

Your *Country* Neighbor

February, 2016

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**A Magazine for
Small Towns and
Rural America**



This Cardinal is partially shielding himself from view, but snowflakes make the wintry scene interesting.



One gallery wall in the Crane Trust center.

The *Crane Trust Nature And Visitor Center* is at the I-80 Exit 305, about 6 miles West of Grand Island, at South Alda Rd. Don't miss it if you're going to view the Sandhill Cranes migration this Spring.

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Cover Photo(s)

Here's another image of my backyard bird-feeder with a Cardinal helping himself to some black oil sunflower seeds. I was surprised how well the snow 'showed up'; I hope it's the same on newsprint... you be the judge.

There are additional 'bird photos' in this issue, including a Bald Eagle in one of the dead cottonwoods taken east of Nebraska City's river bridge. There used to be an eagle nest in that area, but since the flooding a few years back there are fewer trees standing, and the nest is gone. See page 11.

The photo below the fold is of a wall in the gallery at the **Crane Trust Nature and Visitor Center** near Grand Island. I stop there in the Spring when I go to photograph the Sandhill Crane Migration. The photo was taken the last time I was there. This wall and many more will be displayed through the 2016 'crane season'; February, March, and April. Unframed prints are available in the gift shop.

Find pages and pages of website addresses by googling CRANE TRUST.

Your Country Neighbor

*A Voice and a View From the
Valleys of the Nemaha*

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Writers This Month

Devon Adams
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Thank You!

Your Country Neighbor

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View Online Version at
www.yourcountryneighbor.com

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www.yourcountryneighbor.com

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Thank you!

This Issue Marks The 14-Year Anniversary of *Your Country Neighbor*

(published monthly since February, 2002)

If you have followed *Your Country Neighbor* since early this century, you have noticed its articles and photography develop into something you can enjoy with your coffee or your friends. And you probably have friends or acquaintances who have written for this 'magazine'. I thank those of you who mail it to a relative who lives out-of-state; the 'online' version is available worldwide, but it's always nice to relax with a 'hard copy' in ones hands.

Longtime readers will remember Joe Smith's articles on topics ranging from building tractors, to dowsing, to saw mills and medical care. And "Travels With Leo"! Those were amazing features. Joe and Leo have passed. I miss them, and also Frieda and Karen's unique perspectives on country life. But life goes on and so does *Your Country Neighbor*. Stay tuned for many more amazing months of new features and this wonderful cycle of country life.

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WHEN I'M 95...

Stephen Hassler

I'm mostly guessing, but when I'm 95, I expect...

I will reminisce on having met another 'love of my life'.

I'll have learned Spanish, yoga, and how to write apps for smart phones.

The Internet (or something like it), will be my primary entertainment.

Gardening will be my exercise.

Garage sales will be my favorite way of 'shopping'.

Bird-watching will be one of my pastimes.

My favorite pastime will be getting "out and about".

I'll enjoy visiting art galleries and art shows.

My "job" will be "Volunteering".

Reading will be by 'audible books'.

Most meetings will be for morning coffee.

Most socializing will be with those who visit me at home.

I'll still have photography.

My New Years resolution that year will be to formulate a 10-year plan.



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Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

Did you know that there is a Squirrel Appreciation Day in January? I believe Congress has to okay these official days, but really, Squirrel Appreciation Day! When I told my husband that the furry little BEASTS have a day his faced screwed up and he replied, "Why?" I agree, why? Evidently whoever created this bit of laughable nonsense did not have the same experience that my poor husband has had with the wee evil creatures. Needless to say there has been a hate/hate relationship between that species and my husband. Husband is losing.

Not only are they into his bird feeders (we go through 600 lbs. of bird seed in five months), they chew up the outside Christmas lights he painstakingly hangs up, and believe me, our house looks like a small city with those lights, but they also have caused over \$1,000 worth of damage to the wires to our vehicles and yes, it is them. And no, they don't look cute when found sitting on the engine block waving their little tails. Then there is the damage that they have done to my gardens and the digging up of my bulbs. Grrr, so appreciate them, I think not. More like a fully fledged war.

But husband has hit upon a new approach. He has taken a gallon glass jar, took one of the wooden cannons from the grandsons pirate tree house, took out the barrel and placed the jar in this cradle held in place with bungee cords. Next he places ears of corn in the jar, this keeps the weather out and makes the squirrels work for their supper. They love it and are into it all the time. Does it keep them out of the bird feeders; um somewhat, not totally. No Christmas lights were chewed this year, and so far none of the vehicles wires have been touched. So all in all it might be called a draw. Hopefully, we don't run out of ears of dried corn.

So far this has been a good year, weather has been livable, our family is healthy, and we all are keeping busy. Husband seems to be adjusting to retirement and I am slowly adjusting to having him at home. Last year ended sadly for me, and those who regularly read my monthly articles will know I missed December. I know you will forgive and will offer your condolences. My mother passed away. Mom had four daughters and four rings, we each received one and I tell myself that every time I kiss her ring I am kissing her cheek, and that helps me get through the days.

Mom loved her faith, her family, her friends, her country and her Huskers. She knew that there was no better place to grow-up, raise her family, and live her life than here where life is good. I end this by sending a shout-out to my wonderful husband who allows me to poke fun at him in my articles, "Happy 45th anniversary, sweetheart. I can't wait for the rest of our future together." (Or what new material he will give me to write about.) Hoping all of you wonderful readers have a Happy Valentine's Day, President's Day and just all around fabulous February.



Happy Valentines Day

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Poetry by Devon Adams

LIFESAVERS

Goldfinches, bees, and
butterflies and skies.
Ponies, donkeys, apples
without worms. Days and
nights and pink twilights.
Stars and stripes and flashy
northern lights, baby smiles
and puppy wiles and kittens
in the grass. Snowflakes
sparkling in the sun, and
whitetails on the run. Windy
clouds and foggy rains, and
snowbanks full of fluff. Skates
and baseball bats and games
without scores. Ticks in clocks
and endless sunset skies.
Holding hands and time to
dream. Tomorrow coming
down the stream. Today.

ALL OF IT

Giving gifts can be
complicated if you
really care.
A casual counter
grab of sale priced
merchandise may
be the easy way to
fulfil your shopping
obligation, but it
can backfire into
something less than
gratitude. To prove
your love, you need
to think it through and
find the perfect gift to
match your perfect
match. You must give
your heart. All of it.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Stories can be fun to
hear, especially the
ones that twist each
time they're told.
Speakers speaking
branches of the truth
find details becoming
blurred, as memory slips.
Interrogations are often
entertaining when a liar
finds himself at the
end of a rope he has
spun out of lies.

IT'S ALL EASY

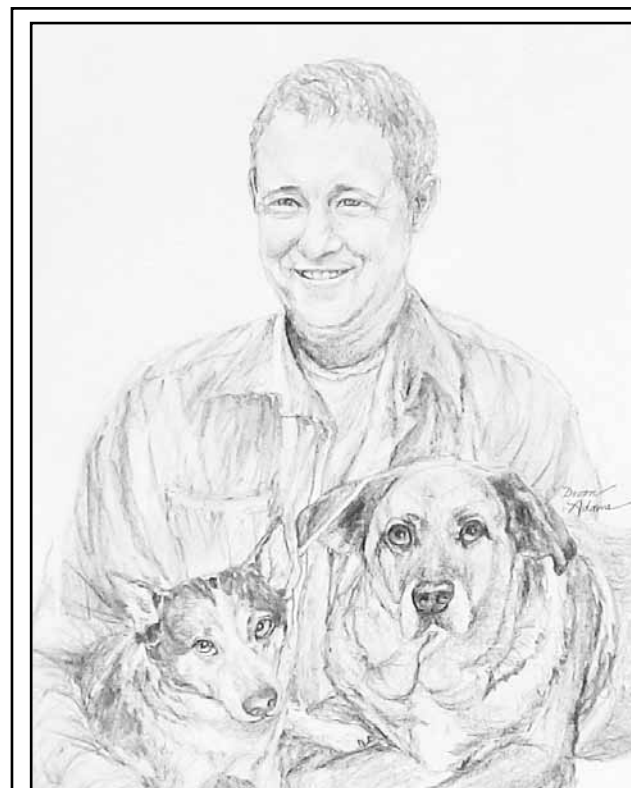
When a day begins
with clumsy stumbles
that only multiply, and
fog inside your brain
that will not clear, you
can figure that, for sure,
there will be more. You
can do nothing to stop
the clock, as each hour
brings more rocks to
block your path. But
do not despair, because
you have the privilege
and the power of being
alive, which makes it
all easy.

GUITAR GIRL

The voices wrapped
around the sound of
the strings as singing
stories told of love and
loss and hope. Out of
the belly of the hollowed
wood came the chords
that wove the ballads
into memories that never
die. Performers on the
stages made magic seem
so easy, with their nimble
fingers picking base lines
underneath the melodies.
She hoped to be a star
someday, but could not
learn to play. So her dreams
became her stage, and in
sleep she found her way.

DEEP COVER

It is a late winter day
with an edge of spring
melting the hard ice.
No snow blankets are
hung across the sky.
Instead, there is the
sapphire silk of high
noon casting blue
shadows on the snow.
Wind is holding her
breath and nothing
moves deep inside
the timbered valley.
Then a feather flick
from the limb of a
linden tree gives
away the tiny body
sitting there. A doe
stamps a warning
with her sharp hoof
when she spots a
stranger walking in
the muffled woods.
The wild things hide
behind the camouflauge
of being still as statues.



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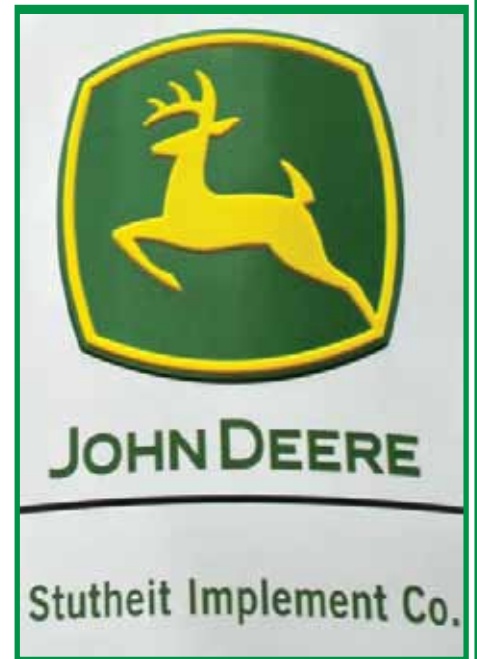
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Cardinal; cool and content (or cold and content).

Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

Hubby attended his first “company retiree coffee” earlier this week, so I guess that makes his retirement official. He says he still feels like he’s on vacation, by which he means being free to do what he wants, when he wants. That sounds pretty much like retirement to me, so I don’t know how he’s going to tell when he’s made the transition to feeling retired rather than simply on vacation.

So far, most days have consisted of drinking coffee and reading the newspaper in the morning, and taking a nap and watching “Death Valley Days” reruns in the afternoon. Actually, that’s nothing new. It’s more like a return to the routine of his farming days back in the 70’s and 80’s. That’s when he honed his skill for power-napping every day right after lunch. Weather permitting, he also managed to fit in nine holes of golf when there wasn’t any particularly pressing chore to be done. Of course, golf isn’t possible right now, so reruns of old Westerns will have to do.

Our son recently asked his dad what he was up to now that he had time on his hands. Hubby cheerfully (and proudly) announced that he was actually enjoying helping me do a jigsaw puzzle. Our son was aghast. “What happened to working in your shop, traveling and golfing? You just skipped the fun stuff and went straight to being old. You’re only about two steps from the nursing home!”

Hubby thought about that for a minute and decided our son had a point. Perhaps he was getting ahead of himself, settling for working on jigsaw puzzles this early in retirement. He would have to adopt a somewhat more masculine pastime.

Hubby prides himself on being organized. I guess we all have our own definition of “being organized.” Anyway, Hubby took himself in hand and tackled the job of de-cluttering and re-organizing his woodworking shop. Job number one: consolidate the 100+ assorted containers and cubby-hole storage boxes of screws, nails, and nuts and bolts. I sneaked a peek in the shop to verify his claim that said screws, nails, and nuts and bolts are now arranged neatly – and labeled! – in only two locations instead of being scattered willy-nilly about the shop. Lo and behold, it’s true. And the top of the work bench is also visible for the first time in nearly a year. Impressive.

I think our son will agree that Hubby deserves to get his man-card back.

With trips to Texas and Hilton Head, South Carolina, in the near future, he will also get credit for travel and golf. Being retired is great, but one has to watch out for the pitfalls of having all that extra time. Thank heaven our son snapped Hubby out of the jigsaw puzzle trap before it was too late!

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Alzheimer's Affects Us All



The Benefits of 3D Video Games for Seniors

By Lee Nyberg

While playing video games is commonly associated with younger people, researchers in different areas of the U.S. have determined that the technology is also beneficial for senior citizens. Studies demonstrate that 3D video games successfully alter and improve cognitive and physical capabilities. Scientists from the University of California in San Francisco developed a game that requires players to maneuver a vehicle along a roadway with varying terrain features. Drivers must use their left hand for steering and their right hand for shooting targets. The researchers evaluated the performance of different age groups, which included adults aged 60 to 85.

Improved Neural Communication

Researchers witnessed improved neurological function in the region of the brain responsible for motivation. The significant improvement in the amount of activity observed in the elderly players closely resembled the brain activity of much younger players.

Enhanced Cognitive Function

Amazingly, seniors in the study also showed cognitive improvement in the terms of both attention span and memory. After abstaining from the game for six months, the seniors underwent further evaluation. Assessments revealed that the older adults retained all of the mental improvements they gained from playing the game.

Boosted Physical Function

Falls among seniors often occur because of various contributing factors, namely physical decline. While demonstrating improvements in mental function during the study, senior participants also experienced enhanced physical balance, gait, and hand-eye coordination.

Psychosocial Benefits

Scientists at the University of Illinois in Chicago also performed studies on seniors and video game play. Participants involved in the study spent time playing three different games that required decision-making skills, spatial memory and visual perception. After game ended, the older volunteers reported experiencing:

- Enhanced emotional health
- Heightened social skills

Additional Benefits

The Wii and Xbox Connect gaming systems feature game options that encourage basic range of motion while completing simple tasks during gameplay with other players. Because of this, the games provide the chance for seniors to enjoy a fun means of getting a low-impact cardio workout while strengthening social bonds. Activities like 3D video games are ideal methods to help seniors exercise both their minds and bodies. Play together, you'll both get a mental boost!

Lee Nyberg is a partner in Home Care Assistance of Nebraska and Kansas City.

For more info, visit:

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Cardinal and Finches.



Chickadee pauseing between trips to the feeder.



These Juncos appear to be shaking seeds from a dead shrub.

Poetry by Carol Carpenter

In the space we leave behind

By the thousands

Van Morrison whispers
poetry, deep blue
throated tenor sax,
his unintelligible warble
slaps against my bones.

Fire from the wood stove
warms the room while
you sharpen knives
at the bar and I read
Whitman and Sexton on the couch.
I think of the box elder bugs
we murdered by the thousands
this winter, their black and red bodies
flushed, vacuumed, frozen, pinched
between our fingers and

by the thousands
how I collect and
hoard your kisses,
their warm red and
murdering wings
pinned to my soul.

What is the essence of us?
Are we just the sum of our parts,
carbon, muscle, blood and bone?
What happens when we leave? Can we exist
within ourselves and
in the space we leave behind?

Read between the lines, I've often been told.
An art teacher instructed me to look for
negative space between objects,
life in the shadows, tucked in
the background of old photographs,
reflected shapes in the mirror,
the old rippled windowpane,
how light dances on the skin of the river.

What is important in that blank space?
Does the sky make the hawk more important
or is it the other way around?
Are bridges suspended by
the air around them?
Which is more important
The tide coming in
or pulling away?

As I sit here, watching the sea,
this lack of gravity rips me apart.
Where does that leave me,
without you, across a far green ocean,
stuck in the space
you left behind.

No more

Each day hangs grey
like a sweater
wet and loosening;
I smoke anything
that will burn,
ash falling from
my fingers.

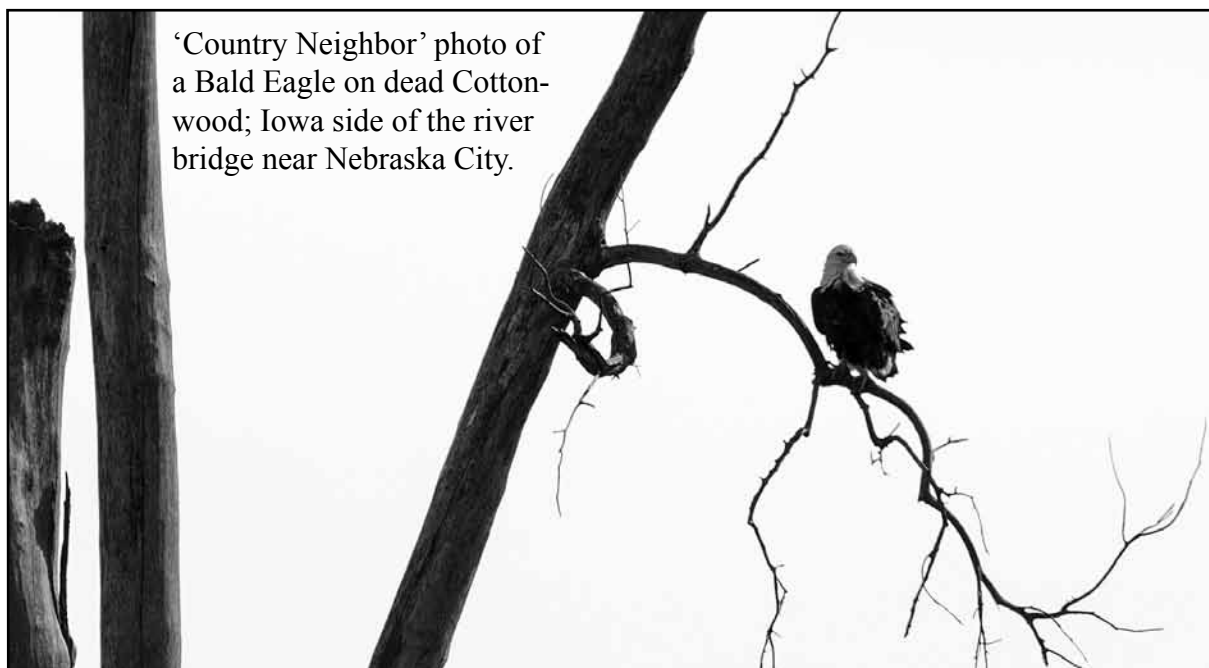
The dusk scares me
much more than the dawn,
but I bear your scar proudly
and, at night, silence sleeps
beside me on your pillow.

I realize that tomorrow
the spring will come and
doors will open and
I, still drunk with nectar,
shall dance between the trees
and die at the water's edge
and then be seen
no more.

Haven

Our little sanctuary
this nest in the dark
as quiet as a tiny chapel
of a large church
where whispers and kisses
warm sheets and skin
tucked in tight away
from the harsh glare
of light and noise

Our precious haven
a small, peaceful, folded
wrinkled corner of the world
reserved just
for us.



'Country Neighbor' photo of
a Bald Eagle on dead Cotton-
wood; Iowa side of the river
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