

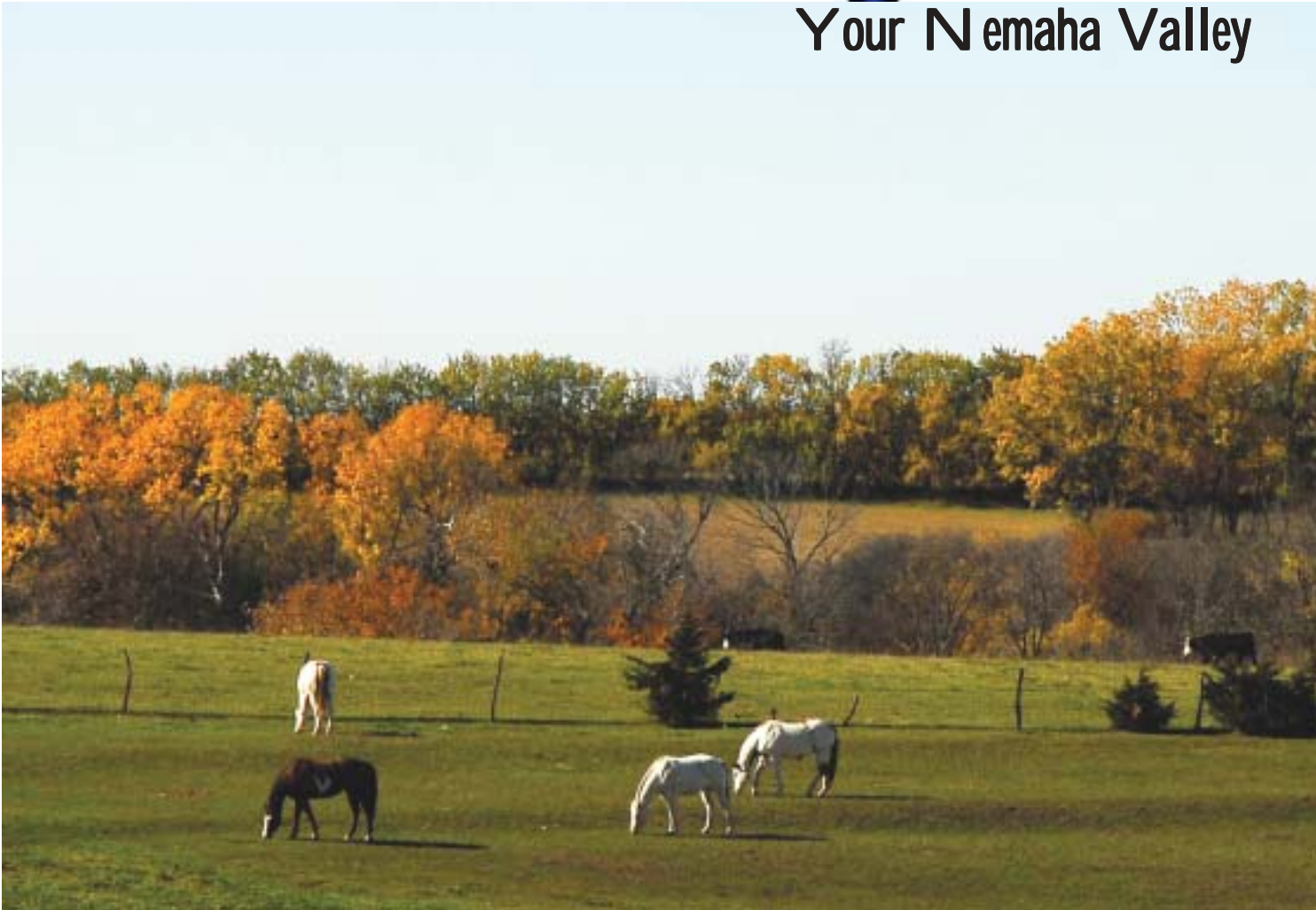
Your

Country Neighbor

December 2006

Your Nemaha Valley

FREE!



St. Joe's in Auburn's Autumn



Hillside Church in Mound City

Voices from your Valley

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The photo above was taken early last month just north of Pawnee City, Nebraska. The Autumn colors, green meadow, and grazing horses nearly guaranteed a good picture. Autumn 2006 was a close second to last Fall, with respect to foliage, to which some of the pictures to the right give testimony.



Colors on PSC Campus



A pretty scene in Auburn

Last month's weather went beyond my expectations. It was especially pleasant on both sides of Thanksgiving. For that I am grateful, but now I am ready for some snow scenes to photograph. But I'll be patient.



Remember last year?

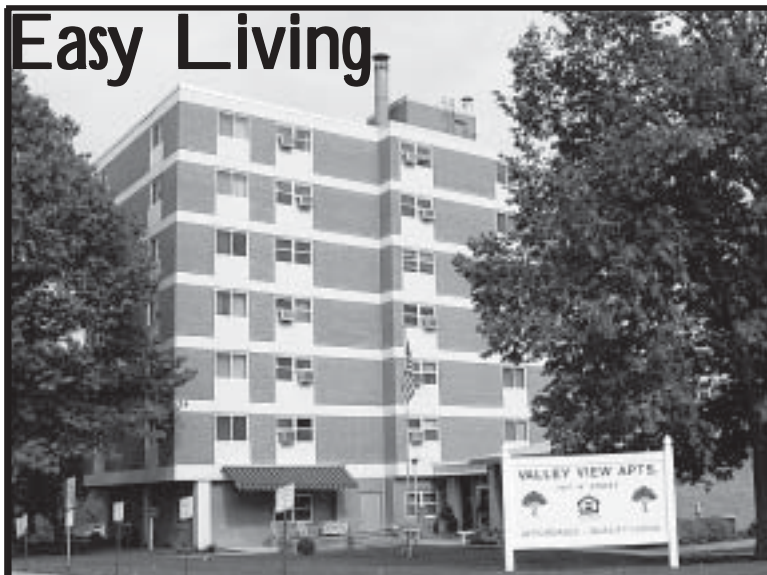
Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to the readers, writers, and advertisers of *Your Country Neighbor*.



Bea's Flower Buzz, pg 11



At the wildlife refuge near Mound City these geese are trying to stay ahead of a recent cold front.



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Thanks to Rose Downing for this notice.

Your COUNTRY NEIGHBOR

Your **Voice** of the Nemaha Valley
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Merri Johnson
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Ursula Waln N.D.
Josh Whisler
Jan Chism Wright

Doctor Jeffrey Meade informs me that he has two articles "in the works", and will resume his submissions in the New Year.

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The Medicare-Medicaid Relationship

People with Medicare who have limited income and resources may get help paying for their prescription costs through the state's Medicaid program. Medicaid is a joint state and federal program that helps with medical costs for some people with limited income and resources. Medicaid programs vary from state to state, but most health care and prescription drug costs are covered for those who qualify for both Medicare and Medicaid. Individuals who believe they fall within the income guideline

- Annual income less than \$14,700 for an individual (or \$19,800 for a married couple, living together);
- Resources or assets limited to \$10,000 for an individual (or \$20,000 for a married couple, living together)

are urged to contact the Social Security Administration at 1-800-772-1213 or Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services 1-402-471-2306 to apply for extra help which is referred to as a "LIS, or low income subsidy."

Individuals who qualified for the low income subsidy in 2006 have recently been sent letters of "determination" informing them whether or not the benefit continues in 2007. If their income status changed in 2006 and they have been "deemed ineligible" in 2007, they are encouraged to reapply.

Medicare beneficiaries who are also eligible for Medicaid will be automatically enrolled in a prescription drug plan unless they choose a plan on their own. Contact your local University of Nebraska Lincoln Extension office for information about Part D enrollment dates in your vicinity, or call the Nebraska Department of Insurance's Senior Health Insurance Information Program at 1-800-234-7119 for assistance with enrollment. The annual Open Enrollment period for 2007 Medicare Part D began on November 15 and will continue to December 21, 2006. Coverage in a 2007 drug plan begins on January 1.

Business planning class teaches essential organizational skills

If you think inspiration and a desire to be your own boss are all that's needed to succeed in business, you might want to think again.

2003 EDGE business class graduate Sharon Schilling, of SchillingBridge Winery and Microbrewery at Pawnee City, knows that's not enough. The "organizational skills obtained through creating the business plan have helped tremendously in developing our marketing plans and our advertising," says Schilling. She adds, if students "take the time to thoroughly do the course as intended, the business plan they create will be a great resource to go back to. We go back to our business plan all the time."

EDGE (Enhancing, Developing and Growing Entrepreneurs) brings a lot of advantages to the classroom. Advantages like small class size, one-on-one consulting, experts in key business elements, and nationally recognized curriculum that was named a best business practice by the National Governor's Association.

The course is designed for individuals already in business as well as those just thinking of starting a business.

The Southeast Nebraska 2007 EDGE business planning class will be held on Thursday evenings, beginning January 11 at the NPPD Sheridan Training Center in Auburn. Tuition for the course is \$400. To register or obtain more information, contact instructor Karen Fritschle at 402-209-0808, Howard McNiff at Five Rivers RC&D at 402-335-3347 or T.O. Davison at 402-274-3894.

The EDGE class is supported by the NebraskaEDGE program of the University of Nebraska and is coordinated by the Southeast Nebraska EDGE Coalition, which includes Johnson, Nemaha, Otoe, Pawnee and Richardson counties.

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In Missouri: Mound City, Rock Port, and Tarkio.

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In Iowa: Emerson, Essex, Hamburg, Malvern, Riverton, Shenandoah, Sidney, Tabor.

Taxes? And More

by Joe Smith

Things seem to have quieted down since the reappraisals were sent out. Some of us went to bat over them. But what about the people that just paid them anyway; there were a lot of them that did. I saw in our Nemaha county paper that a house in the three towns would be so much taxes if the house was valued at say \$150,000. I think all were in excess of \$300 a month. That is just about like paying rent, now add insurance and services. Kind of gets expensive to live in the great state of Nebraska. Something you have worked for most of your life, you have to buy it again. If it is not yet paid for, then that is worse. A person would have to make a lot more money than I do to stay afloat. We in this rural county do not make the salaries they do in Lincoln or Omaha. It seems we are way out of sync here.

One other point is our government in general. The graft and corruption is rampant. Congress built a visiting center, or started one. Why I don't know, but it was a \$300 million project, all under ground. It was probably just a planned bomb shelter for them. But anyway, they started it in 2002 and it is now \$300 million over budget and it won't be finished for a couple more years. Their outlook is that the tax payers can handle it okay.

All the conservative contractors that knew the right people in Washington got all the no-bid jobs in Iraq, many of which are still unfinished. Halliburton comes to mind. (Our Vice-President was the CEO of Halliburton at one time.) Halliburton had several overcharges but all the charges were dropped and they were paid a bonus; good old politicians.

Well the election is over and the people have spoken loud and clear. Did Bush hear it? I doubt it. I just hope the new bunch will get something done that doesn't reek of corruption and scandal. This money spent is your money. The whole Iraq deal was mismanaged from the start. Now that old Rummie has left, he said we needed to have a coalition in there to do this work. Well that is water part way under the bridge. We are still paying for it and will for years to come. The loss of lives and money was terrible and it is not over yet. Bush says we have to finish the job, no matter how many lives are lost or how much it costs. His dad had enough sense not to go in there.

What did we accomplish in Korea? We are still over there and it could bust open again. What did we accomplish in Vietnam? Seems we left with our tails between our legs. I can't understand why we have to be the world cop. All these "Police actions and wars" cost tremendous amounts in lost lives and torn up families. If Bush had to send his daughters over there, the "war" would have ended long ago. The 9/11 thing was a bad thing. Our government had information about it before it happened, but did nothing. It cost lots of lives and now our soldiers are dying and lots of innocent Iraq people are too. But old 'ben Laden' is still out there. We could have finished it in Afghanistan. Well for a conservative state, the election went as good as could be expected. The proposal to limit the money that the government could spend went down in flames. Colorado now has the lowest property taxes of any state around because of that bill. But if you think about it, most of the people against the bill were some how dependent on the extra government money. So if your taxes keep going up, you will know why.

I'm sure this article will tick some of you off, but that is life, some good and some not so good. Joe Smith

"I want to thank everyone who supported me in the election. I appreciate it."



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Christmas Ghosts and the Twilight Zone

by Vicki Harger

Christmas 1854.

It's hard to imagine how difficult times must've been—desperate times of blizzards and frostbitten fingers. Water freezing in the wash basin every night. The Specter of Hardship lurked on every doorstep, mean-eyed and hungry. It was a primitive existence. Survival wasn't just a goal. It was an all-time career.

I stood on a hillside, gazing down at my great-grandparents homestead hidden there amongst the trees, the skeletal remains of one of the oldest farms in Nebraska—gray, bony buildings leaning in the twilight.

There weren't any electrical lines leading to this ghost town of a farm. No rows of power poles marching across the land. Our ancestors could've never imagined America today: plenty of food, a perpetually warm house. Advanced technology. An era when monstrous machinery would obliterate the horse-plowed furrows of our great-grandparents.

If only they could've stood on a modern hillside and surveyed our world like I was looking back at theirs. If only we could've traded places—even briefly. What a new perspective on life we both would've gained.

I left the old homestead in a thoughtful mood, making my way down the rutted trail to our farm in the valley below. The sun had sunk beneath the furrows, and a frigid wind blew in from the west, fierce in its assault. Dry leaves scattered and the power lines above the farmhouse swayed in the sudden gale.

I'd hardly gotten inside when a great gust of wind shook the house. The electrical power went out and my daughter and I were enveloped in primordial gloom.

Time warp.

Our modern life-style evaporated in a nanosecond, and we were plunged into a twilight zone, of sorts. The primitive realm of our great-grandparents.

The silence that entombed the house was strangely hollow. No humming furnace, or bubbling aquarium. No background strains of Christmas music. The echoing tick of the clock was the only sound, ticking off time—bridging the span of moments between the old and the new, Great-grandpa's day and ours.

It was too much for my teenage daughter, seeming to unnerve her completely—a strange reaction for a generation of kids who are deep into time-warps and Twilight Zones. Abandoning her dead computer, she prowled about the house, restless and uneasy. "It's getting dark and cold outside," Mystia said abruptly. "We can't live like this very long, and neither can the goldfish. We don't have lights or a toilet, now. No shower, or heat, or fridge. No computer, or radio, or VCR. Mom! We're just going to die!"

Ignoring her theatrics, I went to get the old kerosene lamp—the one my grandparents had used many years ago. I struck a match. Yellow coziness filled the room. Nostalgic. Very Christmassy and picturesque.

My daughter was still rambling indignantly, but she soon flounced out of the room, coming back a moment later carrying her battery-powered Nintendo DS. She huddled up next to the

kerosene lamp with her only source of entertainment, punching the buttons defiantly.

I looked at her with pity. I, myself, planned to enjoy this nostalgic moment—sipping a cup of Christmas tea in the cozy lamplight. Humming to myself, I put a cup of tea in the microwave and hit the button. Nothing happened.

Oh yeah. Scratch that idea.

Outside, the darkness deepened around the farmhouse. Pale moonbeams filtered through tree branches, causing eerie shadows to dance in the night wind. A ghostly draft creaked through the rafters with stealthy steps, pausing somewhere just above us. The clock ticked.

"Well," I said briskly. I guess we should call the power company." Reaching for the cordless phone, I picked up the receiver. The phone was silent. Dead.

Oh. Scratch that one, too.

"I'll have to use the old cord phone in the bedroom," I said, heading down the dim hallway. I half-stumbled in the darkness and my hand groped for the light switch. I flipped it. The darkness remained, as thick as ever.

Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

So much for nostalgia and the good ol' days. I sighed and got a flashlight. Using the cord phone, I made the necessary call, then sat back and watched the flickering lamplight on the walls.

"Mom?" My daughter put down her Nintendo. "You know our power plants? What if terrorists ever nuked them or something? What would we do all winter without electricity?"

"Well," I said. "You'd better stockpile a lot of batteries. Those Nintendo games..."

"Mom!"

"Um, yeah," I said. "Good question, Mystia." I thought hard, and the more I pondered, the drearier became my mood. Our ancestors had survived howling blizzards in their day, but only because they were prepared. They had thick featherbeds and warm quilts. Woodstoves and candles and hand-pumped water. Outhouses and washtubs. Cellars full of canned goods.

We'd be lucky if we had Nintendo batteries.

Mystia sensed my misgivings. Strangely, it seemed to lift her spirits. She sounded smug, almost cheerful. "See, Mom?" she said. "I told you! We're gonna die—just like the goldfish."

I looked at the sluggish fish in the tank. They were peering at us quizzically, like they were pondering their own uncertain fate. The biggest goldfish seemed the most troubled—the most outspoken. He mouthed words at us through the glass, his silent questions rising in a whirl of bubbles.

I tried to ignore him. I had a lot of unanswered questions, myself—about the repercussions of a massive power failure, and the persistent warnings of Homeland Security. We're woefully unprepared as a nation, experts say. Hurricane Katrina taught us a lot—but would we be ready for trouble on a massive scale? Would there be rioting and looting? Bare store shelves and empty tummies? How would we feed the hungry, angry people who appear on our doorstep?

I hadn't realized it before, but the weight of our modern civilization hangs on a fragile cord—a dangling electric cord, that is.

I stared out the window. Outside, the moon rose in the sky, casting a milky glow upon the darkened farm. Frost crept over the landscape and touched our window panes. In the misty moonlight, it seemed that a Specter of Hardships

lurked in every shadowy corner of the farmyard. A haunting wind moaned outside the house, and the windows rattled beneath the onslaught of invisible fingers. A chill crept deeper into the room. The hands of the clock circled slowly. Time hung suspended, awaiting the resumption of civilized living.

Then flash!

As suddenly as they'd gone out, the lights flickered on inside the farmhouse. Rooms brightened and ghostly shadows vanished. The furnace fan hummed. The aquarium bubbled. Every digital clock in the house flashed 12 o'clock. The magical hour—the stroke of midnight which had suddenly become High Noon. We blinked in the sudden light.

In an instant, contemporary living had been restored.

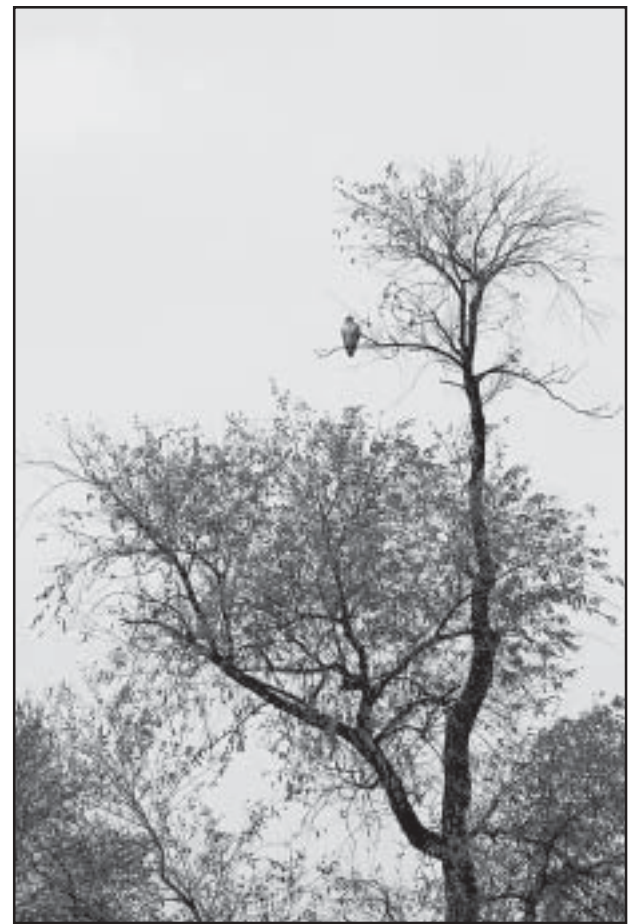
It seemed almost surreal as power surged through the lines—granting us the most precious gift of all. The gift of life, itself. What a Christmas gift that was! We sighed in relief and resumed our lives, again—indulging in trivial pleasures: Hot food. A steaming cup of Christmas tea. Civilization had returned to the Barada Hills.

In the moonlit barnyard, the Specter of Hard Times retreated to the shadowy backwoods somewhere. There he lurks in a twilight zone of his own, waiting, watching—patiently biding his time. Dirty and unkempt, mean-eyed and hungry.

Our great-grandparents knew him well, but I hope to God we never meet.

Howling blizzards. Frostbitten fingers and frozen wash basins? I doubt we could survive a visit from the Specter of Hardships and his unfriendly friends—

Those lingering Ghosts of Christmas Past.




This Redtail Hawk was photographed at the Squaw Creek Wildlife Refuge.

Your relatives and friends who live beyond the 4-Corners area can read *Your Country Neighbor* free, on the internet if they go to this web address:
www.yourcountryneighbor.com

HIDING IN A BOOK

by Devon Adams

It is possible to travel to another dimension without boarding a space shuttle or swallowing pills or snorting powder. The cost is optional. It can be expensive or free. Your choice of destination is guaranteed. Such terms are exceptional values and departure and return times are totally flexible. This is the kind of deal that sounds suspicious because it seems to offer something for nothing. But there is a trade involved. You must allocate a portion of the hours and minutes of your day or night to devote to reading a book. The choice is yours, about when, where, how long, or why you want to read. But once you open the pages, you are no longer in a real time or place. A movie is playing inside those pages and the sights and sounds are vivid. It is hard to pull out of a book, but life demands that we must work and interact with our families. With practice, it is possible to keep the movie running in your mind even when you aren't reading. The characters will follow you around. Sometimes you can simply watch their actions And listen to their words, but there are times when, in your imagination, you actually become the characters. What does it feel like to think like a killer or like a cop who is close to a capture? What would you say if your child was stolen or if you discovered a family secret that would turn your world around? How would you find a wife or husband who suddenly went missing? Your speculations about the story line carry you from one reading session to the next, like drawing a line to connect the dots to reveal a hidden picture. Good authors can keep you guessing and it is as much fun to be wrong about the end as it is to be correct in your prediction of the final scene. For whatever reasons we may have, hiding in a book offers an engrossing escape route that takes us away from daily life. We are delighted to discover that we really can be in two places at the same time.



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Diary of an Unemployed Housewife

By Merri Johnson

Some people get the urge to clean house in the spring when the renewed warmth of the sun inspires them to throw open the windows and throw out the winter's accumulation of dust and grime. Me? Not so much. Getting back into the garden is too tempting on those warm days. Likewise in the fall; I usually have no self-discipline to clean indoors when rustling leaves and invigorating temperatures are calling me out into the yard.

But this October was different. The bright days were few and far between. Instead of sparkling, blue skies, we had chilly, damp, gray days. But I held out hope for Indian summer, and so I determined to attack the basement furnace room on those dreary days, in order to be free to enjoy the warm weather I hoped would return. Or maybe it was the gleaming copper pipes of our newly installed boiler contrasting with the dull gray of old musty, cardboard storage boxes that did the trick. Either way, I was ready to get down to the business of serious cleaning.

Despite getting dirty, or maybe because of it, finishing a major cleaning job gives me a lot of satisfaction. The first chore to tackle in my quest for a clean furnace room was carting all those storage boxes into the next room, wiping down the contents and placing them into clear, plastic containers *with lids* to keep out future dirt. Some of those contents included miscellaneous do-dads that used to reside in a dirt-floor machine shed. My husband brought them along from the farm in 1987. You can imagine the grime. But my husband thought "they might come in handy some day." Yeah, right. (And he accuses me of being a pack-rat!)

But that part of the job was nothing compared to the real heart of the matter: removing the last of the old lath and plaster ceiling that had either fallen or been pulled down in stages over the decades. Why it was ever installed in the first place baffles me. But it had to go. No matter how much dusting and sweeping I might do, chunks of that old plaster and dust would continue to sift onto every surface in that room. What's the big deal about yanking down a few dozen slats of snow-fence lath, you ask. If you could see my furnace room, you'd understand. The view looking up in that room resembles what I imagine a prairie dog town looks like underground: a maze of wiring, radiator piping and the usual household plumbing, all running this way and that between and across the upper floor joists, both above and below the slats.

Every tug on a slat released a shower of plaster bits and 90 years' accumulation of dirt that had been hiding on the rough, top surface of the lath. After only a few minutes I got smart and went in search of protective gear: leather gloves, a stylish polka-dot shower cap, and an equally alluring paper face mask. Not that those items kept me spotlessly clean, but at least the plaster chunks bounced off the slick shower cap instead of lodging in my hair and I, hopefully, inhaled less of the dust, dead insect remains, and other, quite possibly toxic, particles in the air.

Things were going swimmingly. My muscles were sufficiently sore to prove that I was working hard. And I was feeling really good about finally removing that old, dirty lath. I had dragged several boxes, piled high, up the basement steps and out to the alley, and was glad no one was around to see how grungy I was getting in the process. Then, on my last return trip to the house, the inevitable happened: just when you look your worst, someone comes to call.

He came across the yard toward me. If I had been inside and heard the doorbell, I would have ignored it. But what could I do? Turn around and pretend I hadn't seen him? Pull my shirt over my head? There was no avoiding him. I lamely apologized for my appearance, explaining that I was cleaning my basement. After he left, I got up the nerve to look in the mirror. Good grief!! I looked like a coal miner. He must have thought my basement hadn't been cleaned since before the invention of brooms. It took several more days of sweeping, mopping and organizing to get that room shaped up. But I did it.

The Indian summer days I'd been hoping for came the first week of November. I eagerly opened the windows...and noticed just how dirty they were. Down came the curtains. Out came the scrub bucket. I think I set a personal record for fall cleaning this year. Now, if I could just channel that energy into paperwork, I'd really be on top of things.

But, it's going to take a darn good cold snap to get me in the mood for that.

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When Opportunity Knocks...

by Penny Zeller



Possessing an ability to capitalize on opportunities, combined with an ability to know what 'good service' means has put Joe Mitchell, owner of Joe Mitchell Appliance and Radio Shack and Joe Mitchell Dairy Service, in the driver's seat of two successful businesses.

His first step into the business world was in 1989 when he purchased the dairy equipment and supply business, De-Laval, from Ray Huninghake. He would then add appliance repair when the Seneca Sears Catalogue Store closed. For a time, he operated his businesses out of a two-car garage located on U.S. Highway 36 in Seneca.

In 1992, opportunity knocked again and Joe purchased the Purina Feed Farm Service and Supply business of Clyde Jones and moved his business to this location in south Seneca.

At that time, Joe added GE Appliances sales and service. The only thing this location lacked was a good storefront showroom.

A couple of years later, Joe would find a location on Seneca's Main Street that offered just that. After remodeling, he moved the appliance portion of his business to 501 Main.

In 2004, opportunity knocked at Joe's door once more, when the established business of K'ler Appliance and Radio Shack came up for sale. Viewing this as a wise addition to his already established businesses, Joe purchased the business and building and moved to his current location at the corner of 11th Street and U.S. Highway 36.



Today, Joe Mitchell Appliance and Radio Shack offers state-of-the-art appliances from GE, LG, Amana, Frigidaire, Maytag, and Jenn Air. Service is provided by four full-time servicemen and not only will they try to fix your problem within 24 hours of getting your call, if you purchase a new appliance they will haul away your old one for you.

"We will service most anything, including commercial refrigeration," explains Joe. "With the dairy business being on-call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, we don't mind the after-hour service calls."

Coming to the customer's rescue are Rick Hynek, Dennis Williams, Ryan Sextro, and Joe himself. Ordering all those parts



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is part-time employee John Reeder, who also closes the store every evening. During store hours, taking those service calls are Lea Anne Nolte and Elizabeth Jordan. Joe Mitchell Appliance also participates in the job shadowing program offered by Nemaha Valley High School.

"I think it is important to give the kids an idea of what jobs are like in the real world," comments Joe. Currently working with Joe and his crew are Brad Benskin and Tara Mitchell.

"Whether you're looking for new appliances or the Radio Shack electronics, if you don't find it in stock we can order it for you and turn around time is minimal," explained Nolte, Accounts Manager. Nolte went on to say that the store is also now offering small kitchen appliances by Kitchen Aid and has also expanded into big screen LCD televisions from Hitachi.

With Christmas just around the corner, it's a good time for you to stop into Joe Mitchell Appliance and Radio Shack, the only Radio Shack dealership within a 50-mile radius of Seneca, where you should be able to find gifts for both your home and family. Expanded holiday hours include Saturday afternoons to 3 p.m. and Sundays 12:30 to 3:30 p.m.

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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report

by Josh Whisler
Photos provided by Author



Fishing:

The Missouri River is low and still offers fishing opportunities to those that want them. It's as clean and clear as you will ever see it. Visibility of a couple of foot is my estimate. Usually it's pretty muddy and murky. "Does this make the fish bite better?" You ask. I can't say for sure because you have your good days and bad days all year long at the river it seems. But it sure makes the river look a whole lot more attractive when it's clear rather than soup. What are they biting on? They are biting pretty regular on dough baits and there are always night crawlers. These are not big fish but add fishing fun anyway. I think we'll have to wait till spring to get back into the big fish again. So give it a try but don't forget your jacket. If you go, take your camera, the Bald Eagles are following the ducks through on their migration south. You can see them pretty up close and personal right now.

This month's fish picture takes us a couple of months back when the big ones were hitting. David McConnaughey is shown with a couple of dandies taken near Peru this fall.

Hunting:

Hunting seasons galore! You can just about take your pick – from water fowl to big game, the choice is up to you. What hot right now? It's the 10 days of the Regular Rifle Deer Season! The season hit just right near, if not right on, the peak of this year's Deer Rut. Bucks are fighting and does are strutting. That's not real good on the car fender but it sure helps the hunter bag a decent deer without too much trouble. Deer are pretty alert up until this time of year. Keeping their distance and staying cautious. But during the rut they focus more on each other rather than the hunter or your car, which brings up another reason for harvesting deer. Not just for the meat or the horns but to control the heard so fewer auto accidents occur. Deer in the roadway end up being not only costly but dangerous.

This month's hunting picture is of Joe Whisler with a nice buck taken during the Regular Rifle Deer Season.

Remember — Fall Turkey Seasons opens back up after The Regular Rifle Deer Season is over and runs to the end of the year. Permits are 'Buy' so you can purchase one any time. There are plenty of birds around. I tried some wild turkey that my neighbor had smoked and it was excellent. Just in time for Thanksgiving too.

It's cool in the mornings and warming up to the mid 50s during the day. But when the sun goes down in the late afternoon and evening it cools right off. That's a sign that there's not much Fall left. So get out and enjoy it while you can. Half the fun is just getting out there – you won't regret that 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."



David McConnaughey is shown with a couple of dandies taken near Peru this Fall. This month's hunting picture is of Joe Whisler with a nice buck taken during the Regular Rifle Deer Season.

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Bea's Flower Buzz

"Euphy, the Christmas Tree Cactus"

by Bea Patterson

Odd it is how holiday traditions get started in families. Herein lies a story about one of mine, the tale of "Euphy the Christmas Cactus."

Chapter 1. Several years ago, we purchased what I think is a multi-stemmed Euphorbia cactus from our son, who was moving to California. Getting it home from Lawrence, Kansas, in the station wagon was a trick, but it has subsequently thrived in our big bay window with an eastern exposure. When I say thrived, I mean much of it has grown to about 8 foot tall and its collective mass probably measures about 36" in diameter. Its big pot rests on a dollie so it can be moved as needed; otherwise, it would take three men and a boy. It gets dusted with the long-handled hose on the vacuum cleaner.

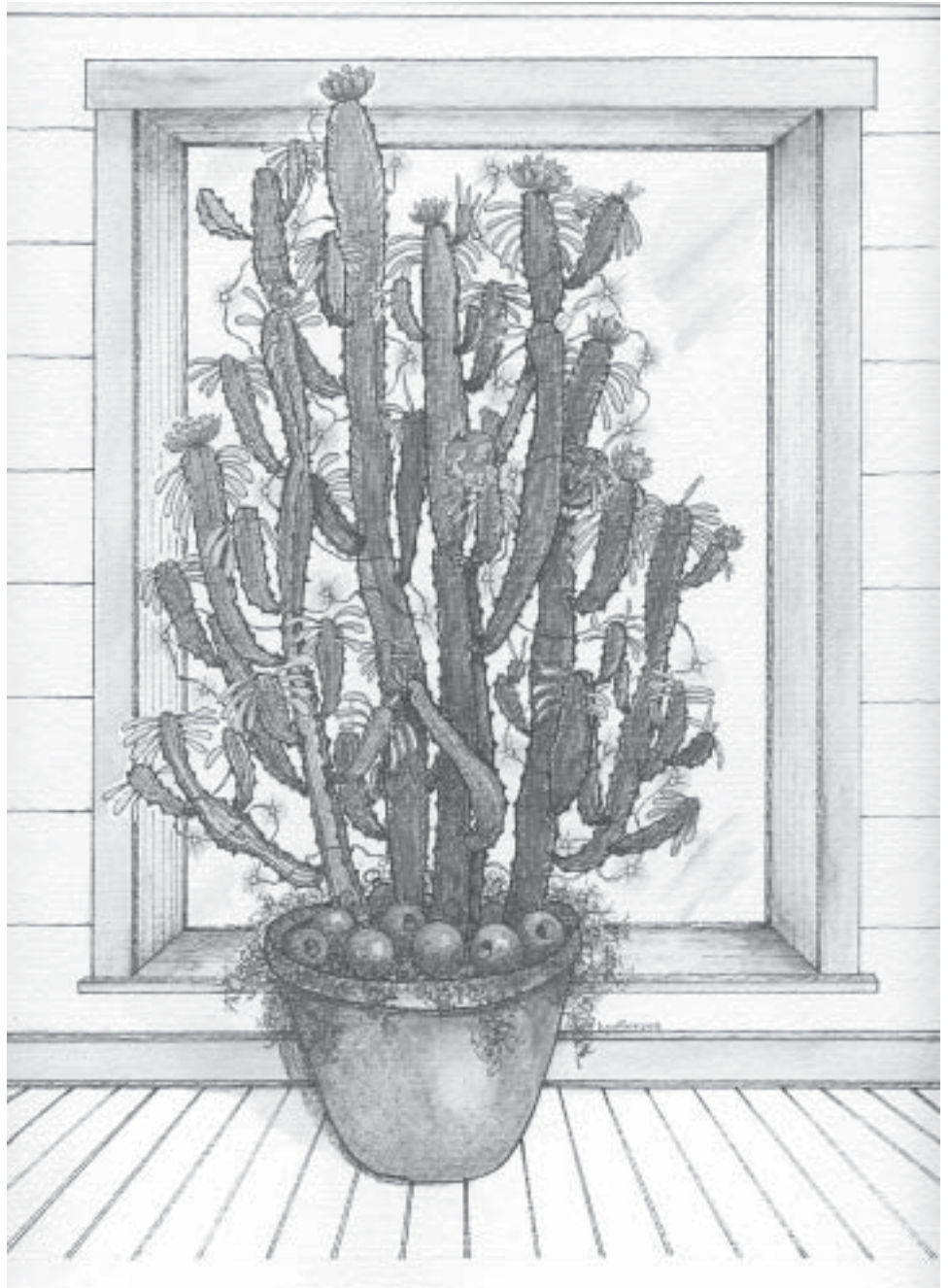
Chapter 2. Come the holidays, we love observing the occasion with the symbolic Christmas tree. However, we are not fans of faux trees nor commercially bought trees, so since moving to Peru, we have always chosen a native cedar tree which we harvest ourselves. Although a cedar has things to love about it, we got tired of dealing with the hassle and the mess. Not having a tree, was considered.

Chapter 3. Upon reading some advice from a holiday decorating magazine to "use things you already have in a new way," my eyes roved around the room and stopped at Euphy. Let's see - 8 foot tall, green, lots of prickly branches, big green pot... Suddenly, I saw it. Twinkly white lights, a little bird's nest, Spanish moss for a "tree skirt" — a whole new meaning for "Christmas Cactus." Best of all, I wouldn't have to get rid of it later nor would I have to store it in the attic; I was "*re-purposing*" and even better yet, *simplifying* (my friend Alice's advice).

Chapter 4. Euphy the Christmas Tree Cactus has now become a holiday tradition at our house, and we love it on many levels. Euphy is a connection to our distant, dear son Matt and his wife Danel. My love of plants and nature is reflected in yet another way in our lives. Euphy stands as a symbol that Christ's love is evergreen/everlasting, growing in our hearts, sparkling and beautiful, when we nourish it.

My prayer is that you and your family experience a blessed Christmas and celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ in a church and manner of your choice.

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THE FOURTH QUARTER

by Devon Adams

Let us pause for a moment of silence in honor of those courageous women who suffer countless hours of anxiety and fear as they watch their sons in the mortal combat of competition with other boys in contact sports, specifically football.

Since it would be against the laws of nature and the police department to lock their children in a closet until they reach the age of thirty-five, just to keep them safe from harm, these mothers grit their teeth and hand their boys over to the coaches, who want then to win football games. The guys don't worry about their moms, the ones pacing along the sidelines, who are too nervous to sit still, and more afraid not to watch than to watch, as play after play unfolds, and bodies slam into each other and boys are knocked down, and sometimes knocked unconscious. Heart attacks aren't allowed and mothers hide the tears that fall. They yell and cheer until the fourth quarter clock runs out. Later, they listen to the replay of the play by play and offer support for the winners or the losers whatever the case may be. The high school years go by until the final season game for the senior squad is looming on the horizon. Four years ago it seemed impossibly far away. If your son is an average athlete, you can pat him on the back for a job well done and then let out the breath you've been holding for four years. But talented players may go on and on, twisting knees and tearing rotator cuffs and nursing concussions and recovering and advancing to the pros, dragging mom along with them. If your luck is very good, or very bad, your son may play football until he reaches the age of thirty-five, the theoretically safe time to release him from the closet. All the while he is making big bucks, you are accumulating sediment in your arteries and adding numbers to your blood pressure reading. But it is more than likely that both of you will survive well into old age, and you'll have some swell memories to throw back and forth, instead of tossing a real pig skin around.

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Poetry, etc.

A Mixed Blessing

by Jan Chism Wright (c) 12/21/99

Christmas is, at best, a mixed blessing. A whirlwind time of Christmas shopping, present wrapping, mad merry-making and family gatherings. It is also a time when the loss of loved ones hits home hard. And it is especially hard when the loved one is a child. Even though that child, your God child, was eighteen years old and just starting college. You see the empty chair and crutch beside the fireplace and the tears and emotions overtake you like never before. And the brother and his wife with whom you were never particularly close, you now feel strangely bonded to by the cement of sorrow, the glue of grief.

Oh for the carefree Christmases of childhood before reality began to intrude. Before the grandparents were gone and there were no more Christmases at the big house in the country. Those same Christmases that, as a grownup, you try desperately to recreate for your own children. But it's hard for you to know if you have achieved it because Christmas is no longer the same for you. Roasting your own turkey has become a rite of passage. Then comes the Christmas when one or both parents are gone and you are truly on your own.

These things are sad but expected and somehow bearable. But the loss of a child is unexpected, somehow wrong and so unbearable. And you feel guilty that you are grateful that it was not your child. And you can just imagine how your brother and his wife must feel but you can't really. You can't fathom that well until you fall down it yourself. So, once again, you send out the cards and the packages. And you appreciate with perhaps more poignancy the family and friends still with you. And you find yourself crying at odd moments but, somehow, you make it through another Christmas of mixed blessings.



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BY DEVON ADAMS

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The Face of Drought

A Farm Report from Western Nebraska

by Karen Ott

It's early morning here on the western Nebraska plains. The sun has been up only a few moments but the brilliant calypso oranges, pinks and purples are already fading to November-muted grays and blues. There's no frost and the air is a trifle dusty, a hangover from yesterday's wind and the nearly-completed corn harvest. Dale has already left the house. No breakfast this morning, just a quick hug, and a "see you tonight" before firing up the combine and leaving for the field.

I've swept and vacuumed the floors, washed and folded a load of clothes, made the bed, and sewn a few seams on a pair of curtains I'm making for the river house; I'll be leaving for my morning run shortly. If the day goes as planned I'll spend an hour lifting weights at the YMCA, run a few errands, put my roses to bed for the winter and cover the hen-house windows with plastic sheeting. But who knows? It's a brand new day.

2:09 pm: Home from Scottsbluff. The groceries are put away, Devon's birthday present is wrapped, and the like-new leather jacket I bought at Goodwill for \$3.95 is hanging in the bedroom closet. I saw my Aunt Esther in the greeting card department of Wal-Mart. (Yeah, I hate the place but a penny saved is a penny earned.) My uncle was admitted to the hospital late last night. He's had a hard time of it since they left the farm; moving to town took the life right out of him. In less than year he went from a vibrant, hardworking farmer to a confused and shuffling skeleton unsure of where he was, or who he was. Without his fields his soul crawled into a dark corner and died. They say you can take a boy out of the farm but you can't take the farm out of the boy. The same holds true for an old man.

3:00 pm: The hen house project is out of the question. The wind is gusting over thirty mph and I'm not about to manhandle a roll of plastic, hammer, nails, and sticks of wooden lath by myself. The job is tough enough when it's calm. Ditto the rose garden. Both jobs will have to wait for a day when Mother Nature is in a better mood.

4:23 pm: The wind is letting down. It's still blowing like a ban-shee but the gusts aren't quite as vicious. Sunset isn't far off and it'll be dark soon. Whatever did people do before electric lights? Go to bed at 6:30? We'll be celebrating our grandson's fourth birthday this evening. He won't really be four until Thanksgiving Day but one celebration at a time is enough for me.

Thanksgiving has always been the target for completion of corn harvest but this year we'll finish early, Saturday noon if all goes well. Reduced yields cut harvest by almost a week. I won't say watching corn prices rise to a ten-year high and knowing we have so little to sell hasn't hurt.... because it has. A day doesn't go by Dale doesn't bring up his list of what ifs: what if we hadn't been hailed; what if we'd had enough water; what if the drought had broken; what if we hadn't contracted corn; what if, what if, what if?

But 2006 is water under the bridge and self pity is a waste of time. Now's the time to shake this year's dust from our heels and look forward, not back. If revenge is best eaten cold, regret is best not eaten at all.

4:51pm: Dale's home early because of the birthday party. The combine is in the shed and the chores are done.

8:24pm: It's quiet. The party's over, the presents unwrapped, the kids home with their Dad, fast asleep. Dale is at the kitchen table, bent over today's corn tickets, I'm at my computer.

For all its hardship and worry we have a good life here...simple and ordinary...but good, maybe even better than most. That's something to be thankful for.

The day is nearly done.

Karen



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Insomnia (Part 2)

By Ursula Waln, N.D.

Certain herbs and other household remedies can be used effectively to induce sleep, especially when used in combination with the preventive measures discussed in last month's article "Insomnia (Part 1)." A relaxing cup of hot herbal tea in the evening can be a nice way to wind down and prepare for a good night's sleep. However, there are only a couple of relaxing herbs that warrant broad recommendation. Some relaxing herbs are habit forming and should be used cautiously if at all. Others have the potential for toxicity, interaction with drugs, or other effects that make them inappropriate for certain people. And, all herbs have the potential for allergic reaction. We should never assume that just because something is natural, it is harmless.

The most popular relaxing herb is chamomile, a very gentle and safe herb. Most people find the taste of chamomile tea pleasant enough (sometimes described as flowery with a hint of apple). Rooibos is another relaxing herb that is very safe and tastes good enough for regular consumption. Both chamomile and rooibos can be drunk liberally without concern of dependency or toxicity.

Valerian root, on the other hand, is a powerful sedative herb that should be treated with the same respect as a prescription drug. Valerian root can be a very effective treatment for insomnia, but it is habit forming and should not be used on a regular basis or for more than five or six days in a row. Nature seems to signal us to use valerian root cautiously by making it smell and taste like dirty socks! Because it is so repugnant, it is generally sold in capsules, making it easier to take and easier to abuse.

Advice not to use habit-forming substances more than so many days in a row should not be taken to mean that it is safe to resume use after taking one day off. Repetitive use, even with brief respites, will cause the body to decrease production of neurologic receptors involved in relaxation. (Down-regulation of receptors is a physiologic response common to many pharmacologically active substances.) This creates a dependency because with fewer receptors available to be activated, the powerful action of the drug is needed even more. We commonly speak of this phenomenon as developing a tolerance for the drug. The more the drug is taken, the more the receptor production is reduced, and the more of the drug it takes to produce the original effect. The only way to break the dependency is to stop taking the drug and allow the body time to create new receptors. The time it takes the body to get the receptor levels back to normal is known as a withdrawal period. In the case of sedative withdrawal, a 'rebound insomnia' is characteristic.

Passionflower is a tasty herb that works especially well in combination with other herbs as a sleep aid. However, passionflower does contain alkaloids that can build up in the muscle and nerve tissues and cause irritation with long-term use. While passionflower is not habit forming, it is best to take a break from it periodically to avoid toxicity.

Kava kava, which is sometimes used for insomnia, is most effective when the sleeplessness is due to anxiety. Problems with liver damage attributed to the use of kava kava have been traced to preparations using the whole plant. The aerial (above the ground) parts of the plant contain a toxin that is harmful to the liver. The root, which does not contain this toxin, has a long tradition of safe use for treating anxiety and reducing social inhibitions. Kava kava can have unwanted side effects, such as abdominal discomfort, headache, dizziness, impaired ability to operate machinery, and skin rash. It should not be taken in combination with alcohol or other sedating drugs.

California poppy (*Eschscholtzia californica*) is an effective relaxant that is considered to be non-habit forming and has very low risk of toxicity. It shares some similarity to its cousin the opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*) but is much milder. It should not be used in combination with alcohol or other sedating drugs.

Cramp bark and skullcap can be helpful when muscle pain is preventing sleep. These herbs relieve muscle spasms. They are not habit forming and have no known toxicity. However, they should be used cautiously in combination with pharmaceutical muscle relaxants and cardiac medications.

St. John's wort can be helpful for insomnia, especially when depression is involved. St. John's wort contains high concentrations of melatonin and has been found to stimulate nocturnal melatonin production. St. John's wort should not be used in combination with MAO inhibitors or other antide-

pressants. It also should not be used during pregnancy. Some people cannot take St. John's wort because it causes them to develop photosensitivity (causing burning red welts on areas of the skin exposed to sunlight). St. John's wort should not be used in combination with antibiotics associated with photosensitivity reactions. Intestinal discomfort and allergic reactions are not uncommon.

Lemon balm (Melissa) has relaxing, pain relieving, and antidepressant properties that can make it a useful sleep aid. It is also useful in treating Grave's disease (hyperthyroidism) because it inhibits thyroid function, but for the same reason lemon balm should not be used regularly by people with hypothyroidism.

Hops can be used as a tea or made into a sachet to be placed near the pillow. Hops promotes relaxation but should not be used when sleeplessness is accompanied by depression, as it can make the depression worse.

Hyssop relaxes the respiratory muscles and is mostly thought of for coughs, but it can also be useful for treating sleeplessness associated with anxiety. Hyssop should not be used during pregnancy.

Black haw, lime blossom, mistletoe, and motherwort should only be used under the supervision of a qualified practitioner, as these can have significant cardiovascular effects.

If you find that herbs and other substances that are supposed to help you relax have the opposite effect on you – actually make you more wound up – you may have what is known as a paradoxical reaction to these substances. For reasons not well understood, some people respond to certain neuroactive substances in a way that is opposite the normal response. There is nothing to be done about this other than avoid these substances.

A half-dozen drops of lavender oil in a warm bath before retiring is an enjoyable and reliable remedy with virtually no drawbacks (unless you happen to be allergic to lavender). Lavender promotes relaxation, and so does a nice warm soaking. If you don't want to soak in a tub though, a couple of drops of the essential oil rubbed into the chest can still be of benefit.

An article on insomnia would not be complete without mention of the tried and true tradition of drinking a cup of warm milk before bed. Milk is rich in tryptophan, an amino acid that happens to be the building block for melatonin. (See last month's article for a discussion of melatonin's role in sleep.) Turkey and tuna are also rich in tryptophan, so including these in our diets may help too.

We have many options available to us for treating insomnia, but – as discussed in the first half of this two-part series – the key to prevention lies in identifying and correcting the underlying causes, whether they be environmental, physiological, psychological, or some combination of these. Otherwise, we're just treating the symptoms, and while this may offer some relief, the problem persists. Once we know what's wrong, we can take corrective steps to restore the sleep patterns we need for a healthy, happy life.

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Marta's "Welfare Agency"

by Joe Smith

Marta's "Welfare Agency" includes a bunch of cats, lots of birds, our kids' pets at times and of course her big pet Joe. As she cooks breakfast, there are several of the cats parading along the front of the house along the kitchen windows. They stare in trying to hurry Marta up so they can get their breakfast. Then she walks out the door and more of the cats start begging her, so she breaks down and feeds them. While she walks by the fish pond, the fish all come up with their mouths open as soon as she asks them if they want breakfast. It is fun to watch. All she has to do is start speaking to them and here they come. The cats come up and get real close and the fish don't pay any attention to them. Any fast movement will send them into deep water. One day Marta watched the black tom, Spook, and the fish touch noses.

Marta has gone 'off the farm' to start another bunch of welfare clients. She has a bluebird trail that she takes care of every summer. She has the nests so that she can take them out and see the little babies. There are tree swallows that take over some of the nests. The swallows will dive-bomb you while you inspect their nest. Almost part your hair as they fly by cussing you out.

Most of the cats have names which are like their color or their style. One is Smoky, then Patches, Spook, Scat, the 'Wild One', and several more. It seems most of the black cats are real spooky. The one we named Spook is gentle as a lamb. We don't mind the wild cats; they stay out from under foot and keep the out-buildings almost free of mice and rats. They are good hunters. But that doesn't mean we need any more of them. The tom-cat takes care of that. Joe Smith

The Entertainment Tree

by Joe Smith

When we built the new kitchen on the front of our house, we included a solar collector. That required us to cut a couple of ash trees down so the sun could get to the collector. A tree sprouted out of the stump. Not a pretty tree, but a wonderful place for all the birds, cats, and squirrels to play. It has lots of limbs and forks for the young cats. They have all kinds of fights out there, and try to chase birds and each other. Marta has a bird waterer out there and even the squirrels use it. There is a small mound of plants that get mauled when the kittens pounce on each other.

Marta hangs several bird feeders on the limbs that taunt the squirrels. We have all types of birds here at different times of the year, from the little Juncos to the large woodpeckers. To identify some, we have to get the bird book out. A lot of them are seasonal as to when they show up.

That is the reason for this post. I saw a squirrel in the tree this morning, his tail whipping one way and then the other. He was trying to find a route to get to the bird feeder. But alas, he just couldn't figure out how to get down there. We were watching, and one of our young cats, the one we call Grouchy, decided he would just go up there and catch that animal in the tree. She was sneaking up the tree, but the squirrel just hopped over to a big tree. It probably was a good thing for the cat that he did.

We spend a lot of time watching the animals and birds on our little tree. Take time to watch all the entertainment that goes on right in your own yard. Joe Smith



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