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Neighbor

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FEB 2012

Canada Geese lounging on a frozen part of Auburn's lake near the Fair Grounds.

TEN YEAR ANNIVERSARY ISSUE!

More Pages

More Photos

More Color

Voices from the Valleys of the Nemaha

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

Writers this month

Devon Adams
Merri Johnson
Vicki O'Neal
Shirley Neddenriep
Karen Ott
Josh Whisler
Marilyn Woerth

Thank You

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Your Country Neighbor

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Editor's note:

Seven years of this publication are online at:

www.yourcountryneighbor.com

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Ten Years of Monthly Publication!

Your Country Neighbor has been publishing monthly for ten years this February. This warrants a few gratuitous comments. Readers, thank you for supporting my advertisers. Advertisers, thank you for supporting *Your Country Neighbor*. Viewers, thank you for admiring my photographs. Writers, thank you for sharing, entertaining, teaching, and learning.

Your Country Neighbor is hand-delivered to grocery stores, pharmacies, hardware stores, restaurants, cafes, plus businesses that advertise in these pages, in the following cities and villages in **Kansas**; Hiawatha and Sabetha. In **Missouri**; Rock Port. In **Nebraska**; Auburn, Brownville, Cook, Falls City, Humboldt, Johnson, Nebraska City, Nemaha, Peru, Syracuse, and Tecumseh.

See seven years' past issues of *Your Country Neighbor*, online, as well as lots of photos at:

www.yourcountryneighbor.com

Cover Photo

This month's cover photo was taken on January 23rd at the lake in Auburn. Most of the lake was unfrozen and populated with an unusually large number of Canada Geese, but the northwest corner of the lake provided an alternative resting spot.

Migrating geese go only so far south as needed to be able to find water and food. Depending on the ice cover, Squaw Creek Wildlife Refuge near Mound City, Missouri, will have tens of thousands of Snow Geese November through February. See page 8 for a photo taken January 25th.

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Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

I've come up with my own contribution to the one-liners comedians employ to reveal the tell-tale signs that identify us as undeniable members of some group or other. You know what I mean. *You might be a redneck if you've been married three times and still have the same in-laws. Or, You might be a liberal if you think NPR isn't biased. Or, You might be a Husker fan if you postponed your mother's funeral because of a home football game.*

My line goes like this. *You might have reached the upper limit of middle age if orthotic catalogs constitute interesting reading in your house.*

My husband isn't much of a fiction reader, but he does spend time with the daily World-Herald and he has subscribed to various golf and woodworking magazines over the years. And investment reports always get a fairly thorough perusal.

But it gave me pause recently when I observed him spending what seemed to be an inordinate amount of time thumbing through FootSmart®, a catalog of all things related to the foot, spine and posture in general. The catalog does use female models to illustrate its products, but there isn't anything particularly alluring about corrective back braces and compression socks. On the other hand, the models wearing the ladies' support hosiery did have pretty nice legs. I'm relatively sure they were not actual customers.

But, I don't think his interest was in the models. Sadly, he was genuinely intrigued by the orthotics, specifically those little pillow-like shoe inserts that cushion his Morton's neuroma. If you've never had foot discomfort, you may not be aware of the number and variety of ball-of-foot cushions, arch supports, heel pads, toe stretchers, and bunion regulators, sleeves and slings on the market. And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

What an array of products we have to customize the fit and comfort of our shoes to correct or at least mitigate the effects of all sorts of maladies. I find it mind boggling that there can actually be so many foot conditions. And to think that people used to feel fortunate to have a pair of shoes or boots that simply wasn't worn out. In hard times, many people kept on wearing shoes with holes in the soles, making do, plugging the holes with layers of newspaper or cardboard. I can't imagine the sorry state of foot health in those days.

We recently visited a friend who was recuperating from surgery to correct hammer toe and gout. He was still thumping around in his "Herman Munster" protective boot. His wife noted with an indulgent smile that the boot was a bit of a problem in bed. Seems she had taken a few kicks in the shins in the course of tossing and turning.

But, back to my husband's taste in reading material. I suppose I shouldn't tease him. We're all getting older, unless we aren't. In which case, we no longer need to be concerned with comfort, whether it involves our feet or anything else.

Which begs the question, *Why do caskets have padded mattresses?* I'll save that topic for another article.

In the meantime, I'm all for shoe inserts, as long as they enable my husband to continue hobbling along behind the lawn mower. I'd hate to have to take over that job.

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Poetry by Devon Adams

THE MUSIC OF SILENCE

There are layers of sound that surround us. But you can hear the silence if you listen. Music is lurking in the spaces between notes that vary from the lilt of bird songs to the crash of a cement drill, to the roar of a truck on a ribbon of highway. Pay attention, and you will find that your body relaxes and your lungs breathe deeply in the silent pauses. You can feel the tension loosen as the intensity of sound diminishes. Turn off the raving of a political fanatic on the car radio, and there is the whoosh of the wind tunnel that your vehicle is carving through the dark of the night. It isn't silence, but it is restful, in comparison. The velvet song of a wren is like a sea wave in the crescendo of its delicate voice, and then the low roll before the next stanza. When we listen we hold our breath, waiting for the break in the music to inhale the beauty.

THAT GIRL FROM ST. LOUIS

The war was on and they were young, and both were far away from home. She was a country girl in a city job, and he was a small town guy in a uniform. They met and fell in love, the handsome soldier and the stylish redhead. She knew how to cook the southern way and he loved to eat any old way at all, especially southern. They were both lucky that he came back from the war, and life was good to them. He was a wizard as a teacher and became a principal that generations of students remembered as a friend and a mentor. She kept a perfect home and worked with money at the local bank. She made legendary meals cherished every holiday by family and friends. It was always just the two of them, until it was just one. She was lost without him, but then he came back to let her know that he had made the journey and he was waiting for her. She remembered how they met, so long ago, one day as she looked through photos from the past. There they were, on that St. Louis street, a brand new pair of lovers holding hands. His mother had written on the back of the picture, "That girl from St. Louis."

SOMEONE TO TALK TO

It is easy to throw words around, when there is a listening ear nearby. Without much pause before a thought is launched, memories often forget how much was said, or how loud it was. Proximity is all that matters, until we are alone. Then talk is altered, if not muted altogether. We find a blank space in our lives when the usual people aren't around, for temporary reasons, or forever. Then our thoughts are loud inside our heads, and they want to be said in spite of empty rooms and lonesome days. Then we learn to speak in substitutes for closeness. Phones do double duty and can send our voices or our written words, but there is no face in front of us that mirrors our emotions, no certain sight of loved ones looking in our eyes. We need to know the thoughts that only come when they are translated into words, and sometimes writing letters to ourselves is the surest path to follow when we are searching for the truth inside our hearts.

SNOW NAILS

There they were, standing in a line like good soldiers. They were rigid and cold in demeanor. Staring forward, with glassy eyes, they surveyed the snow field that met the blue enamel sky. Pounded deeply into the drifts, the saber-toothed icicles had fallen when the slant of the sun met the slant of the roof, and they were aligned in a precise formation.

HOLD TIGHT

Because of the deep clarity of the air, the stars were intensely bright on a night that felt the sky shiver. Each point of light seemed fixed forever, hanging out there on the hooks of infinity. But that immutability of position is a lie. Each piece of rock and cloud of dust and particle of matter is moving. Galaxies swirl and bobble in local motion, while at the same time they are racing away from each other toward the edge of space and time. Except that there is no edge, and time goes on forever. If we could catch up with yesterday, we might be able to relive a special moment, and never let it go.



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Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

I am having a love affair. Scandalous isn't it! I really, really love this land where I am planted. Now, I did not choose to be planted here (husband's job), but I am very grateful that I am.

This time of the year I love the many shades of blue in the sky (cloudless day), when the light, blue on the horizon, develops into a deep sky blue overhead. I also love when the yellow maize color of the corn stalks left from the harvest blends with the blue of the sky and the earthen brown of the soil. Add a sprinkling of white sparkling snow that sets off the patterns from the farmer's disking, and then I melt. I know I am seeing a slice of heaven.

The patterns of the rolling hills, sloping valleys and parting ravines that grace the countryside, give one's eyes a sense of a peaceful flow to the tranquil yet active life around us. I want to grab a part of that scene and hold it forever, close to my heart. I also feel this way about the three

acres I live upon. I am thankful that I am allowed to be called its steward, if only for a short appointed time.

When I am out in my garden in the spring, the cold wet soil shocks my senses to the slow awakening of the season. As the days grow longer, and warmer, and the strong loamy smells of the earth introduce many layers of aromas, then my senses become more alert to the needs of the plants and the soil. My heart bonds once again to the land. It is as if the land is baptizing me for one more year as its guardian, and flirts with me to impassion itself, once more upon my heart.

To me there is nothing more relaxing, more peaceful, more fulfilling than to be engaged in all forms of gardening. Hoisting a bag of manure upon my shoulder, digging a two foot hole, grubbing out the weeds, harvesting tomatoes, spraying the roses, picking flowers for a

bouquet; I love it all, always (well almost always). A saintly man once said, "The best place to become Holy is in the ordinary day-to-day routine of my life". To do it well, have pride in it and enjoy yourself all at the same time; piece of cake in my book. (Does that include housecleaning? Oh well, that too.)

My husband knows about my love affair and I dare say it is one he enjoys too. Perfectly in sync as an old married couple should be, after sharing this small piece of heaven for twenty-six of their forty-one years together. We have been all over this country and some of the world and have seen many beautiful horizons hand-in-hand, but the draw of this land, in this place, is stronger, and more fierce than any foreign terrain.

So we will stay where we are planted and continue our love affair on our piece of heaven where life is good.



Bird feeders get crowded with finches on a cold day. This photo taken in January when the temperatures were in the teens.

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«««««««««««««««« «The Piano» Continued from page 3

That piano was constructed in 1926 and began life as a player piano. Somewhere along the line its components were removed with only the two doors remaining to indicate where the perforated sheets of music once rolled. Grandchildren and a great-granddaughter played on occasion; mostly the 500-pound piece of furniture served as a grandiose display area for silver-framed wedding photos of grandchildren.

Last year great-grandsons began lessons using a small keyboard for practice. I knuckled under, finally admitting to myself that they would have more use for the piano than me. Ed DuFraine and a helper drove from near St. Joseph. Using a huge dolly, they loaded the piano onto their closed-in, low slung trailer and moved it to the space reserved for it in great-grandsons' basement family room in Missouri. After he situated it in its new home, Ed returned to tune it. "A piano always needs tuned after a move and after it adjusts to new temperatures," he said. He is retiring from the piano-moving/tuning business after many years. His business is for sale.

Now a new generation has a chance to lend music to ears eager for music. These youngsters are more into football, but with mother's insistence, even that stumbling block can be overcome. There is always hope.



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Thousands of Snow Geese frequently populate Squaw Creek Wildlife Refuge during the winter months when the water is not frozen over.
Photo taken January 25th, 2012

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Brownville is picturesque and historic, even in winter. The Carson House is my favorite museum. It's right across the street from the Lyceum. The Lyceum has been closed this season, and I am eagerly awaiting the opening of this fine Southeast Nebraska restaurant; hopefully before Spring.

At the east end of Main Street, across from the Brownville Mills Health Food Store (see ad above and on page 9), is a row of quaint and friendly shops offering art, antiques, ice cream, and unique crafts. One or more maintain hours during the Winter, but all will be up and running by the time of Brownville's annual "Wine, Writers and Song" weekend event in



April. Writers, call Nora at 402.825.3992 for detailed workshop information.

Another block or two brings you to the Missouri River. This time of year the American Bald Eagle is often seen perched high in the tall trees along the River's shore, sometimes diving and snatching a fish with it's talons, sometimes soaring on updrafts when the temperature is warm enough; eagles fly as little as possible when cold in order to save energy. Mainly, they are following the Snow Geese by way of the Squaw Creek Wildlife Refuge near Mound City, Missouri, and going further south when the Refuge's waters are frozen over.

The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



I call the months of January and February ‘The Winter Doldrums’ because I’m always ‘snowed in’ by a blizzard of pre-tax paperwork, and piles of shifting, drifting, cash-flow computations. As a person more comfortable with words than numbers I find the sheer quantity of reports, forms, and everything else that goes with them absolutely stultifying (cause to lose enthusiasm and initiative as a result of a tedious or restrictive routine).

I’d rather be shoveling chicken manure than tax-related paperwork, and writing a ‘projected’ cash-flow for a crop yet to be planted, irrigated, harvested and sold seems so sadly comic.

I’m well aware that’s the price of doing business in today’s highly controlled/regulated business environment, but I wish the government would quit breaking pieces off of the common man (or woman) and pick on someone their own size; and I say this from experience.

In 2009 the IRS took it into their collective head that the tire shop’s reported 2008 payroll reported on form 941 was actually paid in 2006 (when the tire shop was still a 944 filer). We received notice of a civil penalty and taxes due...to the tune of \$8000.00+ dollars.

I called, mailed copies of the appropriate paperwork, and in return received even more threatening notices. “Pay-up” they said...”Or we’ll take your property.”

Everyone I spoke to outside the IRS advised me to fork over the cash, but I was born a fighter, and my Volga-German hard-headedness and sense of justice kept me from crying ‘uncle’

For three long years I made monthly calls to the IRS tax-collection offices, meticulously documenting the discussions, until, this past November, an IRS representative referred my case to a ‘taxpayer advocate.’

This week I received notice from the Taxpayer Advocate’s office that the civil penalties and taxes mistakenly levied by the IRS were being removed from the Tire shop’s account.

Included in the letter was a one-line apology for my ‘inconvenience’.

I’d stared down the IRS and lived to tell about it.

I’m on cloud nine.

Hallelujah!

Yippee!

Yea!

As Always, Karen

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My Hubby is a Reel Catch

By Vicki O'Neal



It was soon obvious I didn't know what I was doing...like when my scarf got tangled in the fishing reel...Or when I tripped over the picnic basket and nearly fell out of the boat.

But I think it was most obvious when my normally patient husband began shouting at me: "Turn around and face the fish! Your back is to him! No one brings in a fish that way!"

Ah yes...The day had started out well enough. The breeze on the river was brisk, but I'd come prepared. I had on a sweater, jacket, hood, a pink-striped scarf, and an old sunhat perched on top my head.

In my pocket were a pen and a scrap of paper. A writer's emergency kit.

We'd forgotten only one thing—my life-jacket—however, a fair substitute was soon found. We tied an empty gas jug around me with a rope. A bit clumsy, but it would keep me afloat in case of shipwreck.

We set out on the river in our SS Minnow—the hundred-dollar rowboat we'd found at a yard sale. With the Cap'n rowing hard, we honed in on a sunny spot—a small cavern-like cove, complete with waterfall and smooth-carved walls—a sheltered niche full of fish and sunshine. Cascading falls...clear, aqua-marine waters. Beautiful!

I stretched out in the sunny boat, as usual, with my pen and scrap of paper in hand, while my hubs prepped his hooks and bait. Then he made the mistake of asking me if I wanted to join him.

I haven't fished much since I was a kid visiting my cousins in Minnesota...pulling in sunfish and perch and little crappies. Nothing like the hunking big fish swimming in this river. These fish were big enough to drown you.

"I'm pretty busy," I said, scribbling on my scrap of paper.

"Put down your pen and come fish with me," he said. It didn't take long for him to regret those words.

I'd no sooner thrown in a hook than I caught a fish. Michael caught one at the very same time. The race was on!

I began reeling frantically. My heart pounded and my

deodorant failed.

"What are you doing?" Michael hollered. "Your reel is upside down!"

"Is not!" I said. "It's above the fishing rod. That means it's right-side-up!" But I had no time to argue my case. We were in a fight for fish.

With the gas-jug banging about my waist, I reeled furiously—standing backwards in the boat. That's when my husband told me to turn-around-and fish-like-a-normal-person, but I didn't dare. I knew I'd lose my fish...so I kept on reeling.

Our lines got tangled...A diabolical mess. Somehow, we reeled the fish in anyway.

My fish was beautiful and very big—several inches longer than my husband's.

Now folks—any woman with half a brain knows she's treading on dangerous ground when she catches a larger fish than her husband. Especially when he's the one baiting your hooks and casting your line.

Wisely, I resumed fishing without saying a word.

Despite my backwards method of fishing, I caught one fish after another. Hunkin' big Squawfish. My hubs was so busy unhooking my fish and re-baiting my hooks, he had little time to fish, himself. So far, Michael had caught only one fish.

I knew such a turn of events could be hard on a marriage.

"It's just beginner's luck," I said glancing down at all my fish in the bottom of the boat. One of them was still flopping a bit. Quivering. Staring up at me reproachfully. It made me sad...full of remorse. What was I doing? Killing God's beautiful creatures.

"Oh no! Look at him!" I said. "Poor thing. He's still alive and suffering." Tears stung my eyes, and I started to sniffle. "He was just minding his own business and I jerked him out of his home—"

Michael was trying hard to be patient. But it was a stretch. "Listen here," he said. "Do you cry over your fish-sandwich at McDonald's? No! This is just life. You've got to get used to it."

I sniffed and got out a piece of chocolate cake from the picnic basket. Three pieces, in fact. I ate them all while Michael wasn't looking.

I felt better and eventually went back to fishing. I caught more—almost twice as many as my husband—but in the end, Michael caught the biggest fish. It was God's way of saving our marriage. I'm sure of it.

The sun sank low in the west, staining the sky a lovely pink and crimson. The breeze died and the waters turned to glass. So still. Not a ripple. It was then that the fish began to jump. And flash... And twist in a primordial dance.

They erupted around us—going after the evening-bugs. Shiny fish leaping in the rays of the dying sun. It was beautiful to behold.

With a final wink, the sun kissed the mountain goodbye, sliding down...down toward distant lands on the other side of the planet. The moon rose and shined down on us in the twilight.

Fishing with your husband can be quite romantic, folks. Especially when he takes you home and cooks you a gourmet dinner with the fish you've just caught.

It was a wonderful feast...wonderful, indeed!

I polished off my dinner, took a shower and crawled in bed. I sneaked a notebook and pen into bed with me. While my husband snored, I scribbled away happily in the dimness...

Unintelligible words stacked on top of one another in the darkness. Words about boats and squawfish and waterfalls. All those delayed words that hadn't gotten scribbled on my scrap of paper because I'd been so busy fishing.

At last I ran out of words...all but the final ones.

I stopped. What would I call this story about a patient husband who baits hooks and untangles lines and tolerates all kinds of foolishness from his backwards, upside-down, jug-slinging, cry-baby of a woman?

I looked over at my noble fisherman snoring away in the dimness.

There's just one title that would do, of course. Only one would do...!

Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler
Photo Submitted by Author

Fishing:

The Missouri River is flowing low and cold. The weather has fluctuated up and down several times but for now there is ice flow in the river pretty steady. The noise of the ice crunching along the shore is an eerie sound that kind of sends a shiver up your spine when you think about the sheer power of the river's current as it slams ice patties into the shore over and over. Although the weather is cold now, it hasn't had enough time to put any ice on area ponds and lakes and it looks like that it's not going to happen this year unless something severe happens in the weather. Unusually by this time of year there are at least 4 or 5 inches of ice on ponds and lakes, but this year there is none. Mostly due to the winds when it warms up - it takes only about 12 hours or so to take the ice of a pond when the wind blows at 50 degrees like we have had in the past month. My take on ice fishing is it's out for this year. But the wind have brought some

visitor to our area and that's the Eagle population. There seems to be a large amount of Eagles coming through our area right now and it is nothing to see well over a dozen on a trip to the river. If you're not used to seeing Eagles or have never seen one - you really need to get out and look - they seem to be everywhere right now. If you see a bird perched high in a tree, it's probably a pretty good chance that it's an Eagle. Time doesn't seem to matter but I have seen more in the mid-morning than any other time. And don't forget your camera - it truly is a site of a life time to see so many at one time.

River Picture for this month is of the Missouri River in low winter flow stage. Observe that the entire concrete Peru Boat Ramp is exposed at this time. Now that's as low as it gets!


Hunting:

Hunting seasons are closing one by one right


now. Later antlerless deer season hasn't really been that great as far as seeing deer due to the unseasonal warm weather. The deer don't have to come out in the daylight to feed so I don't think a lot are being harvested this season. The Nebraska Game and Parks numbers will come out soon but I would not be shocked that the numbers taken during the late season is down.

The hunting opportunities are narrowing down for right now and fishing is out for right now too. But soon the Turkey Applications for Spring Turkey will open and away we go again on another year of hunting. And it's a good time to re-string your fishing poles in anticipation of the coming fishing trips. All I can tell you is "get ready" because it will be here soon enough. 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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Peru Boat Ramp - Low Winter Flow Stage

LOOKING AHEAD

Devon Adams

The time of ice is upon us and the seed catalogs are coming. Fantasy gardens are so easy to grow, without their weeds and bugs. Not to mention the absence of the real heat and sweat that accompany any actual summer plantings. The next step after the catalogs is the trip down the aisle in the store that sells packages of seeds. Combined with a wild imagination, the pictures on the little packets seem to come alive, and you can smell the flowers and count the cucumbers.

By the time temperatures rise, and the earth eats the sun and makes a warm bed for seeds and plants, the fever for planting is at a peak. At gardening centers, we walk between rows of petunias and pansies, hibiscus and lilies, roses and clematis, all begging us to pick them up in their plastic pots. Herbs and onion sets and tomatoes tempt our taste buds. The sapling trees and bushes look so good on their labels that we can envision them growing in our yard. We convince ourselves that we 'need' them. But then the choice comes between what we want and what we can afford, and decisions are finally made.

The bottom line for all the speculation and the dreams is a uniquely human ability to see inside the seed. Holding a weightless bit of matter in your hand means that you are actually holding a full-grown plant in all it's glory.

When you plant these magic hearts they will become what you imagine, and fuel your continuing passion for growing things.

We see the future in the present and then work to make the future happen. This knack for looking ahead applies to more than plants. Our newborn may be red and wrinkled and scowling at us for taking him out of his warm cave, but parents see an adorable five-year old starting his first day at kindergarten, who becomes a teen graduating from high school, then an adult with a family of their own, bringing the grandkids to visit Grandma and Grandpa. We can see the finished structure of a house when we hold a board in our hands

and a vision in our heads. We see the need to start small and plan in order for a dream to grow and mature.

An artist looks at a white expanse of paper and can visualize a finished painting, and from the first brush stroke it grows like a wild thing until it is a complete picture. A writer sees an interaction between two people on a bus, and ten years later it is embedded in the plot of a published book. Carpenters drive by houses that they built and remember when the structures were no more than blueprints lying on a desk.

Our lives start with a seed and grow into mighty trees, with the branches of our experience reaching far away from the trunk, and our roots sunk deep in the soil of our past. When we die, the dead wood finally topples and disappears into dust, waiting for new seeds to be planted.



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Both Color Phases of Snow Geese; "Snow" and "Blue" forms. This taken at Squaw Creek Wildlife Refuge, January 1, 2012.

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Snow Geese at Squaw Creek Wildlife Refuge, New Year's Day, 2012



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