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**February 2010**

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## Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

### Writers this month

Devon Adams  
Merri Johnson  
Shirley Neddenriep  
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Thank You

### Your Country Neighbor

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*Editor's note:  
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this publication are online at:*

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## Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

A few years ago, Judy Collins wrote and recorded a song called "The Fallow Way." I had to buy a two-CD set to get that song. But it was worth it to be able to sing along with those lyrics extolling the austere beauty and forced slowness of winter, the time when "beneath the glistening snow the black earth dreams of violets."

The earth in my yard isn't nearly as black as the soil in my native Northwest Iowa. But if the depth of the snow cover is any indicator, there's a long winter's nap's worth of dreams of violets going on under there. I hope the soil is getting properly rested up because I have some big plans for expanding my landscaping and flower gardens this spring.

I'll do a fair amount of dividing and transplanting, like all gardeners do. For us outdoor types, it's the equivalent of rearranging the living room furniture, only with a lot more possibilities. Along with the transplants, there will be plenty of new additions to the garden.

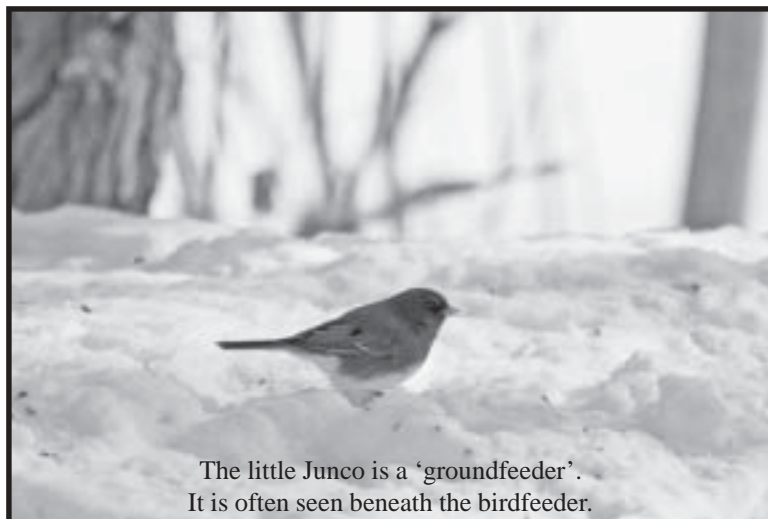
I've been accumulating the new garden catalogs as they arrive in my mailbox, adding them to my stockpile of last year's wish books. (Am I the only one who has trouble tossing those beautiful, glossy-print pictorials in the trash?) Last night I got them all out and began fantasizing. Since I had some companies' issues from two years, I thought it would be interesting to compare prices.

Van Bourgondien will sell me their Award Winning Dinner Plate Dahlia Collection for the same price as last year. But this year they've upped the ante on the order. Instead of \$25 worth of free plants on a \$50 order, I have to order \$100 to get \$50 free. I'm sure there's a term for this particular marketing technique. "Budget buster" comes to mind. On my budget (yet to be determined), \$100 worth of plants is too much from one catalog when there are so many to choose from! Dahlias aren't my thing anyway. Too much bother digging up and replanting each year.

High Country Gardens, on the other hand, doesn't mess around with twofer-type offers. They just cut the prices. This year I can buy the Sizzling Colors Inferno Strip for \$15 less than last year. Of course, their low water and well-drained soil requirements may not comport with our humidity and clay soils. There's always *something* to complicate things, isn't there?

But I'm probably getting the plants ahead of the plan here. Maybe I'd better select sites and draw them to scale (and be sure I can count on some help from hubby to spade them up) before I succumb to the lure of the catalog photos. The measuring and designing is easier than the plant selection. I think I like it better, in fact; it's less stressful than choosing between Giant Columbines and Flowering Ferns or Oriental Poppies and Coneflowers or Lily of the Valley and Grape Hyacinth or Baptisia Twilight Prairieblues and Aстранtia Star of Billion. The selection is almost too much to contemplate for a non-shopper such as myself.

Ah, well, spring is still a long way off, with a full two months of winter left on the calendar. But it's all good: staying bundled up inside, browsing the catalogs, planning... dreaming. It's what the fallow time is made for.



The little Junco is a 'groundfeeder'.  
It is often seen beneath the birdfeeder.

## PEGGY KUSER

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## THE EAGLE AND THE DEER

Caught in a flash of moving lights  
that split the night,  
the old buck paused too long.  
His body was thrown in the ditch  
by the truck that barreled  
down the quiet road.  
In the dawn of the morning, an  
eagle soared away from the river  
and spotted the broken life  
lying on the frosted ground.  
As he descended through the light,  
the spirit of the deer rose to meet him,  
and they became one, linking  
yesterday to tomorrow.

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## Poetry by Devon Adams

### SILENT SNOW

It is very pretty,  
and it feels soft,  
like white feathers.  
But it is cold  
and crunchy  
under your boots.

### ICE PEN

Break off one of those  
huge icicles that are hanging  
from the eaves and  
use it to write a message  
in the snow.  
Say what you want,  
and no one will know,  
because your words  
will melt away before  
the sun goes down.

### PULL THE SHADE

Someone forgot to pull the shade  
all the way down to the windowsill.  
The room is mostly dark, though,  
except for the crack of rose light  
sneaking under the blind.  
It illuminates the far wall  
with an ethereal glow that  
transforms objects to a dreamscape.  
This is a large room that stretches  
from horizon to horizon, and  
the window is the sky,  
with dark gray clouds covering  
the last of the day.

### WINTER MOONRISE

The brittle moon rises  
like a frozen pizza,  
covered with frost,  
and easily shattered,  
in danger of falling  
from the sky in pieces.

### WHITEOUT

Drowning in snow,  
with your breath stolen  
by a vicious wind,  
and your vision lost  
to a white infinity,  
you hang on  
to anything solid.

### IN THE FIELD

They are huddled against the wind,  
bending under the weight of the snow  
that assaulted their slender bodies.  
There is no place to hide from this  
attack that came crashing suddenly  
from out of the north, blowing a  
blizzard across the plains.  
Row upon row of stalks are  
getting weaker by the minute,  
trying to hold up the heavy  
ears of corn still waiting to  
be picked, but the snow piles  
on deeper and deeper, each flake  
adding to the burden, as the wind  
bites with the fury of a wolf.

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The Downy Woodpecker is sparrow-sized. The male has a red patch as seen here.



The little Titmouse may be the most frequent visitor to your feeder. It grabs a seed and flies to a nearby branch where it holds the seed with its "toes" and breaks the casing with its beak to get the 'meat' inside.

## HOW TO OPEN A DVD

by Shirley Neddenriep

Our kids gave us a DVD player for Christmas. It is upscale in that it will play a VCR or a DVD. DVD stands for Digital Version of Downloads or something like that. The first step in operating a DVD is to turn on the television (TV) set and select the channel used to play VCRs or DVDs. After that you are on your own. The operating guide was written for football players adept at reading involved play-by-play procedures that repeat themselves.

But first one must open the DVD itself. It is recommended that several DVDs be purchased on any given shopping trip. If the first attempt at opening the DVD does result in failure, and you are left holding a shiny round disc after having removed too many layers of protective covering, use that disc to make a clock and go on to the second one.

Begin by holding the boxed DVD resolutely in one hand (the left one, if you are right-handed). A shiny, transparent sheath covers the entire box. Grasp a dull steak knife with the other hand and firmly place its tip into the fold of plastic.

It is sad to spoil such a neat fold. People shorten their life span in clumsy attempts to make neat folds at Christmas and other stressful gift-giving times. None the less, your intent is to destroy the neat fold.

Insert the tip of the blade with a gentle, twisting motion, lifting a fold until gradually the plastic splits. Then the blade can be run along the edge of the unit to remove the first layer.

Usually the plastic splits about half-way down and tears itself into a coordinate that leaves one-half of the unit freed from the plastic and the other half still tightly wrapped. In that case, the knife must be reinserted and the process repeated.


Once the exterior layer of clear plastic is removed, you may find a second layer. Begin again with the steak knife procedure taking care to keep the point of the knife away from you as by this time one may have become a little apathetic about ruining a perfectly neat and squared fold, and jab at it. Apply Neosporin and a Band-aid to the puncture wound in your left palm and continue.

Once this step is accomplished, discard both clear wrappers as you will by now be holding in your hand an actual DVD case. Be careful that blood does not drop onto it as the DVD itself is ultra sensitive to foreign matter such as blood, sweat or tears.

Or, you may be holding the DVD in a neat cardboard sleeve exactly the dimension of the DVD itself and embellished with descriptive photos. Clear the projected path of the projectile (the DVD) which may emerge from its sleeve at great speed once enough pressure is applied to its end.


It is important to multi-task during your work because if the door is opened by the husband, one can quickly assume a position in front of the sink of unfinished dishes, the ingredients for a dish complete with an open cookbook, or a pile of unfolded clothes spread over the kitchen table. It will then appear that you are busily engaged in acceptable house-wife duties that do not relate to 'entertainment' in any sense of the word.

*Continued on page 6 >>>>>*



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If, however, the coast is clear or (cherish the moment) you are alone for the day, inspect the DVD carefully. It may or may not have further impediments for complete success. On some hard covers small tabs marked "Open" are located on the vertical side of the DVD case.

Once these small tabs are located, make a tenuous attempt to open the case. Probably it will not open. Nothing comes easy in the world of electronics (refer to instructions). It may be that a strip of adhesive labeling the case with the name of the enclosed movie is firmly attached to the top edge of the case. Mop brow with tea towel as needed.

Again use the tip of the trusty steak knife to gouge, uh, carefully loosen the label. Discard the label if you can get it loose from the table or sink. The adhesive is very good on these labels, better than envelope labels that you want to stick firmly. By now it is stuck to your finger or arm or into your hair. A dull paring knife will help here, or scissors. When it is free, slowly fold it in half so it sticks to itself. That is a form of revenge and very satisfying.

At this point the two tabs should release the binding of the DVD so that it opens like a book. Firmly embedded there is the disc itself.

Next the disc must be removed from its restricted circular indentation in the black plastic case. The circle is the exact dimension of the disc. This snug fit is a safety feature in the event the DVD is shipped to one of the nations whose language appears in the Instruction Guide; i.e., France, Germany, Spain,

China or the International Space-Station. There are English-speaking persons in all those places who can rest assured that their DVD will arrive safely because of its secure tamper-resistant packaging.

To remove the disc from its cocoon place both thumbs on the center button of the circular indentation of the case. By pressing down on the center, the disc should release. It won't until one or both edges (of a circle?) are lifted up slightly by whatever finger is free. Take care not to touch the disc surface itself unless you need a second clock face. When the disc is free insert your index finger into the center hole and carefully hold that aside for later transfer to the machine.

Find and depress a small round button on the DVD player which when pressed, will cause a little round tray to graciously extend from inside the machine. It is designed to exactly receive the disc. You are on your own here as there are a multitude of little round buttons on the DVD player which was manufactured in a remote place in the world by persons with diminutive fingertips and 20/20 eyesight in dim light using night vision goggles.

Transfer the disc shiny side down into the little round tray in the player. The tray can be manually pushed back into its machine. At that time the TV screen will show that success at opening and installing the DVD has been done. As to viewing the movie, like I said, now you are on your own, or, have a small child or football player at hand for assistance. Either one of them will work for a peanut-butter and jelly sandwich.

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**Neighborhood Closet Celebrates 10 Years**

Auburn/NE – Neighborhood Closet will celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> year in business on February 10<sup>th</sup>. Located at 911 Central Avenue in Auburn, Neighborhood Closet is a gently-used clothing store open to the general public. Offering an invaluable service to the community, the Closet provides both a place to donate items which are no longer needed and a place to purchase quality clothing at low prices.

Sponsored by Project Response, Inc., Neighborhood Closet originally opened in 2000 with Sandy Streit acting as manager. Serving Johnson, Nemaha, Otoe, Pawnee, and Richardson counties, Project Response is a nonprofit crisis center that provides support and advocacy to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other related issues.

One of the free services offered at Project Response are vouchers for clients to receive clothing at the Neighborhood Closet. In the last two years, the Neighborhood Closet has honored more than \$13,000 in vouchers. Any revenue generated by the store is donated to Project Response at the end of the fiscal year. The monies are then used to provide direct services to victims of violent crimes. In the last three years, Neighborhood Closet has contributed more than \$3,000 to Project Response.

Were it not for the tremendous support from donors in the community, the Closet would not be such a success. To celebrate their 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Neighborhood Closet is offering a storewide sale February 9-13 with all items priced at \$0.88 (no coupons honored).



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# Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler  
(Photo provided by Author)

## Fishing:


The Missouri River is low but levels have been fluctuating with the recent melting. Ice flows were common last month with the exception of this last week when the temps returned from the sub-zero extremes to the seasonal 20's and 30's. It seems like the snow has been on the ground forever and even getting to the river isn't easy. It will be even harder when all the snow melts. Area ponds are just getting enough ice on to ice fish because of the large amount of snow that has been sitting on them. There are some reports of ice as thick as 14 inches where the snow was blown off the pond or lake pool where the cold temps can get access to the open water. On other areas with snow the ice is six and eight inches thick and is not clear. This is often referred to as rotten ice and is not as strong as clear ice. So fishermen will have to watch where they go and use their best judgment when fishing out on the ice. I have checked around and minnows along with wax worms are available in local bait shops. I don't know how this recent melt is going to affect the ice on these ponds and lakes – I assume that it will set on top so don't only dress warm but water proof.

## Hunting:


Hunting seasons have been closing one by one with the close of the year, but there are still some small and upland game seasons open – squirrel, quail, and pheasant open 'til January 31<sup>st</sup>, and rabbit will remain open 'til February 28<sup>th</sup>. The recent snowing and drifting has had to take it's toll on the small game with the snow taking over the cover, drifts in excess of eight feet in places, and below zero temps. This is not good. Only time will tell how the little critters recover from the extreme Winter we have been having. It's hard on hunters too, with many of the county roads to hunting areas blown shut. And with deep snow hunters are limited to where they can go if it is even possible. Waist deep snow makes it a good day to stay in out of the weather, and like I said, the roads to hunting areas are not open, and if they are, 'It's one lane'. So if you meet someone on one of those roads – Somebody's backing up!

Winter has settled in and hunting seasons are closing one by one. Soon it will be time to think about Spring turkey seasons and Spring fishing and not to mention morel mushroom hunting. But for now all of that seems miles away, but that doesn't have to keep you from getting ready. Re-stringing your fishing reel and practicing your turkey calls can pass the time for now. You can't be too ready. Remember, I'm not an expert but I have my share of luck. I wonder if the experts are having any luck today? So until next time, "Happy Hunting & Fishing."

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# The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



A person can buy just about anything they want (and things they didn't even know they wanted) at China-Mart. From seasonal junk to chintzy clothes to thirty different flavors of yogurt it's all there, just waiting for streams of weak-willed shoppers pushing wiggity-woggety-wheeled carts to stop and load up.

For the most part I'm a steel-willed shopper, easily ignoring the hundreds of useless frou-frou calling my name, or the exotic sweet temptation of Lindt's dark-chocolate truffles. Although, I am sorry to say, there have been times I've returned home from a shopping trip with items for which I have no earthly use. Seriously, just because candy canes were 10 cents a dozen did I really need 8 boxes of them? No one at our house even eats candy canes, and yet there are 96 of them taking up precious cupboard space,

But I digress.....

The store has it all...except anything remotely related to production agriculture.

There's dog, cat, rabbit, and parakeet food, but a chicken could starve to death wandering the endless aisles. And while there's every brand of baby bottle made under the sun you won't find one for an orphan calf. Same goes for OTC meds; there are pet cures for worms, ear mites, fleas and even bad breath, but you could go blind searching for a single pink-eye puffer suited for cattle.

When the weather warms store employees unpack boxes of lightweight shovels, odd-angled hoes, and short handled 'spading' forks, but ask a clerk for a pitch, potato, or hay fork and they'll more than likely look at you with pity, snickering to their friends at lunch, "You'll never guess what some kook asked for today!",

You could hunt for irrigation boots, pivot parts, or buckets of prairie dog/gopher bait till the cows come home; you won't find any. However, if you're a hobby gardener looking for gallons of watery weed killer, shakers of ant poison, sacks of grub 'suppressor' and fancy dirt specially formulated for cactus, orchids, African violets, vegetables, annuals or perennials, you'd be in luck. Our local China-Mart has more brands of dirt than a fine restaurant has bottles of wine.

I'm certainly not advocating Mega-Mart's board of directors' ride into the farm-store arena and kill off what's left of rural commerce, but seeing huge stores so utterly devoid of anything ag-related

troubles me somehow. Not because it hurts my farm-wife feelings, or makes me feel irrelevant, but because it's a sign of the times; we live in an age when most American consumers have no sense of connectedness with the land except for a bag of wal-mart dirt.

Can the yawning gulf between farmer and consumer ever be bridged? Does it even matter?

Of course it does. Lack of knowledge breeds misunderstanding which in turn gives birth to suspicion. A few generations later there's no common ground, only doubt, distrust, and a relationship sadly in need of mending.

Perhaps it will never come to that...or it could be we've already passed the point of no return?

Special interest groups, whose goals can only be accomplished by pitting citizen/consumer against farmer/producer, are increasingly shaping the public's perception of production agriculture. With tax-exempt status, war chests full of cash, Hollywood-slick ad campaigns and narrowly focused

agendas they're re-making the image of the American farmer into someone who can't be trusted to manage the land's resources. They're smart, focused and determined.

Until the past year or so farm groups, busy attending their own business, ignored the threat as inconsequential, but things are changing: Like Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle they've rubbed the sleep from their eyes...and are flexing their muscles. But the question remains....where will it all end?

Will the American farmer be able to rise to the occasion, or will our nation, carrying a sack of Wal-Mart dirt, continue skipping down the primrose path to complete agricultural illiteracy?

Stay tuned....things are about to get interesting.

Karen

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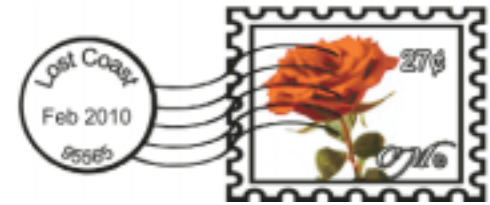
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All Twitterpated...  
By Vicki O'Neal



Chocolates and roses. Swirling emotions... "I-love-you's" and kisses in the moonlight.

The moments are so fleeting....Those breathtaking moments that we ladies look for all of our lives.

We want a Prince who never turns into a grumpy frog. A fairy-godmother who can give us a dazzling life with the wave of her wand. Castles and coaches. Heart-stopping romance. Climatic, star-bursting moments when time stands still—suspended in space while the galaxies spin on and on.

Ah yes. That's what we all want. But those sparkling moments are just fragments of our lives—if they exist at all. As brief as a sneeze....and just about as productive.

With longing, we look back on the days when we first fell in love. Dizzy-Tizzy Twitterpation. The thrill of discovery.

Will we ever feel it again?

Everyone's desperate for romance—especially around Valentine's Day. The world is all a Twitter with it. On-line dating. Chat rooms. Cyber-flirting. Text-messaging. E-harmony.

But the harder one looks, the harder it is to find. True romance seems so evasive. In our modern world, a strange paradox exists.

We can chat on a cell phone with our beloved at any moment, day or night...whether he's halfway across the globe—or just in the alley, taking out the garbage. It should be romantic, I suppose, but it's actually a romance-killer. I mean—how romantic is it to phone a man while he's sitting on the commode, or shopping at the drug store for a new jock strap?

The mystery is gone. The breathless wonder. We are left with feelings of discontentment. Everybody else seems to have a better love-life than ours.

Our grass is never as green as the neighbors'. Ever.

Single folks envy the married. And married folks envy the single. And divorced people fall somewhere in between. Nobody's happy with their own situation.

The grass is definitely better in somebody else's yard.

Well, folks. Why don't we just try mowing the grass in our

own yard? Try to be satisfied with the few sprouts that we've got on our side of the fence... Fertilize it a bit. Turn on the sprinklers...And see what happens! Whether we're married or single. Divorced or widowed. Engaged or heart-broken.

Life is what you make it.

Romance is finding pleasure in the small things, you know. Sipping cappuccino beneath the palm trees at the food court in the mall. Shopping at Victoria's Secret, just for the heck of it. Going for a walk down a country lane in the twilight...listening to the restless wind in the oaks. Breathing deeply of the fresh air. Watching the moon rise in the east.

Create your own 'romance' if you have to. Whip it up from scratch! A little of this...A little of that. Sweeten it with a bit of —

Well. I don't know. Be creative.

When no one brings you roses, plant your own flowers and cultivate your own soul. Keep busy caring for yourself and others—and eventually, true love will find you. And if it doesn't....at least you've had fun tryin'....

On this Valentine's Day, instead of sulking and wishing it would go away—try doing something new—even if it's all by yourself. Indulge yourself. Buy your own chocolates...your own roses...your own teddy. A sweet burning candle. A bubble bath. Baby yourself! Twirl in the moonlight to the sound of your favorite music.

When others see that you're having so much fun, they'll want to join you. Then you won't be alone any more.

Remember....

None of us lives the life of Cinderella. Everybody has down-times. It's up to us to change what we can...whether we're married or single. Whether we're married to Archie Bunker, or Brad Pitt. Whether we look like Edith Bunker or Miss America. We are all the purveyors of our own destiny.

Now...go out there and do it, folks. Get twitterpated about life!

And have a wonderful Valentine's Day!

*Vicki O'Neal*  
www.VickiO'Neal.com



The Nuthatch is an elusive little guy. It “runs” down the tree trunk, grabs a seed from the feeder, then flies away quickly, and soon returns for seconds and thirds.

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**HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY!**

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