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February 2014

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A Magazine for Small-town America

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Canada Geese on Auburn's (Frozen) Lake, January, 2014



American Bald Eagle, Near Brownville Bridge, February 2014

CONTENTS

Merri's Diary	2
Brownville in Winter	4
Medicare Questions <u>Answered!</u>	5
Devon's Poetry	6
Marilyn's "Where Life is Good"	7
Cupids, Coupons, Valentines	10
Alzheimer's Communication Gap	13
Carol's Poems and Photos	15
Coupon for <i>Valentino's!</i>	16

Voices from the Valleys of the Nemaha

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Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

Is it spring yet? If vowing to wash my windows on the first 60-degree day could make it so, I'd make that pledge. Alas, Mother Nature is not interested in my window glass, although a Northern Flicker that frequents our suet feeder apparently is.

Back on one of those frequent gusty days in mid-January, I heard a distinct tapping coming from my office. Logically, I assumed something was being blown against the window or siding. Upon investigation I was surprised to find a Northern Flicker clinging to the screen in the upper corner of the east-facing window, pecking insistently at the glass. The glass didn't yield, but the screen isn't going to keep out very many bugs come summer.

For a minute I forgot that I'm a bird lover. *You crazy bird!!* I hollered. *What do you think you're doing?? You're ruining my screen!! Get the heck off my screen!!!*

It wasn't until I beat back against the glass myself that the bird gave up and flew off. Perhaps he was going after an insect he had spied between the panes (I told you they need to be washed). Or maybe he saw his own reflection and went into attack mode. Either way, he was just being a bird. The screen can be replaced.

As I sit here typing this, I realize there is another possibility for his behavior. On my desk – in plain view from the window – sits a small nest holding three tiny, blue, pecked-open egg shells, along with six other birds' eggs that I collected this past year. Perhaps the Flicker was driven to investigate. I've been researching on-line to identify the birds that laid the eggs. Once I accomplish that, the eggs and nest will join several other specimens in my nature artifact display case, built for me by my adoring hubby when he was home from Tennessee for the holidays.

During his stay, we took a walk in the country near our home on one of the rare mild days of this winter. I spotted a nest anchored to the slender branches of a shrub in the ditch. In all my summertime walks down that road, I never saw the nest through the leaves. But the onset of winter plant dormancy revealed that wonder of construction. It was a little out of reach for me, but not for hubby. He collected it, taking care to keep the anchoring twigs and nest intact. I think it may be a goldfinch nest. The intricacy of bird nests always amazes me. How does a bird manage to manipulate grass, twigs, milkweed down, string and various other elements using only its beak?

Our granddaughter visited us over Christmas and helped hubby put the finishing touches on the display case. When I explained to her what it was for, she asked to see "the nest with the white egg with brown spots" that I had shown her last summer. A Cardinal had built its nest in our front door wreath. Unfortunately, the chicks that hatched had mysteriously disappeared before fledging, so I removed the nest and kept it, along with one unhatched egg. I was impressed, to say the least, that she remembered seeing the egg and could describe it. We may have a budding naturalist in our family!

The next time she comes, she'll be able to see all the nests and eggs on display. Perhaps the weather will be mild, and we'll be able to take a walk and spot more nests and other interesting things in the winter landscape. Soon it really will be spring and the birds will be busy once again performing their magic. In the meantime, I encourage you to make a point of noticing things now that will be hidden in the deep foliage of summer. My special wish is that you experience the bonus of seeing them through the eyes of a child.

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Getting Your Medicare Enrollment Questions Answered

by Mary Ann Holland

Mary Ann Holland, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Educator and Trained SHIP Professional will be teaching “Welcome to Medicare” workshops in southeast Nebraska during Spring, 2014.

If you are confused about enrollment opportunities in signing-up for Medicare, you will want to attend the workshop. Do you plan to continue working, and delay receiving Social Security benefits? If so, you are still entitled to enroll in Medicare at age 65. Find out what parts of Medicare you would be mostly likely to choose. Are you 65 and uninsured; enrolling in Medicare will give you access to health insurance coverage widely accepted across the country.

If you are currently employed, will your group health plan continue to cover you after you turn 65? If you enroll in Medicare, will your spouse still have access to your employer group plan? How do VA benefits affect Medicare? What does Medicare cost? How do I choose a Medicare Supplement plan? What is a Medicare Advantage plan? Want answers?

Plan to participate in one of the ***You’re Turning 65: Welcome to Medicare!*** workshops listed below. No registration is necessary; the workshop is free. Select the date and location that works best for you; content is repeated at each workshop.

Tuesday, February 25, 2:00-4:00 p.m.	Plattsmouth Library, 400 Avenue A, Plattsmouth
Thurs., February 27, 6:00-8:00 p.m.	Morton-James Public Library, 923 1 st Corso, Nebraska City
Tuesday, March 4, 2:00-4:00 p.m.	Cass County Extension, 8400 144 th Street, Weeping Water
Friday, March 7, 2:00-4:00 p.m.	Auburn Public Library, 1810 Courthouse Avenue, Auburn
Thurs., March 13, 5:30-7:30 p.m.	Plattsmouth Library, 400 Avenue A, Plattsmouth
Tues., March 18, 5:30-7:30 p.m.	Auburn Library, 1810 Courthouse Avenue, Auburn
Monday, April 7, 2:00-4:00 p.m.	Cass County Extension, 8400 144 th Street, Weeping Water
Wed., April 16, 2:00-4:00 p.m.	Morton-James Public Library, 923 1 st Corso, Nebraska City
Tuesday, April 22, 5:30-7:30 p.m.	Auburn Public Library, 1810 Courthouse Avenue, Auburn

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The workshops cover the basics of Medicare, enrollment timing, Medicare Supplement Insurance, Medicare Advantage Plans, Medicare Preventive Services, and the prescription drug benefit, including information for applying for extra help for individuals with limited income and resources. Pre-retirees, new-to-Medicare beneficiaries, family members and caregivers are welcome to attend.

A complete list of Medicare workshops planned for 2014 can be found on your local county Extension website. Messages for Mary Ann Holland can be left with the Nemaha County Extension office at 402-274-2745, Johnson County Extension office at 402-335-3669, Otoe County Extension office at 402-269-2301, or Cass County Extension office at 402-267-2205. You may contact Mary Ann Holland via e-mail at: [HYPERLINK
“mailto:mholland1@unl.edu”](mailto:mholland1@unl.edu)
mholland1@unl.edu

Poetry by Devon Adams

ECHOES OF SPRING

Around the edges of winter, where old ice is melting in embroidered patterns, there is music instead of cold silence. Drifting on an easy breeze are notes from feathery throats that form a random chorus of praise that earth will soon be green again. A time to be born, a time to create life and lay it in soft nests as a prayer for tomorrow.

FLOATING

He kicked snow crystals into an explosion of sparkling prisms as he leapt up to jump over a fence. But suddenly, the richly furred coyote was floating in the bitter, cold air, a weightless entity not bound by earthly gravity. He was caught between reality and dreams, seeming to pause past the point of no return, where he could enter another dimension that would swallow him and never give him back. Then he landed like a feather in a drift of fresh snow, unaware of his brush with eternity.

BE ALL MINE

Coming in a heart-shaped box that's tied with satin bows, the gift is tantalizing to behold. There are chocolates waiting under the lid, and when they are revealed, fumes of ecstasy release into the air. Not one layer, but two, wait to be explored. It is a hunting safari, guessing what's inside the luscious walls that melt inside your drooling mouth. Waiting is impossible, but stopping once you start is worse than treason. The only problem is deciding to be nice and share, or to run and hide, and succumb to the guilty pleasure of self destruction.

OLD ICE

Hidden behind the cedars, on the north slope of the hill, the snow is lying still, like an elderly man holding his breath, waiting for death to take him. It is gray ice now, dense and hard, a warrior weary from fighting the onslaughts of the mighty spring sun. It will melt, as if it never was.

PURPLE HEARTS

Now is the time to play the game of hearts, when spring is closer than winter, and two is better than one. Love is real, diamonds are forever, and amethyst is the gemstone of February. Dazzling facets make any shade a blaze of glory, but deepest purple glows with pure emotions, flashing from inside the depths of color.

NIGHT MOVES

Calling through a foggy sky, or flying by the stars, the relentless journey toward a compass point is engraved deep in their brains. Majestic in day light, wings flashing as they bounce shine back to the ball of sun, they do not waver as black becomes the sky and dark covers the quilt of fields below. The ancient knowledge that they carry is born inside them when they hatch, and the wisdom of their cells makes them listen to the loud, clear call of their destiny.



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Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

"The palest ink is better than a best memory."—Chinese Proverb. There are many quotes about memory, some famous, a few not worth mentioning. I feel memories are important; those that are fairly accurate and even ones that are whitewashed (a little whitewashing keeps us all sane). It seems that people within the publishing and entertainment business always have something to say about memories. One can't narrate a compelling story or procure a good interview or write a song, without that memory fiber that becomes a thread and all the threads that are woven into a story that produces a character. These characters and their stories; real or unreal, natural or unnatural could not be created by the storyteller without their animated scope of memory to rely upon for the foundation of their creation.

"Memory is a diary we all carry with us."—Oscar Wilde. Do you remember when, what, where? Most of us are not trained or disciplined enough to write down our thoughts; basically your life on a piece of paper. Thank heavens for our memories and in some cases our imaginations. Do you remember your first romantic kiss? Unfortunately, I do (not my husband), but even more so I remember the first time my future husband kissed me in front of my sisters and brothers. "Eew, he kissed her. I'm telling mom and dad." (They know, little sis, they know.)

"Strange; what brings these past things so vividly back to us sometimes." —Harriet Beecher Stowe. For most of us smells can bring back the most compelling memories. I would bet that every new smell you ever inhaled is attached to a memory, a moment in your time, your history, as well as the collected smells of the past and present of mankind. I am always searching for that new tantalizing smell. I contemplate what fresh memory I will attach to that foreign odor. Sometime in my life I would like to smell New Zealand, Africa, and Jordan. Someday a real memory created instead of just an imaginary one.

"Memory is the treasury and guardian of all things"—Cicero. Our history, our genealogy, the very essence of each and every molecule within the wonderful awesomeness of our universe, our infinite space, the collective and the individual memory of ALL species of All energy, how great thou are.

"The man with a clear conscious probably has a poor memory"—Author Unknown. This statement rings true for me: Decades ago I charged a customer for a large cup of coffee instead of a small (a mistake), and I still agonize over that deed. (LOL, I know I'm pathetic.)

"Everybody needs his memories. They keep the wolf of insignificance from the door."—Saul Bellow. Amen to that one.

"God gave us memories so that we might smell roses in December"—James M. Barrie. This is one of my all time favorite quotes, especially now that I am advancing towards my December. Its 1972, my husband of one year is in Navy boot camp at the Great Lake Naval Station by Chicago. He has been given a one day pass and his parents have driven me up to Chicago. We will be staying at his aunt and uncle's house. I have bought a very special outfit for the day. The top of the dress is sleeveless, with a large navy, square collar that drapes down my back; it mimics the sailor's outfits. The dress also has a short flared mini skirt with matching navy panties. I am on the base, I see him, and we walk rapidly towards each other. It is a windy day and the skirt of my dress flies up, to my annoyance there are several wolf whistles, I turn red with embarrassment. My sweetie comes over puts his head down to give me a kiss and whispers in my ear, "I am glad you are all mine," as his arms wrap around me and his eyes are beaming with love.

Holding on to that memory, where our lives are memorable and always good. Happy Valentine's Day!

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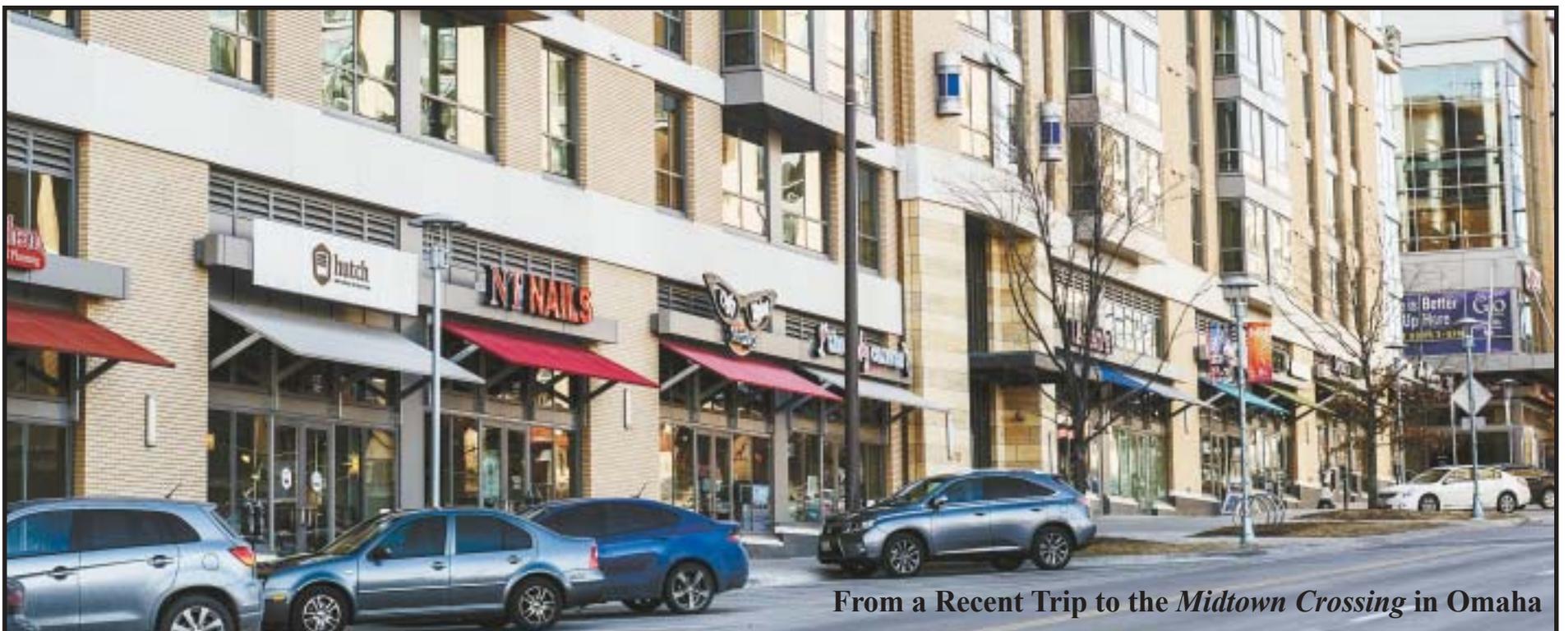
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Home Maintenance

Why is it so Important?

By Leslie Justus

Stay on top of regular maintenance tasks and avoid costly repairs. Furthermore, keeping up with home maintenance can enhance your home's value.

Here are a few tips:

- Make a 3 month, 6 month, and 12 month checklist.
- Moisture can do the most damage.
- Leaky gutters can cause foundation problems.
- Inspect your roof/attic for *any* damage.
- Inspect the furnace/AC or have it serviced.
- Check grout around bathroom/kitchen tiles.
- Inspect windows and doors for leaks.

Think about a maintenance fund. Rule of thumb, (1% to 3%) of the purchase price.

As time goes on, it will become easier to spot other maintenance projects. Always remember to protect your financial asset.

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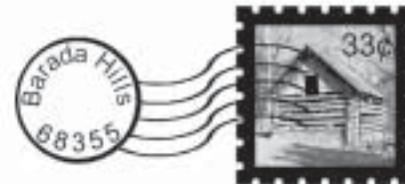
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Valentine's Day is upon us....

Mushy-mush. Hearts and flowers. Chocolates and diamonds.

It makes every woman yearn for her "Prince-on-a-White Horse." But the gals can't find him. You see... Prince Charming rode into the sunset, leaving behind his dirty socks and underwear. And he left the toilet seat up too. But that doesn't stop all the gals from longing for their Fairy Tale Prince.

Love-is-in-the-Air! Cupids wink at us from every store window. Sappy love songs float on the breeze.

Single people feel downright lonesome this time of year. Especially newly-divorced gals like me....

I could easily get depressed, but my friend, Holly, doesn't let me dwell on such things. She's single, too, you see. She was divorced by the Prince-of-all-Narcissists. (He left his dirty underwear in too many places... But does Holly care? Hardly. She got over him long ago.)

Holly's feeling giddy, today—worse than usual. She drives me around in her little Ford Ranger, looking for somebody to harass. It doesn't matter if it's Valentines' Day or Christmas Eve, Holly has to pester people—especially the homeless folks.

So here we are—sitting at a stoplight when Holly sees her first victims—a bedraggled couple pushing an old shopping-cart across the street. Poor

things. They have no idea what's about to befall them.

Holly starts honking at them and waving. Her gestures only produce bewilderment—both in the homeless couple, and in the drivers around us. People stare.

I want to crawl under the seat. I never get used to this kind of thing.

Holly sticks her head out the window and shouts: "I want to give you something!" She flaps Coupons at them. Coupons for a free Big Mac, and an iced coffee from Dutch Brothers.

The homeless couple moves quickly away from us, but Holly soon cuts off their escape. She pulls up directly in front of them and shoving the coupon at them says, "Here! Take this and enjoy it!"

Then she waves airily and drives off.

I slump in my seat, grateful to have survived without accident or traffic ticket... but it's not over. Not by a long shot.

Suddenly, Holly sees a homeless man rolling down the sidewalk in a wheelchair. She brakes hard and pulls over, nearly throwing my neck out of whack. "Go!" Holly says to me. "Take this Coupon to him right now or I'll kill ya! Hurry before he gets away!"

She gives me a push out the door. "Go... go... go!"

I run after the man, the heels of my shoes echoing like gunshot. He sees

Continued on page 11 >>>>>>>>

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me coming and rolls faster.

The man disappears through the doorway of a building. I follow hot on his trail, catching him at last—shoving the Coupon at him in my best Holly-like manner. I say, “Here!” “Take this! It’s from Holly! She’s loony, but she has a good heart.”

I turn and hurry back to the truck.

Holly nods approvingly. “You’re learning! “Now, I’ll take you to Dutch Brothers and get you an Iced-Coffee. You’ll love it.”

Loony or not, Holly keeps her word. She gets me one of those high-falutin’, White-Mocha-Frappuccino thing-ma-jigs.

Soon she’s sorry, though, very sorry. It does strange things to me... all that sugar and caffeine. I start to giggle and trip over curbs. Falling into potholes. I nearly wet myself, laughing.

People stare.

Holly’s face is flushed by now. It’s her turn to be embarrassed. She sighs. “Remind me to never get you a Frappuccino, again!”

I hoot and clutch my bladder. “Where is the restroom?”

She hurries me into a ladies’ room at WinCo. “Listen, Girlfriend! You’re going home to sleep that one off. I don’t want to be seen with you in public! You’re embarrassing the socks off of me.”

“Right-o!” I say with a flurry, and a flush of the toilet. “And the feeling’s mutual!”

So... that’s how it is, folks. What a merry time we had, in a strange sort of way. We weren’t exactly Cupids-with-Coupons, but we were close.

We didn’t need “Valentines” to have fun. Didn’t need men. Chocolates. Flowers. Or diamonds. We didn’t need anything from Prince-Narcissist, with all his dirty-socks, and-raised-toilet-seats.

We’re happy to chase down homeless folks and cavort about, falling into potholes. The simple joys of life, you see.

You’ve got to try it yourself.

And try one of those high-falutin’, White-Mocha-Frappuccino thing-ma-jigs, too. But don’t drink it and drive!

And if you ever see Holly coming down the road in a Ford Ranger, flapping her Coupons, just get out of her way, folks. Get outta her way.



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Alzheimer's Affects Us All



Bridging the Alzheimer's Communication Gap

By Lee Nyberg

If we meet for coffee, you'll probably ask me what I did over the weekend. I might ask to borrow the book you mentioned last week. Neither of these exchanges would be possible for someone in the middle stages of Alzheimer's Disease (AD). We need to communicate differently to reaching people living with AD.

The Alzheimer's Association has a comprehensive guide for communication; here are a few key points:

- Avoid asking, "don't you remember?" and testing the person.
- Be patient; people with dementia have a harder time expressing themselves and processing what you've said.
- Refrain from correcting them.
- Seek to understand the feelings behind their words.

To maintain connection, we have to adapt communication further and accept and support a person in their unique experience of AD. Bobbi Adams, a retired Lincoln teacher, recommends encouraging the flow of memories without expectations for exactness or specifics. Bobbi and her husband Rod, created the picture book, "My World," to help families connect to their loved one through positive memories. My World's photographs have universal appeal, covering different times in a person's life. Ms. Adams says she used early versions of the book with her own mom, "to spark memories of happy and pride-filled times." She suggests, "Look at the photos with your loved one; ask 'did you ever go...? ever see...?' to ignite memories. Even if you tell the story instead of your loved one, s/he benefits from the positive feelings of your time together. Use this book to engage your loved one, with no expectations for their ability to read or explain anything." Unlike looking at a personal photo album, My World's pictures can be a gateway to honor a person's experiences, with no pressure to remember who was in the photograph, or where or when it was taken.

TimeSlips™ is another photo-oriented tool for connection. These photos spur imagination by showing people in action. The creator, Ann Basting, of the University of Wisconsin's Center on Aging, seeks to improve the quality of life for both the person with memory loss and the caregiver. Ms. Basting believes her program, sometimes conducted in a group setting, helps those with AD tell us who they are by placing them in the role of storyteller. Clayton Freeman, of the Alzheimer's Association in Omaha, relayed this experience:

A man looked at the TimeSlips photo of a baby sitting in a large doctor's bag and said, "He's bringing the briefcase to the Indian Reservation. He'll see the baby there." The man's daughter explained her dad was telling the story of his 30 years working as an agent for the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Research shows both the person with memory loss and their caregiver

benefit from low-pressure engagement. Such activities are an important part of person-centered care because they support caregivers' efforts to understand the person with Alzheimer's and their history, and what kind of engagement works especially for them. These photo tools help people see "beyond the loss, to recognize strengths," from TimeSlips.org and "to meet [people with AD] where they are," as explained by Ms. Adams.

Special thanks to Ms. Adams (MyWorldPhotoBooks.com) for her help and to TimeSlips.org.

Lee Nyberg seeks to help families and those living with Alzheimer's through education and her company, Home Care Assistance.

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Photography and Poetry by Carol Carpenter

I know nothing of farming

I know nothing of farming
of fallow, planted or plowed fields
of disc planter or harrow
or how to prepare the soil
with anhydrous ammonia
or manure or fire
of soybeans, sorghum, seed corn.

I know nothing of farming
of raising cattle
of breeding, calving, weaning
and how to pull a breach calf
or euthanize an injured cow
of pasture, silage, hay
of culling or castrating
of how and when to sell.

I know nothing of farming
of crackled lightning fires
and hail stripped corn
eastern gales and bitter north winds
of crops drowned by flood or
sizzled by drought
of cattle frozen, starved by blizzard
or tornado torn fields

I know nothing of farming
of men and women and children
rising before the dawn
chores long after dark
of long days in the hot sun
or the cold, wet wind
of chapped hands
or sun crumpled skin
scarred with worry and joy.



Helpless ~ for my sister

I find you again locked behind
rooms of razor wire
on the other side of
crevassed glaciers
fractured like broken mirrors
and I run to the outdoor
hybrid sportsman store
for crampons
climbing gear
bolt cutters.

Cabella's white bright bulbs beam
and I trace my fingers
along shelves lined with Seroquel

Klonopin
Tofranil
Effexor

The bottles disappear shimmering
and my hand comes away empty.

I stand at the checkout behind a troop
of Boy Scouts buying beef jerky
canoe paddles and life jackets
and in my cart
a shortened rope
crampons two sizes too small
and a long handled pair
of rusty bolt cutters.



I live in the middle of nowhere

where the gravel tumbles into a
minimum maintenance road

where the sun and moon
crawl over corn and soybeans
Goldenrod and Queen Anne's lace

where coyotes sing under Orion's belt
where outside the kitchen window
a young bobcat sprints through
the deep snow crossed with the trails
of squirrels and white tail deer

where the nearest neighbor is
at least a quarter of a mile away
where everyone waves with one finger

where isolation and inspiration
hold hands on a path through
plum and willow thickets

where bald eagles and hawks
stand guard over
frozen rivers and fields
where warblers wander in
autumn and spring
where the edges of the day
paint pastels through my window

I sit and watch from the
middle of nowhere
where wind and silence
pause briefly
to catch their breath





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