

Your

# Country Neighbor

FREE!



February 2008



This Summer I will take more walks in the morning, perhaps around this lake in Auburn.



Delzell Hall, Peru State College Campus



Many are tired of the season and the snow, but this picture was taken on the first day of Spring, 2006. No prediction intended.

## Voices from the Valley

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From the Publisher of

## *Your Country Neighbor*

"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 occasionally, an editorial or news release. The photos remind us of the beauty we may miss during our busy lives.

There is a Web site that displays many pictures of beautiful Autumn and Winter scenes including color photos of many birds that winter here in Southeast Nebraska. Plus the past three years of this publication is archived online. You can view much more at:

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Your

## COUNTRY NEIGHBOR

**Voices** from the Valley of the Nemaha

Published by Stephen Hassler

Writers this month, Thank You!

Devon Adams  
Frieda Burston  
Sheri Mayhew Dowding  
Vicki Harger  
Merri Johnson  
Karen Ott  
Joe Smith  
Josh Whisler

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**Your Country Neighbor, LLC**

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### TOURISM AND NEMAHA COUNTY, A PERFECT MATCH

The public is invited to attend a meeting, outlining future short-and long term tourism development and marketing strategies for Nemaha County. Nebraska Travel and Tourism staff and Nemaha County Development Alliance volunteers will be available to share results from a recent TARGET study at Arbor Manor, Auburn, Nebraska, February 12, 2008 at 4 p.m. (Light refreshments will be served)

TARGET, which stands for Tourism Assessment, Resource, and Growth Evaluation Team is a program initiated by the Nebraska Division of Travel and Tourism to assist the State's rural communities with developing and promoting local and regional tourism industries. TARGET study provides a way for Nebraska communities to evaluate strengths, improve weaknesses, areas for growth, future opportunities and success stories.

During the TARGET visit to Nemaha County last spring, tourism and community leaders spent the day with Nebraska Travel and Tourism staff and Nemaha County Development Alliance volunteers, visiting local and regional attractions, sites and tourism-related businesses. The presentation of this report is a result of that visit and countless hours working with our State Tourism professional staff. The local leaders and tourism staff found the potential to diversify and grow this industry which could bring new money into the community. Tourism can be developed by local, creative people with the foresight to undertake projects within a community's reach. Tourism also lends itself to part-time and seasonal employment and provides opportunities for retired individuals and summer holiday students who are searching for summer jobs.

Please make the effort to attend this meeting. February 12, 4 P.M. at Arbor Manor, Auburn, Nebraska.

The TARGET meeting will be adjourned at 6:00 p.m. at which time you will have the opportunity to eat at the Arbor Manor, and at 7:00 p.m. a business meeting will begin with the Southeast Nebraska Economic Development Association. The SENEDA committee emphasizes the economical growth of the four counties in Southeast Nebraska.

If you have questions about the TARGET visit, contact T. O. Davison, coordinator, at 274-3894 or Michael Collins, TARGET program coordinator at (402) 471-3795, cell: (402) 432-1384, or email: mcollins@visitnebraska.org

VISIT

***Dramatic Expressions Photography***

on the 'web'

by *Your Country Neighbor* Photographer,  
Stephen Hassler

www.yourcountryneighbor.com/photoblog.htm

**You can share this publication with relatives and friends who live beyond our 'delivery' area. Just send them this Web address:**

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## Elephant Butte Lake, New Mexico

by Joe Smith

Elephant Butte Lake was right in the middle of New Mexico on the Rio Grande River. Many years ago the government built two dams, one out of cement and one an earthen dam. When the lake was full it was over forty miles long. It has been producing electricity for a long time, probably close to 70 years. There is a small mountain in the lake that resembles an elephant's head, hence the name it has.

My dad took the whole family over there almost every summer while I was growing up. He had several boats and motors we always took with us, one at a time that is. He also had an old twenty-two horse Johnson motor, which in those days was a good sized motor. They had cabins along the shore and a store and café there also. The marina had places to rent boats if you needed one or they would keep your boat for you. Dad would take us out early in the morning until about noon when it got hot. He and mother would take a nap after lunch. My brother and I would go down to the boat dock and fish for carp right off the docks with fish livers. People used the carp to bait their trot line. The people that ran the dock would buy them and put them in a live trap and sell them for bait. My brother caught a big one time. There was a fish-cleaning table there where people cleaned their fish and threw the guts in the lake. Fish in the lake would eat it as fast as they threw it in. We would ask for the fish livers and use them to catch the big carp. The whopper my brother caught weighed in excess of 13 pounds, as I remember.

The boat ramps were two long floating piers with a short one between them. All the rental boats were kept between these piers. My brother was on one of those, and a bunch of people ran over to see what the fish was, and the end of the pier went under water about six inches. So my brother pulled the fish on the pier, as everybody ran to the other end. The fish was out of the water. A fisherman was looking for some trot line bait and gave him five dollars. Boy, was he proud.

The Wilmot Hardware in Roswell had a contest on for the biggest Bass. One year my brother won that. He got a new rod and fishing box and a lot of fishing stuff. The next year we were fishing over there and I, while fishing off the end of the boat, caught a bigger bass than my brother had. It weighed in around eight pounds. I could just see the fishing pole and all the good fishing stuff I was going to win, but didn't. They didn't have the contest that year.

The old lake could really get rough some interesting times. Storms would brew up in nothing flat. Waves would have white caps in a hurry. We never had much trouble, though. My granddad and his friend did have to spend one night under an overturned boat on an island. Bill Britt was the fellow. They had just made it across a wide place in the lake and the motor quit. Bill hollered to Granddad to grab an oar and row to the island. Granddad was fumbling with his mouth. Bill hollered again for Granddad to row dammit. The wind was bad and Granddad hollered back. "I don't mind drowning, but I ain't gonna choke to death on these damn false teeth". We found Granddad and Bill the next morning sleeping under the boat.

We were fishing in a cove on the east side of the lake about six miles from the docks. There was another boat in the same cove with three men. They had been drinking some, it appeared. One of them stood up in the boat and said loudly, "If Jesus can walk on the water, so can I." He stepped over the side of the boat and went straight down. The other two came over to that side and grabbed him when he came up sputtering water on every body. They darn near turned the boat over while trying to get him out of the lake. Dad was ready to go over there and help when they finally got him out. I guess he found out he couldn't walk on water.

We kept our fish in a mesh bag that we threw in the water every time we moved. It was tied to the boat, or was supposed to be. We pulled up to a good crappie hole and dad told me to throw the fish in the water. I did, but they weren't tied on. We tried to find the bag but had no luck. It had some nice fish in it. I stripped down and dove in looking for the bag but didn't find it. I felt about two inches high after that for while, but dad wasn't worried about it. We had other methods of keeping the fish we caught. Funny how you can remember these thing after sixty plus years and can't remember where you left your wallet this morning.

We as a family made it over to the Butte at least once a year when I was young. I have lots of good memories of those fishing trips. Joe Smith

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*Editor's note:*

*You can read previous articles by Joe Smith online in Your Country Neighbor archives; just click on "publications" at:*

[www.yourcountryneighbor.com](http://www.yourcountryneighbor.com)

## Country Scenes

In color at: [www.yourcountryneighbor.com](http://www.yourcountryneighbor.com)



Church in Johnson, Nebraska



Haunted by age and December's ice storm



An Icy Gown and a Contrast in Power



Church in Brownville

VISIT

*Dramatic Expressions*

*Photography*

by *Your Country Neighbor* Photographer,  
Stephen Hassler

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## THE ICE WARS

by Devon Adams

The violent water fell and froze,  
assaulting fragile constructions,  
tearing holes in the intricacy of patterns  
woven by bare branches silouetted  
against the angry, cold sky.  
Explosions echoed from the trees,  
as their limbs were severed  
by the weight of ice pulling them  
inexorably to destruction.  
The lines of power that give us the illusion  
of civilization came loose and sparked,  
useless tangles waiting to be fixed.  
We became explorers in a wilderness of weather,  
conscious of the simple life,  
where the lucky families had warmth  
from wood fires to insure survival, and  
the other folks just shivered in the dark.  
It's chilling to realize how things can change so fast,  
and how long it takes to change them back again.

## UNDER THE SKY

by Devon Adams

The sun was softly filtered  
through the dusty days of autumn,  
lingering on the edge of earth at dusk,  
flattened slightly, like a purple plum.  
Then it ran to meet the solstice point,  
jumping into the black abyss of winter nights  
without regard for sentiment,  
forgetting the long good-byes and fiery skies,  
like a fickle lover leaving  
before the beauty became commitment.  
Then the toasted memories of summer  
were sealed beneath layers of ice and snow,  
while arctic winds reached across the prairie,  
like crippled arthritic fingers, grasping  
for more than they could hold.  
But the old pattern will return,  
and days will stretch once more  
until the night is small and short,  
and snow will be the damp in dark soil,  
pushing violets into the light.

*Editor's note: You can find poetry previously published by this publication  
online in*

Your Country Neighbor archives; just click on "publications" at:

[www.yourcountryneighbor.com](http://www.yourcountryneighbor.com)

## Moonset, January 21, 2008

Merri Johnson

Northbound in the near-dawn, the road curves westerly and the setting  
moon comes suddenly into view, full and low on the horizon.

It gleams like pale copper under water, reflecting the first rays of  
sunrise across the valley, now appearing and then disappearing behind  
the hills like a stage prop raised and lowered through a trap door.

It illumines nothing but itself, serving only to draw my gaze to its  
presence in the still-dark western sky.

We ride along together for a few minutes, me, earthbound on the  
highway, the moon sailing magically over the snowy landscape.

I try to keep it in sight, to memorize its color, but my eyes wander for  
a moment, and when I look again, the moon has gone to bed.

## Snowstorm

by Sheri Mayhew Dowding

Another snowstorm is coming  
More days spent inside  
Cold winds will blow again  
Everyone seems to hide

The grocery stores are busy  
Bread and milk are gone first  
Flakes begin to fall  
For spring, we have a thirst

The streets are covered lightly  
Traffic begins to slow  
The kids get out of school  
Home for three days in a row

Wind is blowing stronger  
Streetlights are on  
Snow falls sideways  
It's a long time till dawn

Dump out a puzzle  
Hot chocolate is made  
Sit back and relax  
Winters fury is laid

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SILENT PARTNERS

by Devon Adams

I drove under an eagle today,  
as his trajectory carried him  
through the silent air  
above the road.

He was dragging the black angel  
of his shadow.

They were looking for prey  
that was ready to die.

"My Life & Times as Harve Bodine"

by Joe Smith

If you like the stories I write, you would love this story. Harve Bodine was in the Confederate Army, riding for the Quantrell Raiders. He didn't like anything that guy was doing so he and another fellow left before the end of the war and went out West. It seems he turned lawman.



The story has a lot of human feeling in it, honest emotions, true love (sorry, no hot sex scenes). The story takes place in an area I am somewhat familiar with. Other parts came from Harve himself. I had no idea where it was going. I just wrote it down like Harve told me to. Whether it actually happened or not is for you to decide. Joe Smith.

To order an \$18 signed copy,  
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New Listings!



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This 4 Bedroom lovely older home has so much character! The large living room with fireplace and all oak open staircase and oak floor is next to a spacious dining room with gorgeous windows. The kitchen has had a recent remodel with knotty pine cabinets installed. The front porch has been enclosed and gives additional all weather living space. The 25 x 12 screened in back porch is perfect for those warm summer evenings with bug-free entertaining. With a full basement and attached garage you'll always have plenty of storage. A main floor laundry room and bath add to the convenience. To see this beauty, call 402-274-4410.



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## COLD WEATHER WARM-UPS

by Sheri Mayhew Dowding

Hot cocoa with melting marshmallows  
Electric blankets set on four  
Sifting by the fire  
Draft dodgers in front of the door

Heavy coats and lined gloves  
Flannel shirts and wool socks  
Long evenings and longer nights  
Lots of time to talk

Old movies on television  
With warm buttered popcorn  
Scenes of the South Seas  
We long for weather that's warm

Oatmeal for breakfast  
Hot sandwiches for lunch  
Meat and potatoes for supper  
Exercise is needed for this bunch

Under piles of blankets we hide  
Hibernating like a bear  
We don't want to wake  
And find winter still there

## WINDOW ON FIFTH STREET

by Stephen Hassler

It seems as if my window on Fifth Street has been frosted over in recent weeks. I've been focusing inwardly on family issues and presidential campaigns, but with the anticipation of Spring, and a break from this "real" Winter we've been having, I've begun to peer through the frosty glass in order to get a refreshing view of the outside world. By the end of the first week of February, which is when I plan to finish deliveries of this paper, we will have heard the annual forecast from that little rodent of hope, the groundhog, and Super Tuesday will have settled some of the political battles. Then after being temporarily preoccupied with love and roses, and maybe some daffodils, we will become aware that Spring is at the door. Shoveling snow, ice scrapers, and cold will give way to mowing grass, garden tools, and rain... maybe.

Seasons, rebirth, the cycle of life. These and related thoughts are in my mind as I peer down the slope on this side of middle age. I have a grown-up respect for living now that I measure it in decades rather than in annual summer vacations. So as I look at the few decades that I trust I have left, I think about what is no longer in my view looking forward. I don't see touch football with my school friends on Saturday afternoons. No more

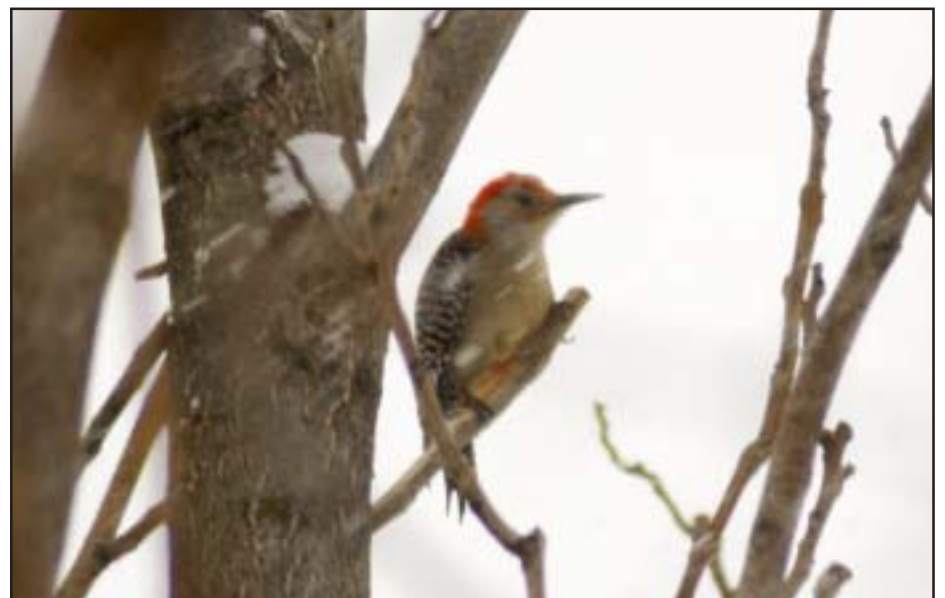
rafting on the farm crick (or creek), no bringing the cows home to be milked. No more building treehouses, catching toads on summer evenings, or fishing with a safety pin. And there is a realization that I no longer want to do those things anyway. They are in my view looking backward, not forward.

My window on Fifth Street has always revealed starting points for destinations dreamed of, and also the peace of mind that life right now is good, and later will be better. I see new adventures with Darla; a visit to the Metropolitan Museum, a drive through the mountains, a movie with buttered popcorn. There could be campfire talks with sons, and Thanksgiving dinner with family. So the I am thinking that a cherished past has got nothing on the wondrous future, and the present is often the best place to be.

**More color photos of our region at:  
[www.yourcountryneighbor.com/PhotoBlog.htm](http://www.yourcountryneighbor.com/PhotoBlog.htm)**



Maybe a Redtail Hawk?  
Hunting above a Winter field just west of Cook.



This Red-bellied Woodpecker must think flying south for the Winter is for the birds.



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#### At Auburn Dealership

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JD 7000 6RN w/fert, insect	\$4250
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My father harvested corn, and my aunt harvested soybeans, but a June harvest of wheat is a favorite country scene of mine.



Looks like a good slope for sledding; Neal Park, Peru.



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# Whisler's Hunting

# & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler  
(Photo(s) provided by Author)

## Fishing:

The Missouri River is low and cold with ice flowing pretty regular now that the temperatures have dipped below zero. When conditions are like this the river can almost tell you how cold it is by the sound of the ice lilies colliding with the river bank and each other. The noise sends shivers up your spine knowing that the water temperature would most certainly send you into hypothermia in a few minutes if you were to fall into it. It definitely gives you a sobering respect for how dangerous but yet how magnificent the river really is.

## Hunting:

The 2007 Late Deer Season (January 1<sup>st</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> 2008) was a cold one. It was snow covered with more snow put down during the 15 day season. The Late Season is for antlerless deer only and they are taken on the Season Choice Tag which allows two antlerless deer to be harvested. There are mixed feelings about taking the antlerless deer at this time of year. The main concern is that the bucks are shedding their horns thus bucks are being killed instead of does. Others feel that the bottom line is to reduce the deer herd, so buck or doe, it doesn't matter. It makes for an interesting conversation at the local gathering places.

Hunting and trapping are going on at the same time and often criss-cross seasons. This year while deer hunters were trying to bag an antlerless deer during the late season, the fur harvesters were trying to bag Bobcat. The Bobcat Season runs from December 1<sup>st</sup> 2007 through February 29<sup>th</sup> 2008. While some fur harvesters trap Bobcat, others prefer to call them in with a predator call.

2008 Spring Turkey Season fliers are out with the new regulation changes for the 2008 Spring Season. NEW for 2008 is that the hunter can obtain three Spring permits of any type (Bow & Arrow or Shotgun) this year. Permits can be bought starting January 14th. All permits are available online at

[www.outdoornebraska.org](http://www.outdoornebraska.org), by mail through the Lincoln office or over the counter at any Commission Permitting office.

2008 Spring Turkey Season Dates are:

Shotgun: April 12 – May 18th.

Archery: March 25th - May 18th.

Hunting seasons are starting to roll back around so don't give up yet. The Spring Turkey Season is right around the corner and it's never too early to start planning your hunt. Get your application in today. Remember I'm not an expert but I have my share of luck. I wonder if the experts are having any luck today? So until next time "Happy Hunting & Fishing."



This month's deer hunting picture is of Kevin Hafer from Sutherland, Nebraska and his son, Michael, shown with a couple of does taken near Peru during the firearm late season.

This month's fur harvester picture is of Kurt Tanner from Nemaha, Nebraska, shown with a big female Bobcat taken near Nemaha along the Missouri River Bluff.



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# Diary of an Unemployed Housewife

Merri Johnson

One of my favorite NPR (National Public Radio) programs is called “This I Believe.” It consists of listener-submitted essays read on the air. In June 2007, Corrine Colbert of Athens, Ohio, wrote about “settling” in her marriage to a man she declared is not her soul mate, not her best friend, does not complete her, and in fact, is nearly her polar opposite. On the other hand, she wrote, he doesn’t abuse her and is a good provider, so she’s sticking with him.

She goes on to quote the *Random House Unabridged Dictionary* definition of “to settle” as “to place in a desired state of order; to quiet, calm or bring to rest; to make stable,” a more-or-less positive take on an expression that is usually associated with lowering one’s expectations.

Still, it’s not exactly the sentiment one is likely to find expressed on a Hallmark® Valentine card. Maxine® maybe, but not Hallmark®.

Which brings me to the crux of this article: how to observe Valentine’s Day. Is the very fact that I just used the word “observe” instead of “celebrate” indicative of my quandary? Do I dare be as bold as Mrs. Colbert in putting these thoughts in print? (One has to wonder if there’s been any change in her marital status since she aired her confession on national radio last summer.)

But let’s be honest. Don’t we all breathe a sigh of relief hearing someone else speak what I suspect is the truth about the majority of marriages that have survived for more than a decade? It’s not that we don’t love each other; we just wouldn’t actually *die* without each other.

My husband and I have been married for over 36 years (thanks in no small part to his long-suffering patience; or maybe he’s just oblivious to my faults). The point is, if he were given the choice between a romantic evening and the meal of his dreams on Valentine’s Day, I wouldn’t bet against the meal. Assuming I won the bet, a restaurant visit would be in order, as my culinary skills are more the stuff of nightmares than of dreams. Since we have now necessitated a public venue for the observance of the date, we have de-romanticized it even more.

The idea that one should feel romantic on a particular day because someone else says so really undermines the whole notion of romance, doesn’t it? Real romance is individual. It can’t be compelled or defined by commercial campaigns designed to stimulate spending on cards, flowers, gifts and restaurant dinners.

I’m willing to settle for grilled burgers and just sitting on the sofa together holding hands.


Oh. And the flowers. Some expectations just shouldn’t be lowered.


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*Editor’s note: You can find previous articles by Merri online in*

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## L'il Bear

by Frieda Burston

When Yulia and Maksim put L'il Bear on my doorshelf, they had no idea they were starting a hobby for me. Now I am known either as “the lady who puts up the bear sayings” or “Grammam Bear”.

I wanted to use L'il Bear to float my philosophies, which were mostly gloomy, but D-D insisted that in a last-stand place like this where 25 residents put on angel wings this year, only lighthearted sentiments should go public. OK, I agreed with that. So every day something new went up— if it was a holiday, L'il Bear made timely comments. If it wasn't, a smart-aleck joke went on the wall.

For Yom Kippur I chose to let L'il Bear emphasize Forgiveness. The ten days between New Years and the Day of Atonement are supposed to be spent in looking over God’s shoulder as He reads your life for the past year, and writes down what’s going to result from it, this year. So L'il Bear’s notes on the wall were telling people how good it is to let go of your grudges and forgive people whose guts you’ve hated all year. He even quoted some doctor who said forgiveness could prevent cancer.

So be healthy— forgive!

Me? No, I had no forgiving to do. That was L'il Bear’s line, not mine. Besides, I was exempt from all the formalities of thought and prayer—I was in the hospital. I was under observation to see if I was having a heart attack. What did I have to do with holding grudges, or with forgivings?

Well, seems like I had been having a chest pain at the same time that my doctor was checking my EKG for cataract surgery, and our phone calls came together, as if carefully timed by the Lord. He sent me to the hospital for observation, and I became a Patient instead of a Penitent.

The first night was a nightmare. Every time I fell asleep, some other piece of machinery rolled in to connect with me and issue figures. Or to check my neighbor in the next bed. And when I finally fell asleep, I was jolted awake by the TV. At 1:30 a.m. I rang for the nurse. “TV is on,” I said. “Yes, I see it is”, said the nurse. “Is it supposed to be?” I asked, and I wouldn’t have been one bit surprised if he had said “Yes”, but he didn’t. So I said, “Then turn it off and let me sleep!” And you know what he said? “I can give you a sleeping pill, if you can’t sleep.”

I was all set to tell him what I thought his politics were, but the neighbor saved me. She said, “Give ME that sleeping pill,” so it was settled that way, the nurse went out, and I curled up to fall asleep.

But just as I was happily dozing off, I realized why the nurse had offered ME the pill—HER taking the pill didn’t help ME sleep— the deeper she sank, the louder her snores, the shriller her whistles. By morning, I was looking forward to a butterknife with breakfast, to carve out her innards.

It turned out that my chest pain was GERD, not heart, and the EKG problem was a clerical error back in May, and thanks to my alert doctors I was out the next day. But when I came here and saw L'il Bear on the doorshelf with the Yom Kippur message of Forgive! still on it, I finally realized what God had been trying to tell me:

Forgiving is therapeutic, yes. But it’s like any other health thing— it doesn’t work unless you use it. No exercise gadget will build your muscles unless you pick it up and stretch. No pills will work unless you swallow them. No diet will slim you unless you eat like they tell you to. And just saying that you forgive someone doesn’t prevent any sickness as long as you’re saying it with murder still in your heart. Your body knows hate. It doesn’t need God to write you down for a rotten year, if you’re writing it with your own metabolism. L'il Bear tried to tell me, but God had to show me.

So I’m going to start thinking about what L'il Bear says. His words MAY be for me too. Frieda

# The Face of Drought

## A Farm Report from Western Nebraska

by Karen Ott

### January on the high plains.....

The winter's been hard and unyielding, the sort which forced unprepared pioneers to burn their furniture for heat and starved their livestock where they stood. How did settlers deal with weather so cold it turned their breath to shimmery crystals in a split second? How did they come to terms with treacherous sheets of ice which silently waited for that tiny misstep, the smallest of mistakes? How did families survive such bitter hardships in such primitive surroundings?

Even with modern amenities we struggle to keep equipment running, feed our animals, and keep our homes warm. Our upstairs floors (the 1906 originals) were constructed of four inch wide fur strips with no underlayment; when a harsh wind blows from the north the cold claws its way into the house where it rises in frigid waves, like the northern lights over the polar ice, through cracks in the uncarpeted floors. The wooden floors look wonderfully 'country', and would make a great photo shoot for any magazine doing a story on the charm of old farmhouses, but lately they've been chilly enough to give a person frostbite.

With a single electric baseboard heater servicing the entire upstairs I've closed off the bedroom my brother and I slept in as children and keep the computer running 24/7 as an additional heat source for my office. I feel lucky to have that; until a few years ago the house's original upstairs rooms had no heat whatsoever. My mother made do with an old coal-oil stove for her sewing room (now my office) but unless she planned on sewing the entire day away she refused to fire it up. It smelled awful, and for days afterwards the house carried a faint hint of kerosene.

The cold temperatures have the feedlot cattle burning calories like that old stove burned fuel. At a time when they should be packing on the weight they're converting their feed into heat instead of pounds. In corrals critters crowd together for warmth, but out on the fields the cows stand apart, positioning themselves broadside to catch the sun's warming rays, using their bodies as flesh and bone solar collectors. Some mornings steam rolls from their backs like smoke from a fire as the frost melts away, a sight common to most rural folks, but sure to cause consternation and confusion in the mind of any traveler unfamiliar with cattle.

Even during the warmest part of the day temps rarely reach above 30 degrees, and

nighttimes are cold enough to freeze the cackle right out of a hen. Like everyone else running cows on corn stalks we are supplement feeding. We haven't received a large amount of snow this winter (recent storms reported as hitting the 'Midwest' have gone around us, slid south, skipped over us, or stayed north.) But what little did fall has never melted, but instead has turned to an impenetrable, crusty ice. Until we get a decent thaw the cows won't find much to eat. I wish we could sell the hay instead of feeding it up...we could certainly use the money...but the weather's worked against us for eight years, and this winter's no different.

Besides breaking ice and hauling hay the men have tended to the usual animal trials and tribulations. Yesterday, after a neighbor phoned with the news one of our cows was 'down', we expected the worst, but thankfully she was up and wandering about by the time Dale arrived. Sporting an ever-tightening rusty-wire ankle bracelet (how ever do they get themselves in such predicaments?), she was limping badly, but at least she wasn't dead.

After some discussion the men decided to move her, and her friends, into the back corral for feeding rather than single her out and chase her to kingdom-come. It's funny how a cow which looks as if she couldn't put one foot in front of another without falling over can suddenly take off and sprint across a frozen field like an Olympic champion on a state-of-the-art track.

There's an air of optimism in the valley that's been painfully absent the past few years; no one's jumping for joy, but if we can get some additional snow in the watersheds and a few decent spring rains...and if the hail, frost, one-hundred plus degree temps, disease and insect infestations

leave us alone, we might be able to raise a decent crop....and sell it for a fair price.

What constitutes a fair price is a matter for discussion. \$5.00 corn may sound like a fortune to the fancy-pants fund managers sitting behind expensive desks in Chicago, but those of us 'on the ground' know better. By the time increases in power, diesel, seed, fertilizer, chemicals, insurance, and equipment costs are factored in we may not be much better off than before. But at least we've got a chance...albeit a slim one, and that's a good feeling.

The tire shop continues to expand, and is turning out to be quite a success, but once again I would caution those farm families looking to diversify to think long and hard before taking the plunge into retail. To be successful takes an enormous amount of time, effort...and courage.

Take it from me; it will change your life in ways you could never imagine.

Take care, stay warm and remember.....Spring lies sleeping in the womb of Winter...it will be April before you know it. Karen

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*Editor's note:*

*You can read previous articles by Karen Ott online in Your Country Neighbor archives; just click on "publications" at:*

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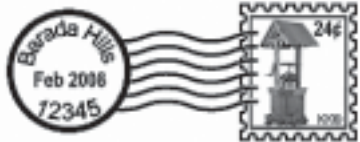
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## At The Wishing Well

by Vicki Harger

Can someone just sprinkle me with Pixie Dust...? I need a bit of magic in my Love Life.

After five years of widowhood, it would be wonderful to have a soul mate for Valentine's Day!

Actually, my quest for a nice Christian fellow began a year ago. I woke up one morning and said to my kids: "That's it! I'm going to find my soul mate on one of those Christian internet sites."

Although the kids had misgivings, they decided to be helpful. They showed their old-fashioned mom how to bumble her way through cyberspace; the setting up of an email in-box, the writing of a profile, the installation of photos on the dating website.

Without my computer-savvy kids, I couldn't have done it.

Well folks, it seemed we were successful. Immediately. Before the week was up, a kindly Christian suitor showed up on my doorstep. My kids were horrified. They hollered at me. They threatened. They looked at me like I was the worst of the worst.

"There are *perverts* out there on the internet!" they said, staring at me suspiciously as though they feared I might be a pervert, myself. "Under NO circumstances should you give out your phone number, and certainly not your address! Do you understand?"

I was nonplussed. "But this is a *Christian* website...and how am I supposed to get to know some guy if I don't talk to him on the phone?"

The kids remained adamant. They **knew** what they were talking about. If I didn't listen to them, they would simply sever my contact with the outside world. And that was final. Did I understand?

I moped. I protested. It did no good. They thought they were the parents, and I was the child. They knew what was best.

The nice Christian suitor, who had showed up on my doorstep, weathered the storm of controversy well. He felt like he'd discovered his true love when he'd found me. Within a month, he'd bought me an engagement ring.

I wasn't so sure about all this.

"This is going too fast," I said gently, giving him back his ring. "I've just gotten on this dating website, and there are a lot of

people out there to meet. How do I know if you are The One?"

My nice Christian suitor went away sorrowful.

Thus began my journey into the strange world of internet dating. The next few weeks and months blurred into a haze of phone calls and lengthy emails. (Fortunately, no one else showed up on my doorstep.) It was a purely clinical-type search. Long distance communication, the relative safety of cyberspace email.

It produced nothing...just frustration.

I felt like a kid at Christmas time with lots of beautifully wrapped packages before me...But each time I opened one, it proved to be an empty box. Useless. There was always something wrong.... Immovable objects called Life's Circumstances. Kids and step-family issues. Financial troubles. Health problems. And long-distance dating annoyances.

One man had a child in an insane asylum. Another was nearly bankrupt. Another man had an incurable disease. The troubles were endless. And then there was the biggest problem of all....

"These men want *me* to pursue *them!*" I told my friend Nancy. "They are scared of women in general. They want the pleasure of running away while a woman chases them!"

Over time, I begin to grow jaded. And bored. I lay on my bed every evening, listening to a masculine voice cajole me over the phone. I'd drift off into a haze of sleepiness, then awaken to hear the man say: "Bobby...!? You called me Bob!"

I snapped awake. "I did?" It wasn't true. Couldn't be. I distinctly remember saying "Oh Terry...Terry...Terry....!" Problem was.... this wasn't Terry on the phone. It was Steven. And to make matters worse, last night I'd called him "*Mikey*"...

Oh dear...Oh dear. Things weren't going well. The pitiful state of my Love Life wasn't improving. It was getting worse.

It all seemed to come down on me the other day at work, there in the **Flower Cart**. I stood in the florist shop looking around at all the colorful Valentine's Day decor. Delicate Pinks. Bleeding-heart Reds...Roses and ribbons and raffia. It's enough to make a

single gal weep, except I had no time to cry. This is the most hectic season at a flower shop and there's much work to do.

I busied myself with the step ladder, climbing up into the empty store window to begin the task of putting up twinkle lights.

But being up there in the window-front didn't help matters any. From my perch, I could see the length of Stone Street...could see the cute couples...the Dawdling Darlin's pausing to peer in store windows. The young...the old...the blissfully ignorant, the sagely wise...and a few in-between. They had smiles. They walked arm-in-arm. They weren't dreading the bitter-sweet-Chocolate Day that loomed just around the corner.

And look there!

Amongst the loitering lovers was my oldest daughter—walking down the street with her hubby. I watched them with a twinge of envy as they disappeared into the shop across the street. How pathetic is that! Envy your own kid.

A pox on Valentine's Day, anyhow! Why does it have to exist?

My thoughts were interrupted by the voice of my boss. "What shall we do about decorating this window-front?" she said to the Designer. "We need something new and creative, but I can't come up with anything. What are you thinking, Andrea?"

Andrea put her hand on her hip. "I'm tired of wracking my brain about it. I'm sick of that window already."

The two ladies sounded as dreary as I felt. We needed something magical, today, some pixie dust or something. If we just had a wishing well that we could toss our troubles into, and wish them all away...

A wishing well...?

I stopped, my hands pausing in their busy work with the twinkle lights. I turned to look at the gals prattling behind me..

"Uh...I have an idea," I said.

The girls stopped talking.

"What if we did a wishing well theme for Valentine's Day?" I said. The girls just stared at me.

"Oh yeah...!" I said, climbing down the stepladder. "Look here.

We could get my mom's big wishing well and put it here. And we could wind ivy around it and then—"

I paused and looked at the boss. "Do you do sale promotions near Valentine's Day? You know like: **Come in and register for a free dozen roses**...or something like that?"

Linda nodded.

"Well. We can have customers toss their names and a penny into the wishing well and then we can draw out a prize-winning name near Valentine's Day. It will be more than a decorating theme. It'll be good for business. What do you think?"

The boss looked pleased. The designer looked relieved. They'd both started to smile. "Hey—you might be on to something."

That did it. Soon I was scrounging through boxes of Valentine decor. I was busy. I was content. I'd forgotten all about the Loitering Lovers and the Dawdling Darlin's out on the street.

And when my daughter popped into the flower shop awhile later, she found her silly mom knee-deep in chaos. Karissa smiled at me indulgently... with good humor, as if she were the parent and I were the child.

"Mom," she said. "Mother! What are you doing...!" But she was happy for me, and so was I.

Conventional Wisdom says to forget about chasing after happiness and concentrate on the here-and-now. Then happiness will come like a butterfly and alight on your shoulder when you aren't looking. It was true.

So Vic, just forget about the men on the internet! Forget the follies of endless emails and droning phone calls. The mounds of bright masculine packages that are all empty inside.

Here at the **Flower Cart**, I'd wished for happiness and contentment. And I'd found it...

At the bottom of a wishing well.

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