed away this Spring with the flooding. But they will eventually return with the a few rises and falls of the river, and soon enough they'll be reestablished in behind the trail dikes the way they were last summer.

With the sand bars changing so goes the fishing strategy. Basically there are three places to fish - the rocks, the bars, or the holes. Now that the sand bars are washed out, that fishing is out for now, so that leaves fishing the rocks, which takes patience and tackle. The rocks are not very forgiving - when you're hung up "you're hung up!" That means breaking your line a lot and loosing your rigging. So what's that leave you? Fishing the holes right now is the right place to be. The river water temperature is over 85 degrees and there is only one place the fish like to be when it's that hot - IN THE HOLES. You are at the mercy of the brush and snags that are also in the holes. But that's where they are, keeping cool in the deep water. What are they biting on? They are hitting sand toads (which are plentiful on a flood year) pretty regular. But it seems the night fishing has had the best results with goldfish and bluegill. Get out and give it a try but take lots of sunscreen and bug spray. The only cool spots are in the shade and unfortunately that's where the bugs are too.

Hunting:

The 2007 Fall Deer Season permits are available on a "first come first serve" basis starting June 11th by Residents and Non-Residents. Check the Nebraska Game & Parks website (<http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/>) for permit availability or stop in at a commission office.

ATTENTION

2007 Fall Turkey Season permits can be bought beginning August 14. All permits are available online at www.outdoornebraska.org, by mail through the Lincoln office, or over the counter at any Commission Permitting office.

2007 Fall Turkey Season Dates are:

Shotgun: Oct. 14 - Nov. 10 and Nov. 20 - Dec. 31.

Archery: Oct. 1 - Nov. 10 and Nov. 20 - Dec. 31.

Summer is here and it's hot. But there is nothing cooler than getting around some water and the river is no exception. If there is a breeze in the area it's at the river, add a little shade, and it's not too bad. It really is time to get out there - the fishing is good. And you won't be sorry 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."

Editor's note: You can read previous articles by Josh online in Your Country Neighbor archives; just click on "publications" at: www.yourcountryneighbor.com



Jack McConnaughey (left) with a 56 pound Flathead Catfish and his son David McConnaughey (right) shown with a 55 pound Blue Catfish.

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When We Die?

by Joe Smith

There are many things said about this subject. Sometimes I wonder if I will be watching my own funeral from 'up there'. In my life I have had some strange, unexplainable things happen and I know others have too. So, is there anything to the after-life talk or not?

Some religions believe that we return to dust, others believe we come back as newborn children. Some believe we come back as animals, maybe Brahma cows. I go along with the return as a new baby, but I don't know if the world could stand another Joe Smith. Maybe things change? Who knows? It seems as though one has to go through a lot of schooling 'up there' to even become a spirit guide. The closer you get to hearing the heavenly music the more you wonder about it. The "Where will I go, up there, or down there?" type of thinking. It has a tendency to make a better person out of you. Maybe "He" will give you credit for the good things you do to make up for some of your misdeeds when "He" sees you really trying to be good.

We all have some misdeeds, somewhere or sometime. I know when the roll is called up yonder I'll have some answering to do. I haven't always been this good old boy. I'm trying to make up for it; I hope "He" is watching.

The song "Yesterday" by a country western artist is what I told the wife I wanted played at my funeral. Not many of you good folks have seen my halo yet, maybe I need to put in a bigger bulb or one of those new ones that save money.

We have lost some really good people just recently in the community, some way too soon. Maybe this is what caused me to write this article. These fine people were well-liked. I guess when the bell tolls you had better be ready. It can come at any time; I hope not too soon, I don't have my halo adjusted just right yet. I have been told I was going to the devil for doing this water dowsing for people. But you know they really need a nice cool water well down there I'm sure. They probably have enough lawyers to dig it. I always heard the people in hell would like a glass of ice water, well a cold drink out of a new well would taste mighty good I'm sure. If it was big enough it might put out the fire down there too.

All jokes aside, where do you think you will go? Will you be able to watch your own funeral, see your wife or husband grieving? Think about it awhile. There are so many different opinions about the after-life. I'm still searching for answers. I guess there is no use worrying about it. I would like to step up to the gate with a clean slate anyway. My wife and I both feel we have been contacted by some of our family after they passed. I have talked to others that tell me of things that happen with no easy explanation. It seems I have been able to contact some that have passed over, I don't do that but once in a great while. You can smile, but the information I received was correct and confirmed. Maybe I can get my answers from one of them?

A friend of mine, who is also our preacher, told me the only thing carved in stone was the ten commandments, all the rest is man's interpretation of what the Lord said. So this goes along with what I believe. You can't do wrong all week and then get a pardon on Sunday. To me this won't work. You might think it will but those misdeeds you have done in your life are on the record. Just remember somebody is watching and behave with that in mind. I have done some things in my life I'm not too proud of, but I have changed a lot over the years.

My wife and I went down to Fayetteville, Arkansas in April and taught dowsing at a conference. The Saturday night speaker was a psychic. She could talk to people that had passed over. Very much like John Edwards does on TV. She explained what she was going to do and had several people pass out a piece of paper to anybody who wanted to contact a person that had passed over. You wrote your question down and who you wanted to contact, then folded the paper in half. While this was going on a person taped patches over the speaker's eyes and then wrapped a black blindfold around her face. The people helping her collected all the slips of paper and put them in a box in front of her. She would pick up one or two and tap her forehead with them, maybe two or three at a time. Then she would ask about a subject or give out the person's name and then answer the question that that person had asked. She answered several people before she got to Marta's question. Marta's question was, "Were all the children that we lost, together now?" The speaker said, "My, here comes a mini van with five or six people in it." The name Joe came up several times. My name is Joe and two of our kids had Jo in their name. Then she mentioned Melisa who was our daughter. The lady said, "She says 'Mom, you were a good mother,' and she didn't know how you stayed with Dad all these years. He has changed a lot though." This was all I can remember she said to

Marta, but it really was a tear jerker for both of us. It was amazing to say the least, plus the fact that she mentioned a group of people. We have lost two sons, and one daughter with her two daughters, that makes five and they were all together.

A friend of mine asked the question of a friend of his that died what it was like over there. The answer she got from him was it wasn't anything like he thought it would be like. All of those spirits she contacted were right in the same room as we were. Doesn't that make you wonder if they are out there all the time? There is so much we don't know. Maybe heaven and hell is right here, just in another dimension that we can't see. I guess we will know sooner or later. Later, I hope.

These are just my opinions, whether right or wrong is for you to decide. Joe Smith

The New Pup

by Joe Smith

My wife decided to get a new puppy. She fell in love on sight with a 4-month old Cocker Spaniel, basically white with black and brown parts. We picked out a name and call her Sugar Baby. I have never seen a dog with as much energy as this young lady has. Actually we should have named her the Tasmanian devil and called her Tas for short. She has battles every day with our cats, some move out of the way in a slow lope and several back her up. She just torments them all the time. We started trying to teach her not to chase the cats. She will find two cats in the driveway and run a figure eight path around them. It is a real scream to watch. The problem now is there are some small kittens that she is wallowing till they are soaking wet.

We are trying to teach her some manners without much luck. We have started putting her in a cage when she doesn't mind and giving her a treat when she does. She has taken over my office as her room when she is in the house. I'm sure it will work out, but it is a real struggle to get it all done. I hope she will mature soon. I don't have much hair left to pull. Some of the things she has done keep my wife and I both in stitches. She gets on a tear and goes wide open. She has learned to retrieve balls and toys. She actually is not a bad watchdog. She will bark at things. One of her problems is the fact she also will climb into anybody's car or pickup. Maybe when she learns what NO is that will make a difference. We are trying to break her of jumping up on people.

We make a lot of trips, so it will be interesting to see how my wife handles that each time. She took her to the vet the other day to a tune of \$65 that one time. It cost as much to raise this pup as it would to have another child. But we had a real nice dog called Toby for years and my wife missed the companionship the dog gave us. I think this pup, even though she is real pain in the rear, might just furnish us with some companionship as we get older and don't travel as much. Time will tell. I'm getting to where I don't buy green bananas any more. Around here you don't know when or how you will go. Joe Smith

Editor's note: You can read previous articles by Joe online in Your Country Neighbor archives; just click on "publications" at:

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SAIL AWAY

by Devon Adams

Today the light was honey gold,
and the air was stripped and clean.
The soggy wet of recent days is gone,
replaced by a fresher, drier breeze.
The solstice shadows
have had their say and are receding
toward the distant autumn equinox
that holds the key to winter.
Our illusions of endless summer
are simply wishes wanting to be real,
because the perfect days come mixed
among the other awful days of
smothering steaming blankets
that threaten our survival.
Perhaps our muddled brains are wise
to embroider pictures where
we'd like to stay forever,
caught in dreams of sailing
on the cloud ships floating
in the sea blue sky.

SEPARATE PLACES

by Devon Adams

He comes to visit often
but it's hard to read her face
and see the distance in her eyes.
They were together for a family,
and for retirement time,
until she lost direction.
It was small things at first,
forgetting conversations
or losing keys, easily explained
by fatigue or stress.
But one day she took a walk
and got lost on familiar streets.
Then he knew that things had changed.
In time, he couldn't care for her,
and now she lives in a place
that is new to her everyday,
because she can't remember yesterday.
He never knew what lonely meant
until he sat beside her
and she wasn't really there.
They are in separate places now,
with rare and shining moments
of recognition and affection
that echo all the years gone by.

CLOSE ENOUGH

by Devon Adams

Often, in the evening,
when the light is golden,
and the shadows pull their covers
over hills and valleys,
like people pulling shades
in windows on the night,
then I know that they are there
just out of sight,
but close enough to touch.
The soft breath of the horses
sends shivers down my back,
and I know the cats are sitting
in their favorite places,
purring whispers.
My old dogs are standing by my side,
almost there in the dusky light.
There's quite a crowd here,
when you count the people
that have been and gone.
I can't say I'm ever lonesome,
with all this company so near.
We don't need words of any kind
to say how much we care,
because we said it all so long ago.
It's enough to know that we're together
and forever isn't far away at all.

*Editor's note: You can read previous articles by Devon Adams online in
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The Face of Drought

A Farm Report from Western Nebraska

by Karen Ott

Ask an area farmer how things look out his way and he'll narrow his eyes, curl his lip and growl, "Awful.", then add for good measure, "Can't wait for this year to be over."

It's always the same story: wheat straw worth more than the bushels harvested, alfalfa fields droughted out after the first cutting, weeds in the corn, berries in the beans and bare fields in July. The hard panhandle truth is great prices...poor potential.

The exception is the beet crop; recent samples taken by the sugar company indicate good tonnage and sugar -- if the fields can escape hail, cercospora leaf spot and powdery mildew, that is.

Farmers world-wide are in trouble: England's floods and Europe's bad weather, have officials warning the public of rising food prices and gaps on their supermarket shelves, and the Australian farmers who produce 40% of the agricultural output in Australia's 'food bowl' were recently advised they would be receiving no irrigation water this season. "Basically Australia is in big danger of not being able to feed itself." said one Ag official.

If a country can't feed itself who will? China? Now that's a scary thought.

A miserable string of one-hundred-plus days ended yesterday with a rare afternoon shower; four tenths on the Morrill farms, about three tenths on the home place. Too little, too late to do the crops, or pastures, much good, but the cool fresh air after so many days of oppressive heat lifted everyone's spirits. It was the first measurable rainfall on the home place since the 1/2 inch on May first.

The heat is forecast to return on Sunday so we're making the most of our few days of moderate temperatures.

Bob the cat cashed in the last bit of his ninth life this week, ending a three week battle with an unknown disease that sapped his will to live. At the end he had just enough strength to curl his paw around my index finger. Besides his humans he is survived by his feline family: Fluffy, Puff, Socks, Fat Max and the irascible One-Eyed Tillie. The dogs, Pepper, Patch, Boxer and Queen couldn't care less.

When I was growing up, farmyard pets weren't taken to the vet; my parents didn't have the money to spend on animals with no potential for generating income. It wasn't that they were hard-hearted or uncaring; to the contrary, they treated sick and injured animals with compassion, nursing them as best they could. I remember my father patiently dripping water down the throat of our dog Ike, who had been badly hurt in a fight with a coyote, and my mother cooking up an extra batch of milk gravy for kittens abandoned by their floozy mother. But when worse came to worse my Dad didn't call the vet, he took down his shotgun from the back of the bedroom closet instead.

And now for those who believe nothing exciting ever happens in rural America:

Last night, a young man driving a stolen vehicle with Maryland license plates, filled gas at the Lyman Minute-Mart, then drove off without paying. The out-of-towner couldn't have known that, in this part of the world, stealing gas is considered as bad as cattle rustling, or that the town of Lyman is so small that at any given time the cop is seldom more than two blocks away from the Minute-Mart; the criminal had scarcely screeched from the parking lot before he saw the flashing lights of the law behind him.

With the officer in hot pursuit he stomped on the gas and sped off: down the hi-way, into a corn field, under a pivot, through a fence, and up and over the union pacific railroad tracks. He was like the energizer bunny...he just kept going and going and going.... until he landed (SPLASH) upside down in the Mitchell Irrigation Canal.

Even then he didn't give up. Swimming to the bank he crawled from canal and took off on foot. A radio broadcast said the law tracked him as far as County Road F and the Platte River before losing him.

County Road F and the Platt? Yikes -- that's my back yard.

We'll be keeping our doors locked tonight.

Karen

Editor's note: You can read previous articles by Karen Ott online in Your Country Neighbor archives; just click on "publications" when you go to:
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Unlike Western Nebraska, Southeast Nebraska corn is looking good.

Country

Scenes



Missouri Wildlife Refuge



Aging Oak, Southwest of Nemaha, Nebraska



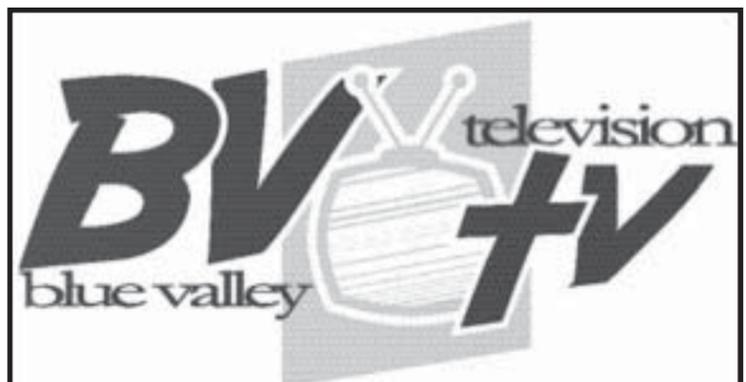
Kansas Hillside



Hard for me to tell from the distance, but I think it's a Cottonwood tree; South of Auburn, Nebraska.



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