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August 2013  
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Auburn Middle School Band Nemaha County Parade



Vintage Aircraft at the Tarkio Air Show. July 13, 2013



Brownville's Annual 4th of July Parade

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## Cover Photos

Auburn's Middle School band is my favorite to hear and to photograph. The Bulldogs are on page 9, and the Eagles are on page 5.

Tarkio's air show included many vintage aircraft as well as some stunt teams. More photos on page 13 and the back cover.



One of the 'Stunt' teams at the Tarkio Air Show, July 13, 2013

## *Voices from the Valleys of the Nemaha*

Publisher and Photographer, Stephen Hassler

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# Poetry by Devon Adams

## STAGE PRODUCTIONS

A big blue back drop is stretched across the stage. It looks like the finest sheer silk, radiant in the brilliant bright light. Suddenly, puffs of white appear, resembling cotton balls, or scoops of vanilla ice cream. They float, until the light and sound effects crew throws a few switches and creates flashes, followed by massive booms. Darkness falls, as we cover our ears to muffle the noise. We peer at the thunderheads exploding into rain. Now we know that this production is brought to us by the original producer.

## EATING OUT

Little country towns were lost in the dust at the end of winding dirt roads, so many years ago, in the middle of the last century. Folks didn't travel much, because they couldn't afford it, and because it wasn't easy, with mud and ice and snow and flattened tires, and blown radiators. So they had businesses right on the main street, that carried everything they needed to live a good life. My parents and I would eat out, now and then, at the cafe that served— what else? — home cooking that came in generous servings. My favorite then, and now, was a hot beef sandwich. It came on a heavy white commercial kitchen plate that had a little dark blue design around the edge. Nestled between two big slices of white bread were chunks of the most tender and steamy beef roast, topped with dark brown gravy. A small side dish held creamy mashed potatoes, drowning in that same gravy, made from pan drippings. Need I say more?

## WIND IN THE WIRES

Around the bend in the old dirt road is a quiet place far, far away from the sounds of the town. Out here by the clear creek there are none of the echoes from growling mowers, roaring motorcycles, booming basses or human words floating on the sultry summer air. But this place has a voice of it's own, that speaks of endless years of prairie weather, with blowing soil and rains and ice that cut the clay with sharp knives. It comes and goes, like the ebb and flow of surf on a lonely beach, and it sings in the wires that stretch from pole to pole. It is the wind in the willows and the tops of the oaks, that howls and cries, or hums soft hymns about the beginning of time. It is wordless prayers chanted from the depths of the infinite sky.

## BERRY FINE

On a sultry summer day, ripened fruit hangs heavy on the stalks of berry bushes, as stingers and skeeters search for blood and revenge from greedy humans who invade this hallowed ground. Trying to steal the bounty from wild critters, these scary creatures wearing layers of shirts, socks, hats, nets, and insect repellent fight their way through thickets and thorns, snakes and vines, spiders and claustrophobia, to reach their goal. With visions of colorful jam and jelly jars filled with heavenly flavors, they endure the agonies of chiggers, and sweat and gnats in their eyes, not to mention twisted ankles, and purple fingers. Even as they vow never to do this stupid stuff again, they know that next summer will lure them once again to fight the good fight for the sweetest kind of victory!



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## WILD IN THE ROSE

There are gardens, beside certain streets, that exude fragrance in the heat of summer. Rising on currents of warm, moist air, are the essence of blooms, invisible to the eye, but forms just the same, detected by the subtle scent sensors in the cavernous halls that comprise our noses. Riots of color nod to the passing breezes, and they are the visual triggers that inspire artists to paint moments in time, which will live longer than the flowers. But city yards, boxed in by fancy fencing, can't capture the elegance of wild roses glowing on the banks of a country road. They wait there, hiding in ripples of long grasses, holding their promise of the wild in the rose, the spicy tang that only an original can produce.

## DREAM WALKER

He walks toward me through the mists of the morning, a figure no more substantial than a dream. And he is not really there, any more than the fog is there, because I am waking from a dream and his image retreats before I can see his face. Time has passed since he was walking on this earth, and yet in dreams he comes to me in life. I can touch him and hear the softness of his voice. But there is no reality in the mist, because this man that visits me is not the one that I knew. He is the man that I loved. The person who comes to me is the kinder man, who was lost inside a meaner soul, who was afraid to be real.

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'Nemaha County, Nebraska Fair' Parade. July 2013

## Medicare Advantage Plans: What Are They?

Mary Ann Holland

Retired University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Educator and Trained SHIIP Professional

Medicare Part C—Medicare Advantage (MA) Plans, is a program established by the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 (MMA). Medicare Advantage is an option for beneficiaries to enroll in Medicare plans offered by private health insurance organizations approved by Medicare.

MA, or Medicare health plans, combine coverage for Part A, Part B and usually Part D in one plan. MA plans can also offer additional services not typically covered by Medicare, such as hearing, vision, dental, and health/wellness services. Individuals who enroll in a Medicare Advantage plan will receive all their Medicare benefits through the plan that they chose, not through Original Medicare. Likewise, all claims, cost determinations, what is and is not covered, will be handled by the Medicare Advantage Plan. IF the plan chooses not to cover an item/service, Medicare Part A and B will NOT pick up the cost. Beneficiaries also must follow the plan's rules including using a provider network, getting prior authorization for certain services, and other spending control limitations.

Medicare Advantage Plans must cover all of the services that Original Medicare covers except hospice care. Original Medicare covers hospice care even if you're in a Medicare Advantage Plan.

In all types of Medicare Advantage Plans, there is always coverage for Emergency and Urgent Care obtained outside of the Medicare health plan's service area for a sudden illness or injury that needs medical care right away, but isn't life threatening. If it's not safe to wait until you get home to get care from a plan doctor, the health plan must pay for the care.

Medicare Advantage plans are not the same as Medicare Supplement (Medigap) insurance plans. You cannot use (and cannot be sold) a Medicare Supplement Insurance plan while you are enrolled in a Medicare Advantage Plan. If you already have a Medigap policy and then join a Medicare Advantage Plan, you will need to drop your Medigap policy.

With Advantage plans, enrollees must live in an area where the plan is offered. Your state and county of residence will determine which MA plans you can consider. Medicare Part C, or Medicare Advantage plans, utilize a network of providers. In other words, your health care providers, clinic, hospital, or other facility must have a signed contract with an MA plan before the plan will pay for your care. It is your responsibility to determine the provider accepts your plan **before** you obtain services, otherwise you will be required to pay 100% of the costs.

MA plans are not as widely accepted as Original Medicare. Some providers will accept all MA

plans, some will accept a few, and some providers will not accept any MA plans. It is extremely important for an individual to check with all current providers to see which plans are accepted.

Medicare Supplement insurance policies, on the other hand, are an extension of Original Medicare benefits; wherever Medicare is accepted, a Medicare Supplement insurance plan will be. There are no residency requirements related to Medicare Supplement insurance; individuals can purchase a policy from any insurance company approved by Medicare and a state's department of insurance.

Medicare Advantage plans must abide by specific guidelines set by CMS, or the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services; these plans are subject to review by CMS to ensure compliance. Each MA plan must accept all Medicare beneficiaries, except those diagnosed with ESRD (end-stage renal disease), provide all Medicare Part A & B covered services, and

*Continued on page 8 >>>>>>>>*



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## Where Life Is Good

by Marilyn Woerth

I have to brag a bit about my hubby. I generally don't, I don't want any other woman to get ideas. But this time I will brag. I am the gardener in our family, he is the builder. Now this partnership can be extremely handy in a garden. Sometimes he builds things that I request (paths); sometimes his own imagination takes over (tea house, pond), and sometimes it's just plain necessity.

After two knee replacement surgeries, gardening had become tricky. Elevated beds of course, would be very helpful, but I really didn't want my landscape littered with such contraptions. Since I can't kneel, or get up and down gracefully, most of my gardening positions are still very humorous. But knee-high raised beds have become very beneficial in the vegetable garden.

When Powell Gardens (my favorite public gardens, so far) opened their Harvest Gardens, we visited not only to view the new gardens but hopefully to discover new ideas. One idea that caught the builder's eye was knee-high raised beds made of wood and corrugated metal. The builder built them over a couple of years; I now have five large knee-high beds made of a wood frame and corrugated plastic. Yes plastic, cheaper, easier to cut than metal, and works splendidly.

The asparagus and strawberry bed is still only a four inch high wooden raised bed, and there is a similar one in the main area of the vegetable garden. This bed displays a huge black cast iron cauldron in the middle of the bed, which holds basil, curry, and chives. The ground level of this bed is covered in cucumber vines.

The rest of the garden is devoted to five 5' by 6' knee-high raised beds, with seating on top. One knee-high raised bed will hold five tomato plants, or nine pepper plants or six zucchini plants and a row of beans, or a salad bowl. Perhaps I should describe my salad bowl. I take one of those glass sugar containers you find in diners, the ones with the spout at the top. I fill one with three kinds of lettuce seeds and two types of spinach seeds, shake it up, and then shake it out over the bed, (shazam) a tasty, colorful, salad bowl.

When the lettuce and spinach go to seed I pull them out, throw them on the compost (built by the builder) and reseed. Some years with watermelon or pumpkin seeds, other years with zinnia, cosmos or cleome seeds. In other words, whatever mood I zig or zag. (Yeah, I know I'm corny.)

My builder is my best asset in the garden. And now that he is retired he can become an extra pair of hands for weeding. Right honey, right? (Silence.) Oh well, I dream on where life is good and partnerships are a wonderful way of life. ("Sweetie, it says in your retirement contract that you have to weed."... "What do you mean you haven't signed it?")

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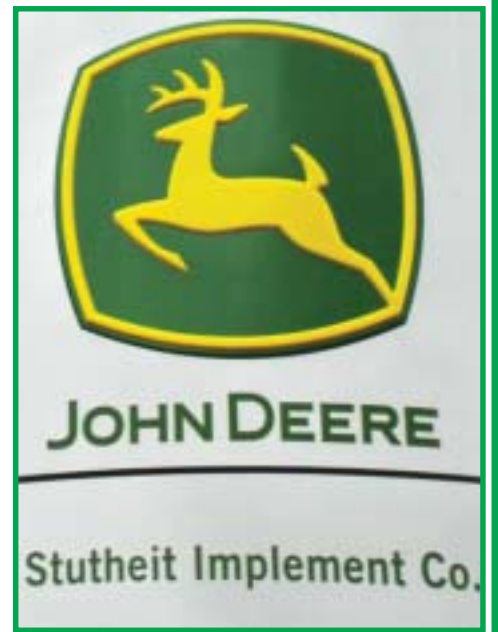
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(S) '90 JD 535 Round Baler	\$7500		

<<<<<<<<<< Continued from page 6.

cover emergency/urgent care. The plans are free to determine their own rates and charges, including monthly premiums, co-payments, deductibles, coinsurance, excess charges and out-of-pocket caps. Medicare beneficiaries must have both Medicare Part A and Part B, and continue to pay the Part B premium, in order to enroll in a Medicare Part C plan. Additionally, the beneficiary must pay the MA Plan monthly premium, if there is one. Typically, MA Plans offer less expensive monthly premiums than Medicare Supplement insurance plans.

The majority of Medicare Advantage plans include prescription drug coverage. The drug coverage portion of an MA plan must follow the Medicare Part D guidelines. A beneficiary would not enroll in a separate Part D plan, but would be enrolled in the drug plan coupled with the MA plan they select.

Medicare beneficiaries may enroll in an MA plan when they first become eligible, usually at age 65, or via a disability designation. The Annual Election Period (open enrollment) lasts from October 15 to December 7 of each year. During the open enrollment period, a benefi-

ciary may enroll in, change to a different MA plan, or dis-enroll from a plan. A Medicare beneficiary may also have a Special Enrollment Period (SEP) if they have a change in permanent residence that places them outside of their MA plan's service area; a SEP gives them a chance to enroll in a different plan. A SEP is also available to individuals who are both Medicare and Medicaid-eligible.

Enrolling in a Medicare Advantage plan is an option for receiving Medicare health benefits; the decision should be made carefully based upon a number of considerations. Individuals who purchase Medicare Part C health insurance coverage would be prudent to have a thorough understanding of the type of health plan and costs involved.

This article was written by Mary Ann Holland, retired University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Educator and Trained SHIIP Professional. Messages for Ms. Holland can be left at your local Extension office, or by e-mail at: [mholland1@unl.edu](mailto:mholland1@unl.edu).

Content used in preparation of this article include direct quotes from the *Medicare Advantage Plans, FAQ section of Medicare.gov* website; *Medicare Part C, 2013 Nebraska SHIIP Counselor Manual, Section 4*; *Medicare & You 2013* handbook, pg. 71, published by CMS.



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### Selling Your Home: What is Capital Gains Tax?

by Leslie Justus

Capital Gains Tax is the difference between the price you pay for real estate and the price you sell it for.

If you are considering selling your home, here are a few questions to ask your tax consultant, CPA, or attorney in order to minimize your tax risk.

- Do I have to pay taxes on the profit I make selling my home?
- When can I qualify for a capital gains tax break?
- How does capital gains tax work if you own more than one house?
- Can I use my vacation home as my primary residence?
- Would I have to report the sale of my home on my tax return?

Selling a home can have a major impact on your federal and state tax returns. It is important that when undertaking complicated tax procedures that you follow the advice of competent accountants and tax attorneys.

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'Nemaha County, Nebraska Fair' Parade. July 2013

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## Breathless and Waiting

By Vicki O'Neal



I sit in the darkness, waiting. It's just before dawn on the Missouri River Bluff. I revel in the silent stillness, sitting in an old recliner on the porch, awaiting the arrival of a new day...A day untainted by mankind's dirty fingerprints. Untouched by the clamor and bustle of the world beyond the River. A day that's fresh from Mother Nature's bountiful supply.

It is the legacy of country folks.

I am doing what most folks never do. Especially City Dwellers...those unfortunate people. They know nothing about the joys of country living.

They awaken to the wail of sirens and the roar of a garbage truck. It dispels their dreams and ushers them into a new day. The poor saps! They may have a lot of

money and may even be "rich" in their own way, but in reality they are poverty stricken.

They never hear the Whippoorwill as he summons the Sun from its bed. They don't know of the gentle breezes that awaken the slumbering trees. They never hear the twitter of a Titmouse.

They hear nothing but the Tweet and Twitter of their Cyber World. The din of corporate America. The opening and closing of elevator doors. The gossip at the water cooler. The swish of street sweepers and the endless agony of rush hour traffic.

They live in oblivion, and they like it that way, apparently. They seldom venture beyond the confines of their security

fences and corporate skylines. They wouldn't sleep in a tent, or sit by a campfire...Not if you gave them a million bucks and a pink Cadillac, too.

I'm glad that I'm not one of them.

I gaze about me, staring into the pre-dawn darkness. There aren't many more of these moments in store. This is August. We have few days left when we can dip our toes in the cool silence of a summer's morn.

A hush covers the land. Only the gentle whisper of a cricket breaks the stillness. Nothing is stirring, not even the breeze. The world holds its breath.

And now...the time has come.

The sound of the Whippoorwill echoes from the dusky darkness. He summons

*Continued on page 13 >>>>>>*

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# The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott

Rain, the artificial kind, woke me this morning just after four. Initially I thought it was the genuine thing, a prayer-answering, bona-fide pitter-pattering sent from heaven... but on closer inspection it was only the pivot rolling through the corn field behind the house.

Although the valley has been blessed with scattered rains... some unusually heavy, others laced with hail-stones the size of baseballs, our little piece of creation seems to be a geographical anomaly...a tiny slice of desert which has received scarcely an inch of moisture since the beneficial spring snows. A neighbor calls it 'a pocket of dry'.

The Wyoming reservoirs are emptying faster than an ice-cream stocked freezer in a home with four boys on summer vacation, and some of the irrigation districts are expecting to be out of storage water around the 21<sup>st</sup> of August... a month shy of a full irrigation season.

To extend this year's irrigation there's been talk of buying 10 day's worth of water, a sort of robbing-Peter-to-pay-Paul arrangement which automatically removes 10 days from next year's allotment unless the districts can pay the water back.

If it snows all winter and rains all spring that won't be a problem. If the drought continues .....?

I try not to think too far ahead, leaving next year's troubles in the future and dealing with today's problems as they come, which usually works. But two nights ago I was jolted awake by a dream of standing, totally helpless, in the path of a towering black tornado, which, I'm fairly certain, had something to do with the enormity of drought and my inability to make sense of it all.

What's new for the week?

A mama raccoon with two babies has taken up residence in the hodge-podge of old bridge planks piled behind the feed shed. Moving in under nefarious circumstance (she

killed the possum family which had been living there since spring) the mother has introduced her youngsters to an all-you-can-eat buffet of cracked corn, ground hay, and smelly silage...although her real intention is to raid the sweet corn patch as soon as the ears sprout kernels.

The roly-poly coons are cute as can be...their killer mom not so much.

The sun is up, roosters are crowing, and two yellow crop dusters, like dueling banjos, are swooping, circling, diving and climbing as they spray the spider mites which have infested area corn fields.

The world is awake and here I am burning daylight....

As Always

Karen



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# Alzheimer's Affects Us All

By Lee Nyberg



## Traveling with a Frail Loved One

It's the season of family reunions, weddings and summer holidays. Many people want to travel to these events and reconnect with family. We are often asked questions like these:

- Should I take my [frail] parent with me? She has mobility issues and is easily upset.
- Should I enlist friends and family to watch after my parents while I am out of town?
- If I bring Mom along, how will she adapt to being away from familiar surroundings?

Our advice always begins with three key words: **Options** and **Backup Plans**.

Option A: You and parent travel. Pre-trip planning:

- Check with your loved one's doctor to determine whether s/he is well enough to travel.
- Consider travel method and length (car/plane), and add to travel time rest periods and accommodate their slower pace, if using a walker or cane.
- Gather copies of prescriptions and medical records to take along with you, in case of emergency.
- Locate hospitals or care centers on your route and at your destination.
- Check with your airline about special boarding and seating arrangements.
- Plan for alternative flights in case of missed connections and hotels and vehicles to accommodate wheel chairs
- Bring snacks and other activities for your loved one, especially in the case of cognitive impairment. Maintain routine meal times as much as possible to reduce agitation.

Option B: You decide staying at home is best for your loved one.

1. Ask a friend or family member who is already helping to care for your parent to stand in for you while you are away. or
2. Use a professional caregiver to care for your parent and have their supervising Care Manager give you regular reports while you are away. Care Managers often work with out-of-town family members and will understand your concerns and information you require.

Option C: You and your parent travel with extra help. Our professional caregivers are available to travel with families to continue providing the care a senior needs. Taking a caregiver along can provide an extra pair of hands and give you someone you trust to stay with your loved one if you choose to go on an outing during the trip.

When your aging parent or loved one needs assistance, a little or a lot, call us at (402) 261-5158.

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## Summer Sweat

Summer is officially in full explosion. As I write this, fireworks are reverberating off the sky. It's time for BBQs, pool parties, and sweat. Ugh, sweat. The worst part may not be the smell. Certainly, we all sweat; it's a key way our bodies cool off and a sign we need to put more water into our systems to prevent dehydration.

Dehydration can lead to fatigue, headache, dry mouth, muscle weakness, dizziness or light-headedness, confusion and forgetfulness. Of course, the dangers are much worse for older adults and children. If you're caring for a senior and think they have dizziness or confusion due to dehydration, they need to be seen by a medical professional. To prevent dehydration, have the senior you're caring for drink lots of water and other non-caffeinated beverages, even when he does not feel thirsty. Increase fluid intake if out in the heat of the day for any length of time. Review medications with your senior's doctor if you suspect they are affecting hydration. Caregivers of people taking diuretics, such as Lasix, should give full medical histories to the prescribing doctor and understand side effects.

Muscle cramps can be another side effect of sweat, since we sweat out the mineral salts our muscles use to function smoothly. Muscle cramps are still a little mysterious to doctors, in part since they seem to happen to people more as they age. Even healthy, hydrated people can get them, and typically at night. Prevention instructions are to make sure to include bananas, oranges, brown rice, almonds, avocados, and spinach in your diet, since these foods contain potassium, calcium and magnesium, and to keep drinking plenty of water. To soothe a muscle cramp:

- Stretch and massage the muscle
- Stand on it, if it is in your foot, and you're capable of bearing your weight
- Apply a hot, damp washcloth to the spot

And now, the smell. Teenagers aren't the only ones with sweaty, smelly feet. This year-round problem is naturally worse in hot weather. Our feet have thousands of sweat glands and shoes are a wonderful place to grow odor-causing bacteria. The Cleveland Clinic's Dr. G Botek says to put deodorant on your feet and be sure to let your leather shoes air out for 24 hours between wearing. Mesh athletic shoes are a good idea, too, since they breathe. Moisture wicking socks can help your feet feel drier.

Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's said this about sweat: "Luck is a dividend of sweat. The more you sweat, the luckier you get." Go have a "super-sized" water; it's hot outside!

Part of the Tarkio Air Show  
July 13, 2013



<<<<<<< *Continued from page 10*

the sun from its hiding place. On cue, the world stirs. The eastern skies begin to lighten. A breeze wanders by, awakening the slumbering trees. They stretch and lift their arms in a primordial dance, swaying and brushing lightly against one another.

A titmouse twitters. He begins his morning song, tentatively at first.. then with more gusto. The world awakens gently on the River Bluff.

I watch the metamorphosis taking place, looking toward the east beyond the river. A faint pink is pushing back the blanket of stars spread across the dark velvet heavens. The stars fade in their brilliance as they are tucked away into hiding one by one—priceless gems too rare to be exposed to the light of day.

Soon they are all gone and the “morning star” takes their place. The sun pushes through the trees with bright fingers to paint splashes of color between the shadows of tree branches.

These are the moments that most of the world will miss. The folks beyond the River.

I stare upwards at the silent shadow of a hawk flitting through the trees. I hear the cheery voice of a squirrel telling the world that he is now awake and the day can officially begin.

I heave a deep sigh. I am at peace. Perfect peace. I lean back in the old recliner.

And then it happens. I lean too far and the old chair tips over backwards. A great crash rends the serenity of the new day. And there I am, lying on my back with my feet in the air, laughing and laughing...Looking up at the morning sky.

It is an appropriate way to look at the world.

Even upside-down, I am more Right-Side-Up than the City Folks!

Of that, I am most certain.....



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## Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

Dear Readers,

Having just survived the first overnight visit from BOTH grandchildren together, I'm sure you understand that I am too exhausted to even think of a topic for this month's column. I hope you get a chuckle out of this re-run from a few years ago.

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My husband began lobbying for a high-definition, flat-screen TV when they first hit the stores several years ago. He was entranced by the prospect of distinguishing individual blades of grass on the fairways of the country's championship golf courses. I am not nearly as enamored of television viewing (or of golf) as my husband, so I found it quite convenient that our living room had practically no bare wall space to accommodate his dream. The room was all doorways, colonnades, windows, radiators and built-in cabinetry. Nixing the suggestion of getting a bigger TV was almost too easy.

*Sorry, honey, there's just no place to put a big TV. Besides, what would we do with the beautiful cabinet you so masterfully built for the TV we have now?*

Yes, I could safely share his pain without fear of having to actually do anything about it.

Then we decided to build a house. A house with a larger living room. A living room with not one wall, but two walls, big enough for the object of my husband's desire. A house with a basement rec room and a perfect place for the old TV and its hand-made, future family heirloom cabinet. Once we moved into our house, the pressure was on. But I held out.

*Technology will probably improve next year. We should wait. Prices will come down.*

Well, prices did come down as holiday shopping season neared. But not because the technology had improved. The economy was in a bona fide slump. The consumer advice last fall was all about hoarding one's cash. "No one in their right mind should be making a non-essential purchase such as a big-screen, hi-def television right now," the voices of wisdom and caution pronounced. *Did I hear that correctly?* The experts were actually condemning the purchase of the very thing my husband wanted more than new golf clubs! They were on my side! What a boost of credibility this gave to my argument.

On the other hand, the economy needed stimulation. "Sales people at the electronics stores have to make a living, too," my husband noted. A little Reagan economics was in order, he argued. We should "spread the wealth" Johnson-family style. Still, I was conflicted, caught in the middle just like the economy-at-large. Spending the money for a television we didn't "need" seemed imprudent, but falling consumer spending was having a disastrous ripple effect on many businesses and their employees. How could I not stand up for my free-market principles of growing the economy with money spent directly, and willingly (sort of), from my own disposable income? That's right; I caved.

Economic policy principles notwithstanding, my husband won the television battle. The TV dominates its make-shift stand, fashioned out of a mini, folding scaffold topped with the leaf from our old dining room table, and covered with a white table cloth. (Its resemblance to an altar has not gone unnoticed nor unremarked.)

Now my husband needs to get busy building custom shelving to properly house the TV and replace all the built-in cabinets we left behind in our old house. Then I'll be able to finally unpack and display the books and other items those built-ins contained. I guess we'll be stimulating the economy a little more, too, buying lumber and hardware. But, it's all good. Lumber salesmen have to make a living, too, you know.

And, besides, building the shelves this winter will keep my husband from watching too much golf on TV.



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## My Mother's Eyes

Carol Carpenter

This summer, my mother turns eighty years old and I'm working on a photobook, collecting pictures from family members, making collages of each of her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren online through Shutterfly. My mother was born on June 25, 1933. That same year, the Golden Gate Bridge sprouted in San Francisco Bay, Germany appointed Nazi leader Adolph Hitler as their Chancellor and The Lone Ranger debuted on the radio. On March 3, Mount Rushmore National monument was dedicated in the Black Hills of South Dakota. One week before my mother was born, Pretty Boy Floyd killed an FBI agent, three local police, and a person he planned to rescue in the Union Station massacre in Kansas City, MO.

I always thought my mother had the perfect birthday, exactly half a year from Christmas. While my mother was a small infant, Germany withdrew from the League of Nations and FDR revealed his Civil Works Administration plan. Many people would recall 1933 as a year of dust bowls and, perhaps, of famous births including Michael Caine, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Gene Wilder and Quincy Jones.

I rummage through shoeboxes of old photographs and yellow album pages where I find shots of my brothers, my sister, and myself when we were kids. Pictures taken in front of the fireplace in our home on Woodring. Photos from our vacations at Round Lake. I remember a photo I saw many years ago taken of my mother. In the photo, she was a beautiful young woman, wearing a dark sweatshirt and faded blue jeans. In her hands, she held a canoe paddle, sunlight dancing over her dark wavy hair, and she smiles lovingly, I think, at my father who takes her picture.

My mother has always been a beautiful woman—long narrow nose, high cheekbones, deep set eyes, dazzling smile. In her youth, she resembled a young Barbara Stanwyck. She poses for this particular picture at the stern of the canoe somewhere in northern Michigan. The photo was taken in September 1956 while she and my father were on their honeymoon.

That year President Eisenhower created the interstate system and Elvis appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show for the first time. During 1956, Fidel Castro and his followers landed in Cuba, City Lights Books published Allen Ginsburg's *Howl and Other Poems*, and heavyweight boxer Rocky Marciano retired without losing a single professional match. My mother takes me along for the canoe ride, the first of many, just the kernel of a child, and I was struck by the boldness of her eyes.

I think about this woman and how World War II took place when she was a young girl. Huddled around the glow of the radio, she listened with her parents to the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor and the U.S. drop the atomic bomb on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Maybe she read the newspaper that delivered stories of the Korean War to the campus of her



small tree-studded Mount Union College in eastern Ohio.

As I filter through other aging black and white photos of my mother, I compare my short and stubby fingers to her long, narrow fingers, my naked fingers contrasting her diamond engagement ring and gold wedding band on her left hand. I trace her hands with my index finger and I wonder if she liked canoeing as much as I do. Or if it was strictly my father's idea.

Gazing at this woman who would become my mother, I wonder how she felt when her parents told her she could not go to Johns Hopkins Medical School because now it was her sister's turn to go to college; how would she handle that decision and how it changed the path of her life. I wonder how she felt the first time she kissed a boy or kissed my father.

Her brow knitted, I imagine her drilling my father, helping him pass organic chemistry, watching him pour over formulas and notes written by her long, confident fingers. But mostly, I imagine her brown-speckled golden eyes, warm and courageous eyes that dance and sparkle and always tell the truth.

In the photos, I cannot see the color of her eyes, but I know them just the same. How much these eyes have seen—the birth of four lively children and the death of her father, JFK shot and men walking on the moon, her husband's death and the end of the Vietnam War, twin towers falling at 9/11 and hurricane Katrina. In practically all the photos, my mother appears content and happy, always smiling. And I imagine that I changed her life just by being born.

I was born on the first of May in 1957, the year when the Mackinaw Bridge opened connecting the Michigan peninsulas, the year the Brooklyn Dodgers moved to Los Angeles. The first Frisbee debuted from the Wham-O company, Sputnik II sent a dog named Laika into space, and the first U.S. satellite blew up on the launch pad. In 1957, Caroline Kennedy, Denis Leary, Sid Vicious, and Katie Couric were also born.

After Dr. Strand and the nurses, my mother was probably the first to look at me. I understand both the joy as well as the terror of gazing at your own child for the first time. So I can imagine what my mother felt the first time she saw me, all pink and wriggly. She told me I looked a little like a tadpole and she threatened to show my baby pictures to the first boy I fell in love with. But she never did.

In progressing years my mother had two sons, my brothers Jim and Tom, and one more daughter, my sister Mary. There are seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren thus far.

On December 3, 2007, I saw fear in my mother's eyes when she sat in a battered brown recliner while doctors in Lincoln, Nebraska operated on my heart. Quite frankly, we were both scared. When she went back to Michigan, she started having trouble with her eyes.

A few years ago, Mom's doctor explained the loss of vision as macular degeneration; at some point, she will probably have to give up driving and golf. I can only imagine that she won't give up either without a knock-down, drag-out fight. She may, at some point, completely lose her sight behind those honey eyes. I look at the portrait of Mom and Bob. Her hair is all grey now. As always, my mother smiles, but sorrow sketches small creases between her brows and laughter sculpts the edges of her eyes. Although the amber color has weathered, my mother's eyes still reflect her iron will.

I think about my mother as I carry the shoeboxes of photographs down the hallway, past the long mirror by the closet. As I turn, sunlight reflects off the mirror, shining in my eyes. My eyes are hazel and change with the light and mood, sometimes green, sometimes brown, and once in awhile, they turn golden. When I gaze from a photo of my mother, my own reflection surprises me. And I remember that, sometimes, I have my mother's eyes.

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