

Your

Country Neighbor

FREE!



January 2007

Your Nemaha Valley **Voice**



A windmill near Peru, Nebraska is silhouetted in this December sunset. After a day of being overcast, the sunlight finds an opening near the horizon and in its remaining moments, sprays a day's worth of color in a farewell blessing.

Your

COUNTRY NEIGHBOR

Your Nemaha Valley **Voice**

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Thank you!

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Finally! Snow! Just in time for the new year and for this first, 2007 issue of *Your Country Neighbor*.

Voices from the Valley

Joe Smith	2
Merri's Diary	3
Kansas Scenes	4&5
Vicki's Backroad Musings	6
Hunting & Fishing with Josh	8
Poetry, etc.	9
<i>Face of Drought</i>	10
<i>Why Are You Eating That?</i>	11

What If

by Joe Smith

That is a heck of a title. Bear with me for a while. When we had our last election the message was sent loud and clear to our president to change his ways. This old "Stay the course" routine was never going to work anyway. The Baker commission told him the same thing. Did it change anything? Even his Generals tell him we have lost the war. Does he hear them? I doubt it. There has been way too much loss of life and money on a war that we can't win. Thousands of Iraqi people have died. Graft and corruption is rampant over there. Reminds me of Washington D.C.

Now comes the "what if", not of the past because it is too late for that but the future. What if we just take our licks and pull out of Iraq to a place close by and see what happens. The Iraqi people have wanted to kill each other for years, this is not new. Iran and Saudi Arabia and the other countries would put a stop real quick for fear of causing a war in their own countries. They enjoy watching us trying to put a stop to a war that all of them are supporting. What if we turn the tables on them and turn it over to them? I don't think it would take long to end the whole mess. We might even head into Afghanistan to finish the job of finding 'Old Ben', that Bush dropped so he could play World Cop.

What if we come home and rethink this whole mess? Don't you think it is about time to rethink four years of screw ups? What if the congress decided to impeach Bush because of his refusal to end the war in Iraq regardless if we win or lose?

There have been too many of our friends and neighbors lost in this police action and another just like it. Now we have McCain trying to get into the act, wanting more troops over there. What

if we give him a rifle and turn him loose in Baghdad for a while. And he would like to be President? Maybe he can't read either. What if we draft Bush's daughters and put them in a Humvee running up and down the roads over there. That would bring a swift halt to the fighting. It all depends on who knows who in this 'war'. The U.S. went to Iraq to stop terrorist but just ended up making a lot more of them. Our reputation in the world has hit an all time low. We had the information in our hands to stop the 9-11 before it happened but we didn't. Did you ever ask yourself why? Was it just a government screw-up like happens all the time or what? Our leaders think they can control the whole world. Hell we can't even take care of ourselves.

This deal about Iran and the nuclear power, why should the big countries be the only ones that have bombs? One false move from Iran and they would be toast, Israel could probably do that, I'm sure they have the capability. If not them Russia would have to take care of it. What if after we pull out and the Mideast got into a free-for-all, would that be all that bad? I think it would calm them down for a long time. Let them foot the bill to fix everything back up

Now I realize this will really tick off some of you Bush lovers. If so, figure a way out of this mess and sell it to Bush. Good luck, he hasn't listened to anyone yet. Joe Smith

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Diary of an Unemployed Housewife

by Merri Johnson

Did everyone find what they hoped for under the Christmas tree this year? Or was your gift more akin to the proverbial lump of coal? I sympathize with those who were disappointed. But how about a little sympathy for all those shoppers who wrack their brains to come up with an appropriate gift and then spend hours or even days trying to find it? All to no avail, of course, since you've figured out by now that the topic of this article is Dud Gifts and the People Who Give Them.

Some of us suffer from gift-giving anxiety, a condition caused by a missing "shopping" gene. This causes us to grossly underestimate the time it will take, or to simply procrastinate until the last minute, which naturally makes it that much more stressful to accomplish.

My extended family has a round-robin gift exchange at Christmas. The men all bring something they'd like to keep for themselves. (Typically the newest workshop gadget, except for my one brother-in-law, who is a much more creative kind of guy, but I digress.) Then they do their best to get their own gift back.

We women generally have a theme, thought up by my sister whose house is tastefully decorated and whose gifts are always just the right thing.

Anyway. This year she suggested a theme of "something hand-made." In other words, something requiring even more effort than simply buying an acceptable gift. Actually, when I first heard the theme, I was momentarily, and delusionally, heartened. I figured that in my archives of *Martha Stewart Living* magazines there had to be *one* craft idea that I could master. Felting old wool sweaters and turning them into mittens and patchwork stuffed animals looked doable.

The thrift-shop had wool sweaters. Cheap. Excellent start. They shrunk up pretty good in hot water and high dryer heat. So far so good. I already had a mitten to trace for a pattern. What's not to like about this craft?! Well. The mittens looked

a little more hand-made than I was planning on. They would do as a bonus gift, but not as the main attraction.

I re-scanned all Martha's monthly make-it-yourself-if-you-don't-have-ten-thumbs ideas. I could see that each one was going to require at least two or three trial runs. No time. I was down to one week. And it's not like making this gift was the only thing I had to do before Christmas. Painting the hall and sewing new shower curtains were still on my to-do list. (Like either of those was going to happen.)

Panic was starting to set in. The devil on my shoulder whispered that there was no rule that the hand-made gift had to be hand-made by *me*. Aha! A possible loop-hole. But I knew the intention was that we put personal effort into this gift. A little bit of ourselves. No giving in to crass consumerism this year. I wasn't going to be the one to cop out.

Maybe I could find a kit. That would save time and exponentially increase my chances that the finished product wouldn't be a total embarrassment. At this point, my ambition was just to avoid the awkward silence I feared would engulf the festivities when my gift was opened. Once again, that little devil whispered, "Just give the lousy kit and tell the recipient 'it'll be hand-made when *you* make it.'" I was sorely tempted, but the angel on my other shoulder reminded me that such a ploy would not be in keeping with the spirit of the theme. Drat that angel, anyway.

I finally had to face facts: if I didn't have the talent to make a really nice gift, I would just have to make something that didn't have to be really nice. Something like an apron. Made of two tea towels, so you don't even have to measure and cut fabric. You barely have to sew seams. Yet, somehow, I still managed to spend nearly three hours constructing it. I dedicated the apron to the memory of my grandmother, who never gave a frivolous gift, and whose house was always faultlessly clean.

If the point of giving a hand-made gift is that "it's the thought that counts," then I believe my gift hit the mark: I *thought* about it a whole lot. I just hope the recipient appreciates the thought and isn't too disappointed that it isn't quite up to Martha Stewart's standards.

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As one who was raised on a farm, I only have to look at this picture to bring back detailed memories of farm chores.

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Dead Ends, Detours, and the Great Unknown

by Vicki Harger

On Saturday, I did something very foolish. I was in a hurry as I came to a stop at the intersection just south of town. Glancing to my right, I saw a pickup truck in the distance. *I can beat that truck*, I thought to myself. My foot was poised to hit the gas pedal, when something or someone made me hesitate. An instant later, a huge RV rushed by in front of me. I gasped. Why hadn't I seen *that* coming? If I'd pulled out a moment ago, I'd be so dead. So very *Don't-open-the-casket* dead! I slumped in my seat, my heart pounding away. Uh, thanks Lord! Thank you so much!

I remembered the odd premonition about death that I'd had several weeks ago. I'd even written about it in one of my last columns. Today, that premonition had nearly come to pass. Feeling shaken, I went home and told my daughter about my brush with death. Mystia responded like a typical teenager. "We need to celebrate," she said.

"Celebrate?"

"Yeah. Celebrate that you're alive. Let's go adventuring."

Off to the Land of Up-side-down? It didn't sound like a bad idea, actually. I could use some relaxation, today.

Grabbing our jackets, we got into the mini-van and headed into no man's land, not knowing where we'd end up. We cruised down backroads, wandering over hill and dale—losing track of time as we wandered deeper and deeper into the boonies. Near sunset, we finally came to a stop in a densely-wooded area near an old arched bridge. Dead End Bridge.

"What are we doing here?" I wondered aloud, staring at the pretty bouquets and memorials gracing the rail of the bridge. It was a sad spot—a place where someone had died...a poignant reminder of my own brush with death, earlier.

My daughter got out of the mini-van. She stretched and yawned, then mumbled something about exploring before disappearing down a shadowy path leading beneath the bridge.

I got out slowly. This place always made me feel uneasy, but today it was especially haunting. I felt a prickle of apprehension as I crossed the wooden planks, my footsteps echoing on Dead End Bridge.

"Wait for me, Mystia!" I called. I leaned over the rail, peering down into the deep ravine. All was silent. The whisper

of the wind was the only sound I could hear. Bending down, I looked through a hole in the planks. Nothing. The old bridge had stolen my child. She'd vanished as surely as if a trap door had sprung open beneath the bridge and swallowed her up.

"Mystia Dawn! Where are you? Quit teasing me, now."

No answer.

Carefully, I worked my way down the path to the creek bed. There was no sign of my daughter. That aggravating kid! I stood looking about at the cliffs and cavernous ravine. Beneath the bridge, a pinnacle of hardened earth jutted heavenward—just like an old tombstone. I stared at the formation. What an unusual thing to find here. Almost as if the earth, itself, had declared this spot sacred. A place where hearts broke, and tears were shed.

Bang!

A sudden noise went off in the woods, startling me. Bang-bang-bang! It was gunfire. Hunters were out there. And Mystia was nowhere to be seen. Where *was* she!

Fear slid across my soul, as dark as the lengthening shadows around me—a feeling of *déjà vu*. Years ago, a much tinnier Mysti Dawn had made headlines in the local newspaper when she'd disappeared just like this. She'd sneaked off and followed Grandpa's cows into the hills. Hours had gone by before we'd found her playing in a distant creek. What panic had overwhelmed me that day! I felt a surge of that same fear as I stood beneath the bridge, staring at the tangled brush and earthen tombstone.

"Mystia!"

I started tramping up and down the creek, growing more and more agitated. Mad and worried. Furious and fretful, I picked my way through the brush, shouting my daughter's name. Panting, I paused to listen.

A familiar sound drifted to my ears. The slam of a van door and the start of an engine. That kid!

I scrambled up the bank and ran across the bridge, my footsteps echoing loudly against the planks. I could see the mini-van backing slowly down the trail with a grinning Mystia at the wheel. She laughed at me as I ran toward the van, yelling. "This adventuring business, young lady, is getting just a bit out of hand!"

Mystia stopped the van. "You know you love a good joke, Mom! Remember? April Fools is your favorite day and..."

"April Fools is a long, long ways off, Mystia!" I said. "We're not even to New Years, yet! How about working on a resolution or two...starting with *I will*

not panic my mother, ever again'!" My tirade was just getting started, but then somehow my words petered out and I stood there staring at my errant child. She was the same curly-headed youngster who had disappeared into the hills so many years ago. Just bigger.

My anger drained out of me and I knew I had to forgive her. It was especially important, today. This was the day I'd almost died, leaving my child motherless and forlorn. No more Adventuring. No more exploring in the Land of Up-side-down.

I sighed. "I think we've had enough adventuring for today," I said, climbing into the van. *And enough adventuring for tomorrow, too. And the tomorrow after that*, I wanted to add. But I didn't. We have no promise of tomorrow. We only have this moment, today.

Slowly, we drove away into the rays of the setting sun. I watched in the rear-view mirror as the bridge disappeared into the burgeoning twilight—the lonely little bridge with its pretty bouquets and unique earthen tombstone.

I knew that somewhere ahead of us, hidden in the mists of time, there awaits an even larger bridge. Somewhere in the distance, there's a tombstone with our names inscribed...And the impending dates of death.

That date could be tomorrow. It could be today.

When we cross that final bridge and our echoing footsteps fade away forever, we will want our legacies to be lasting ones. We'll want the memorials and remembrance bouquets to be beautiful, indeed. When each of us cross all alone....

At eternity's Dead End Bridge.


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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report

by Josh Whisler
Photos provided by Author



Fishing:

The Missouri River saw some interesting changes last month. The weather had an awful lot to do with that, but boy, has it been different. We experienced single digits one week which filled the river full of ice paddies. And the next week we had record highs into the 60's. Along with the change in temperatures came the changes in river levels which sometime shifted as much as three feet over one day's time. Fishing is out for now but if the weather staying mild the fish will want something to eat one of these days. When that day comes you can always trust night crawlers to tell the story. I'll let you know how that works out.

Hunting:

With the changes in the weather, so comes the changes in the hunting - in general. The ducks and geese can't figure whether to go or stay so hunters are cleaning up on this opportunity. Many hunters scoring limit days on ducks as well as dark geese. That is unusual to have such success because the migratory birds don't stay in this area all that long on their way south. Again you can thank the weather for that. Along with the ducks come the Bald Eagles. They are a pretty com-

mon site on the river bottoms but I have seen several Eagles miles from the river as the ducks and geese frequent local farm ponds. They are big and it's not hard to tell what they are. You have no problem seeing the white head and tail feathers from a several hundred yards away.

Muzzle Loading Deer Season opened December 1st and ran 'til the end of the year. The bucks are back to chasing the does again. For several weeks I didn't see deer wandering around and just like clockwork, the does that didn't get bred the first round (Rut) are back into estrus. A doe will continue to come back into estrus every 30 days until she is bred, even if that means in the late winter while she's in the herd. That is why many times you'll see a fawn in the fall that still has spots. Bow hunters see this pretty often due to the bow season opening in September. What is crazy is that if that fawn is a doe it can and many times will be bred. Then we wonder how the deer population can get out of control. As long as there is good food supply this cycle will continue and the hunter is the only tool to use to reduce the deer heard numbers to a manageable level.

New last year - Fall Turkey Season opened back up after The Regular Rifle Deer Season was over and ran to the end of the year. There were plenty of birds around, but a little harder to bag since they do not come to a call in the Fall.

There are plenty of hunting seasons to choose from right now. And big game permits are still available. The weather is holding for now but I feel that is may change to snow soon, so get out and enjoy some good hunting while you can. I know you that you won't regret that you did. Remember I'm not an expert but I have my share of luck. I wonder if the experts are having any luck today? So until next time "Happy Hunting & Fishing."



This month's hunting picture is of Joe Whisler with another nice buck. This one was taken during the Muzzle Loading Deer Season.



This month I also get into the act, shown here with a big doe taken on a Season's Choice Tag with a Muzzle Loader.

Last chance to register for EDGE business class

Are you a small business owner, or have you thought about starting a business? The new year is a fitting time to resolve to improve your business skills or to seriously investigate your business ideas. And the EDGE business planning class can help you turn that resolution into reality.

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Over 70 Southeast Nebraska businesses and entrepreneurs have taken the EDGE course since 1999. EDGE graduate Jeni Leefers of Otoe used the class to launch her home-based business, WriteTime Communications, in 2002. "The tuition for this class was the best money I've ever spent," says Leefers, whose business growth has necessitated adding a part-time employee.

The EDGE class is supported by the Nebraska EDGE program of the University of Nebraska and is coordinated by the Southeast Nebraska EDGE Coalition, which includes Johnson, Nemaha, Otoe, Pawnee and Richardson counties.

Enroll now and you'll be on your way beginning Thursday evening, January 11. Classes will be held at the NPPD Sheridan Training Center in Auburn. Class size is limited, so don't delay in registering. Tuition for the course is \$400. To register or obtain more information, contact instructor Karen Fritschle at 402-209-0808, Howard McNiff at Five Rivers RC&D at 402-335-3347 or T.O. Davison at 402-274-3894.

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HIDING IN A BOOK

by Devon Adams

It is possible to travel to another dimension without boarding a space shuttle or swallowing pills or snorting powder. The cost is optional. It can be expensive or free. Your choice of destination is guaranteed. Such terms are exceptional values and departure and return times are totally flexible. This is the kind of deal that sounds suspicious because it seems to offer something for nothing. But there is a trade involved. You must allocate a portion of the hours and minutes of your day or night to devote to reading a book. The choice is yours, about when, where, how long, or why you want to read. But once you open the pages, you are no longer in a real time or place. A movie is playing inside those pages and the sights and sounds are vivid. It is hard to pull out of a book, but life demands that we must work and interact with our families. With practice, it is possible to keep the movie running in your mind even when you aren't reading. The characters will follow you around. Sometimes you can simply watch their actions And listen to their words, but there are times when, in your imagination, you actually become the characters. What does it feel like to think like a killer or like a cop who is close to a capture? What would you say if your child was stolen or if you discovered a family secret that would turn your world around? How would you find a wife or husband who suddenly went missing? Your speculations about the story line carry you from one reading session to the next, like drawing a line to connect the dots to reveal a hidden picture. Good authors can keep you guessing and it is as much fun to be wrong about the end as it is to be correct in your prediction of the final scene. For whatever reasons we may have, hiding in a book offers an engrossing escape route that takes us away from daily life. We are delighted to discover that we really can be in two places at the same time.

Poetry, etc.

Middle of January

by Jan Chism Wright (c) January 1998

It is the middle of January
and the earth has taken on her
frigid mantle of snow and ice:
has been flaunting her cold, stark beauty,
black against white occasionally broken
by a dash of cardinal red.
A severe pen and ink sketch,
dark, anorexic branches
claw their way to a pale sun.
Some days the snow is as grey
as the clouds erasing all distinction,
an impenetrable wall of grey
that suddenly turns to rose
in memory of a sunset.
Some days the sun breaks though
to bedazzle diaphanous snows
and the diamond laden trees.
A teasing wind blows
and the trees crack and groan
and the jewels rain down and lay
like broken glass upon the ground
to melt our winter hearts.



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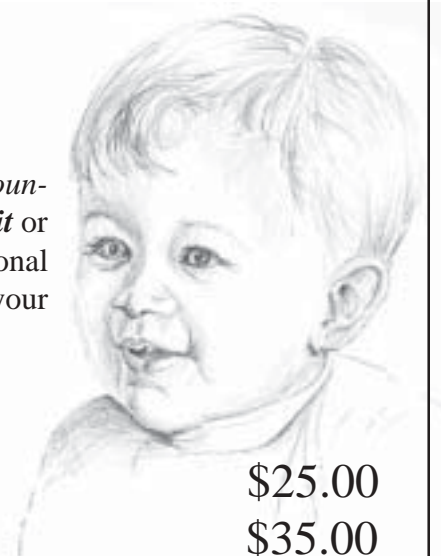
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The Face of Drought

A Farm Report from Western Nebraska

by Karen Ott

Give the weatherman a cigar! "Snow will begin falling around five" he said this morning, and by gosh it did, the first flakes drifting from the darkening sky precisely at five p.m. The weather bureau would undoubtedly attribute their unbelievably accurate forecast to meteorological expertise and millions of dollars of sensitive equipment, but I'm guessing it was pure unadulterated luck. After all, in our ballpark these guys aren't known for their batting average.

It's going on ten p.m. and snowing nicely. The flakes tiny but purposeful, not at all like the lazy five-o'clock guys which looked more like white goose-down than snow. It looks as if we've added about three inches on top of our Christmas snow and we could have as much as ten more by morning. In a period of less than two weeks we've had more December snow than in the past seven years. Who would have thought?

Our watersheds haven't been as lucky. John Lawson, Bureau of Reclamation manager, announced last week's storm didn't drop enough snow around and above the reservoirs to even measure water content; our hay-buyer from Douglas Wyoming said his ranch received a scant two inches. Go figure...Denver International Airport's runways are blanketed with over two feet of blowing and drifting snow while desiccated ranchland receives nothing. Mother Nature's certainly a grumpy old gal..... and blind as a bat to boot.

We are expecting blizzard conditions throughout the weekend which will certainly put a damper on New Year's Eve festivities. Dale and I aren't much for ringing in the New Year and neither are our sons. I suppose their antipathy stems from a childhood incident when a grueling four hour struggle to stay awake yielded nothing more exciting than a curt "OK it's midnight, time for bed," from their father. As our oldest son trudged upstairs we heard him grumble, "I can't believe we stayed up for that. I suspect there's more than a few adults feel the same way come New Year's morning.

This week Dale and I have been immersed in our own perfect storm of personal paper work, tax preparation; and the farm's 2007 cash flow. (And

yes, we are deeper in debt this year than last...thanks to the June hail storm and increased 2006 input costs) There a glimmer of hope though in rising commodity prices ...now if we only have water. Crop insurance will dull some of the pain if we face water rationing again in 2007 but the dirty little secret of crop insurance is that it's a poor safety net for farmers facing multi-year disasters. Yields per acre fall with each additional year of drought...and so do insurance settlements based on those yields. One hail storm every five or six years has little effect on a farm's yield history, but year after year of declining yields due to drought is another story. It's a catch twenty-two. We need crop insurance in case of disaster, but in our case it's the disaster which makes the insurance less effective.

The recent news story about the poor Tyson executives who didn't receive their million dollar bonuses this year set me to thinking. This country equates salary with status; the more money a person makes the more value society places on that individual. Movie stars may not have the sense God gave dirt but that doesn't keep them from garnering millions of dollars per picture. And despite an overpaid sport celebrity's entanglement in a drug/steroid scandal his name will still sell billions of dollars worth of athletic gear to unconcerned consumers.

So, if the price of corn went to five, six, or even seven dollars a bushel, and other commodities followed suit, would farmers be viewed by the rest of the world as smart, successful, and worthy? Or would the end users of our products cry and moan and point fingers at agriculture as price gougers of cash-strapped families. Would America hold the farmer responsible for childhood malnutrition and undernourished senior citizens?

How long would it be before respected news magazines printed harshly worded exposés on the 'good old days' when corn was \$1.95 a bushel, food was cheap and farmers knew their place?

Just wondering.

In a 'Germans from Russia' household it was once customary for children to call on grandparents, godparents and other relatives early on New Year's Day to wish them a happy new year. In exchange for the early morning greeting the children would be given some money, usually a nickel or a dime, although Dale always received a silver dollar from each of his German-speaking grandfathers. Adult visitors were given a shot of whisky, glass of wine, or a beer instead of money.

I won't be seeing any of you on New Year's Day but consider this my good luck greeting to you all:

Ich wünsche euch ein gluckseliges Neues Jahr. Langes Leben. Gesundheit. Fried und Einigkeit. Und nach dem Tod, ewig Gluckseligkeit.

I wish you (and everyone in your family) a luck-filled New Year. Long life. Good health. Peace and Unity. And after death, eternal happiness.



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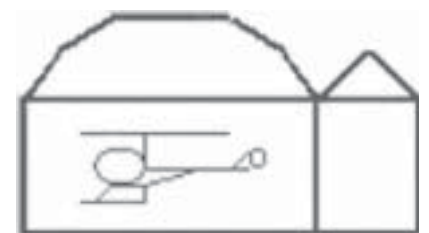
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Why Are You Eating That?

Ursula Wahn, N.D.

If we all ate purely for nourishment, we probably wouldn't have many problems with weight control, hypertension, diabetes, or even cancer. But there are so many other reasons for eating. We eat for pleasure, for taste, for social connection, for comfort, for emotional fulfillment, for a sensation of fullness, for something to do . . . Sometimes we eat when we're not even hungry. In fact, most people in this country have access to far more food than they need for survival purposes and rarely experience significant hunger. Most of us eat more out of habit than out of need. And most of the choices we make about food are based on culinary enjoyment and/or emotional associations rather than nutritional value.

Eating is so integral to our lives, so intertwined with our activities, so deeply engrained in our experience that it cannot help but hold meaning beyond mere nourishment. From infancy on, our experience of food is colored by events surrounding its consumption, by other people's attitudes, and by customs. Parents' likes and dislikes, the usual mealtime atmosphere, rules and expectations surrounding the family dining experience, positive and negative reinforcements involving food – these and other factors establish the foundation upon which we shape our relationship with food. Anger, judgment, or harsh words expressed over a meal can taint the way we think of a particular dish for the rest of our lives. Likewise, expressions of love, celebration, or appreciation can lead us to associate a particular food with emotional satisfaction. Foods eaten during times of hardship may come to represent strife, whereas foods eaten during favorable times may come to symbolize the high life. We subconsciously weave the emotional threads that we spin off of foods into patterns of thought that shape our experience of eating and influence our eating behaviors. When our eating behaviors become self-destructive, there is likely a problem with our underlying thought patterns.

Because eating is such a basic human need, it offers our subconscious minds the perfect symbol with which to associate other more complicated needs, especially troublesome emotional needs. Strong emotional associations make it seem logical to turn to food as a substitute for the fulfillment of unmet emotional needs. When we hurt, we seek 'comfort foods.' Perhaps we feel unloved or unappreciated, so we eat ice cream because that is a food we have come to associate with sweetness, ap-

proval, or reward. Maybe we feel alone and misunderstood, so we eat mashed potatoes because we have come to associate them with warmth, softness, family get-togethers, and unconditional acceptance. Maybe we feel insecure and/or unsatisfied in our relationships, so we eat because food is something that we have come to associate with security and/or care-giving/support. It seems logical, but it isn't. Food is not a substitute for emotional fulfillment. No matter what or how much we eat, our emotional needs will remain untouched. If we recognize that our attempts to find emotional fulfillment through eating are futile, we can disempower the associations that drive our behaviors.

Thought patterns are learned and can be changed. Through honest examination of

our food associations and reasons for eating, we can heal our relationship with food. We are not victims of all of our past experiences, doomed to act out every unhealthy association thrust upon our innocent childhoods. As adults, we can examine our own associations and eating behaviors. We can decide whether we want to continue to act out unhealthy patterns. We are in control. Each time we reach for a food, we make a choice. If the food is healthful and provides the physical nourishment that we need, our choice is sound. But if we regularly find ourselves reaching for foods that we know undermine our health, then we need to ask ourselves why. We need to honestly explore the answers, understand what our cravings are trying to tell us, and set about making more mindful choices.




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