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January 2008



Beautiful Country Home East of Peru, Nebraska

Happy New Year!!

From the Publisher of

Your Country Neighbor

“Your Country Neighbor” is a publication that promotes the American value of “Rural Living” by presenting country and small town life in photos and essays from people who live here. Their columns include stories, poems, and an occasional editorial or news release. The photos remind us of the beauty we may miss during our busy lives.

There is a Web site that displays many pictures of beautiful Autumn and Winter scenes including color photos of many birds that winter here in Southeast Nebraska. Plus the past three years of this publication is archived online. You can view it at:

www.yourcountryneighbor.com



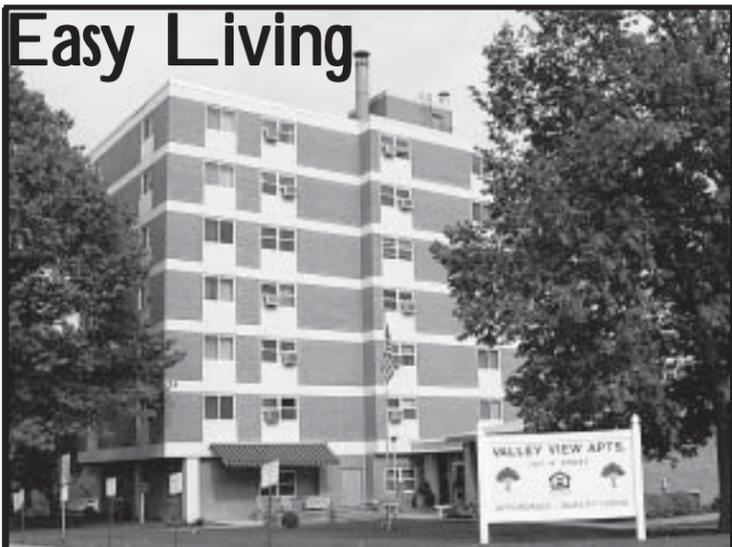
Windmill just west of Peru, Nebraska.

Voices from the Valley

| | |
|-------------------------|-------|
| Country Scenes | 3 |
| Merri’s Diary | 4 |
| Joe Smith | 4 & 5 |
| More Colorful Scenes | 6 & 7 |
| Hunting & Fishing | 8 |
| Devon’s Poetry and Art | 9 |
| “The Face of Drought” | 10 |
| “Saga of a Flower Shop” | 11 |



Lady Cardinal about to pay a visit to my bird feeder.



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Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha
 Published by Stephen Hassler

Writers this month, Thank You!

Devon Adams
 Vicki Harger
 Merri Johnson
 Karen Ott
 Joe Smith
 Josh Whisler

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Country

Scenes

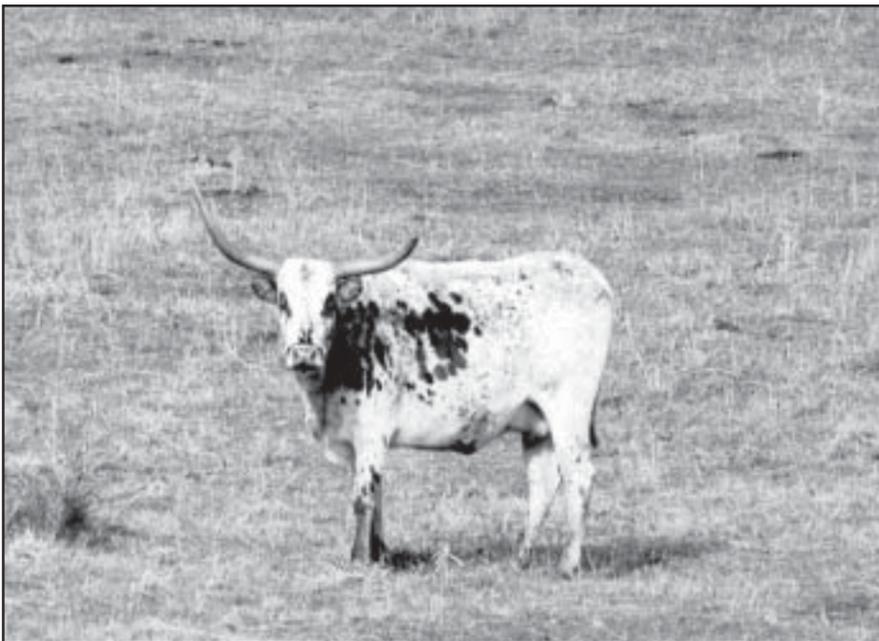
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The Four J's

by Joe Smith

Joe Smith, my son Jason, and Joe and Jonas the Amish fellows are what this story is about.

My son Jason came to Nebraska about the first week in November to get my dozer and my sawmill. He needed them on his new farm, near Seymour, Missouri. They did this while Marta and I were at a conference in Arizona. He had traded for a big pile of logs with an Amish fellow across the road. It was a hard trip, but he finally got it all down there. Then he got sick and couldn't get the work done. So old dad and mom needed to go down and help. He was working on his house, trying to get it finished. My wife and I helped them, doing a lot of painting and other work.

Jason had not had much chance to use the dozer as he and his wife Terry were working 12 hours a day. So I did a lot of dozing, clearing out junk trees from his 26 acres, and leaving the good trees. I probably got maybe a fourth of it cleared. That was about 5-6 days, then he hauled in about four loads of logs from the two Amish fellows, Joe and Jonas. Jason set up the saw, so I started sawing red oak. The logs were several years old and hard as nails. We got nearly all of the logs cut for the two Amish fellows.

The Amish fellows are hard workers and healthy as a horses. They live simply; they walk or ride horses or mules for transportation. They can't own any cars, trucks, tractors, chain saws or any power tools. They do a lot of beautiful furniture making. This is all done without tools with electric motors. All the power is by humans or some other means of power, like a tread mill. Horse power is another way. For bigger sawmills that require more power, they use larger treadmills, maybe a four-horse to six-horse unit. The Amish can figure out a way to do it. They are very good at this. Each group of Amish has their own rules. Each group is nearly self supporting. They have their own schools, their own harness makers, furniture makers and many other things like stores. The families seem to have a lot of children. Joe is in his twenties and he and his wife have five children.

The thing I can't understand is that the Amish can't own a car but can ride with you; they can't have a cell phone but can use yours. They can run a chain saw if they are working for you. The Mennonites on the other hand can have cars and tractors. It takes a lot of thinking for this old Methodist to figure out.

Jason bought some horses and one young mule, named Ellie Mae. The horses he bought are Trotters, so they should be money. The mule is a character for sure. Just about two years old. Terry was going to work early the other morning and ran right into the mule on the sidewalk to the house. It was still dark. Ellie Mae was out of her pasture.

Jason and Terry bought this Amish house; no electricity, no water or bathroom in the house. The upstairs wasn't even finished. They now have it near completion. They were putting in carpet as we left there this week. They had to wire the house and plumb in water. They have a furnace but use a wood heater. It does a good job of heating the house. They have a never ending supply of wood. Jason has a skid loader that he is a master at. This is what I used to put the logs on the mill. I was not the safest guy to be around. The foot pedal controls are instant reaction. I managed not to hurt anybody, but was very uncomfortable running that thing. The problem stems from the running of the dozer with the clutch. With the dozer, the clutch idles the dozer motor when you push it down. The Skid loader is not that way. When you push the left peddle down it raises the load straight up, so you push a little harder and it still goes up. Not good when you have a 14-foot oak log on the front of the loader. It is hard to break old habits. It was plumb scary for this old coot.

Jason traded some sawing for some work the Amish fellows did. That is why we were sawing their lumber for them. The two men helped with their logs. Joe had a horse drawn semi, small but it still carried a lot of lumber. He lived a couple miles west of Jason's place. One evening he hauled three loads of lumber, most of which were 1½ x 12's. Both men were hard workers and very strong for their size.

All the kitchen cabinets were made by Joe's brothers, one of whom is blind. Jason had the oak, some of which came from Nebraska. They use all types of tools, all run by human power. Some of the tools, like drills and routers are run by foot power. The table saw and other are run with a weighted fly wheel and pure arm power. We went over there the last time we were there and checked it all out. It was amazing what they can do without power tools.

After we got things under control we went to Branson for four nights. We went to several shows and got some Xmas gifts. We went back by Jason's place and picked up our pup, Sugar, and started home Wednesday morning, just before the storm hit on Thursday. We made it home about 6:00 P.M.

Diary of an Unemployed Housewife

Merri Johnson

Let's hear it for global warming!

I'm not hearing anything. What's that? You think that just because we had snow for Thanksgiving, plus a major ice storm and several more inches of snow before the first official day of winter, that global warming is a hoax? That's my personal opinion, but I'm willing to consider that perhaps it has just gone south for the winter.

My husband and I took a teeny-tiny trip south on December 6, one of the several days in December that we saw measurable snowfall. We had purchased tickets back in September for the Billy Joel concert in Kansas City. You know how making out-of-town winter plans always seems like a fine idea when it's still early autumn? But our son had invited us to attend with him and his wife. And when your grown children want to spend time with you, you should make every effort to be there. Besides, the concert was scheduled for December 6, right? How bad could the weather be then?

The snow that day had quit by mid-afternoon, so we set out, about an hour early in fact, just to be on the safe side. The Interstate was cleared and sanded, and we sailed along confidently for awhile, until we hit freezing mist about 20 miles north of St. Joe. I immediately shifted into nervous-passenger gear and implored my husband to slow down. In my best non-accusatory-yet-still-somehow-critical voice I asked him why we had bothered to leave early if we weren't going to take advantage of the extra time and be more cautious.

Before he could even give me the I-know-how-to-drive look, an overturned semi came into view. Then a van pulling a trailer on its side in the median. Then a car in the ditch. *Whoa, maybe the little lady is right*, he's thinking about then. We spotted another car on the side of the road just past a bridge up ahead. Then we were on the bridge, and our car was fish-tailing and sliding into the other lane.

I gasped in alarm, which probably didn't help my husband's concentration, but he kept his cool and got the car back under control. Once his nerves settled down, it struck him that our car, which we had just bought last June, didn't have front-wheel drive. If it did, he asserted, he wouldn't have nearly lost control. "Who makes a car without front wheel drive these days? I assumed I was buying a front-wheel drive vehicle," he fumed, "We're getting rid of this death trap as soon as possible!"

We arrived at our son and daughter-in-law's house in St. Joe a little shaken, but safe. My husband shook off the jitters by scooping their driveway while I got on-line and checked road conditions in Kansas City.

The concert was phenomenal, the holiday lights in downtown Kansas City were lovely, the time spent with our kids was wonderful, we had no further traffic incidents, and we spent a restful night in our son's guest room.

The next morning, my husband made good on his resolution to look for a different car and paid a visit to the car dealership where our son works in St. Joe. He didn't find a car, but he had another humbling experience.

Upon his return from the dealership, he pulled into the driveway, let himself in through the basement garage door, and was nearly to the top of the stairs to the living room before he realized he was in our son's *next-door neighbor's house*.

Granted, both houses are split-levels with a two-car garage on the north side and similar front entries. But he admitted that he wondered where all the extra stuff in the garage had come from overnight, and why a different breed of dog had greeted him. Still, he kept right on going. Apparently no one was home, although the door was unlocked. Unless they were hiding, hoping he'd just grab the Christmas presents under the tree and leave peacefully!

So how did he explain his "mistake"? He said the patches of snow on the driveway looked just like the ones in our son's driveway. What kind of flimsy excuse is that?! Only a man could hope to get away with it.

I say we blame global warming. It's been blamed for everything else.

Editor's note:

You can read previous articles by Joe Smith and Merri Johnson online in Your Country Neighbor archives; just click on "publications" at:

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My Wife, the Queen of Leftovers

by Joe Smith

I don't know about the rest of you men out there, but I think my wife is the queen of leftovers. We have been married for a few years (56 +), so in that regard she has had a lot of practice. The other day we were at the grocery store in Auburn and bought one of their nice chickens, all cooked and ready to eat. We had two meals from that one chicken, and then she made chicken soup with what was left. So that would have been the third meal. We will have a roast one day, and then what is left ends up as sandwiches or enchiladas a couple of days later. It is all good food and saves a lot of money.

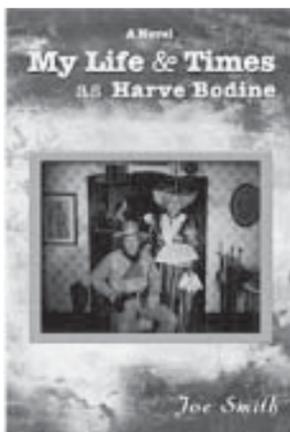
We raised four kids and sometimes we wondered what we were going to feed them. One time after I had just started a welding shop in Tucumcari, we were down to our last money for groceries. Marta went down to the store and counted the items as she went so as not to go over what money she had. We were about ready to go to the farm east of town, when a call came in for a job at the bowling alley. Marta had put the groceries in the back of our pickup. I went over and did the job and when I came out, there were no groceries in the back of the pickup any more. I had to go in the bowling alley and ask the guy for a check just so we could eat the rest of the week. So she has learned the hard way not to waste food. She can dream up more ways to serve leftovers that are just as good and tasty as the best cafe in town. If we had a couple of pigs to feed scraps to, they would starve to death. I'm in no way criticizing my wife; I think she does a great job of NOT wasting food. I remember my mother telling me about all the starving people and to clean up my plate. I guess most women do this leftover thing.

I don't think anybody could live on what my wife throws away. We very seldom even have any thing to put on the cat food. Seemed we always had something to feed the dog when I grew up. I'm afraid Sugar, our pup, would starve if scraps were what she had to depend on for food. This may sound tongue in cheek but it isn't. I am really proud of my "bride" who feeds me quite well. No complaints here. Joe.

"My Life & Times as Harve Bodine"

by Joe Smith

If you like the stories I write, you would love this story. Harve Bodine was in the Confederate Army, riding for the Quantrell Raiders. He didn't like anything that guy was doing so he and another fellow left before the end of the war and went out West. It seems he turned lawman.



The story has a lot of human feeling in it, honest emotions, true love (sorry, no hot sex scenes). The story takes place in an area I am somewhat familiar with. Other parts came from Harve himself. I had no idea where it was going. I just wrote it down like Harve told me to. Whether it actually happened or not is for you to decide. Joe Smith.

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This brick front berm home is spacious and bright with lots of south-facing windows for solar heat in the winter and an awning to shade the windows in summer. The large family room area has a great forced air fireplace. The kitchen is roomy and opens up into the dining area. Each of the bedrooms has a nice-sized closet with plenty of storage. With 7+ acres around the home and a mature wind break, there's privacy and space to enjoy. Come take a look to appreciate the area. 402-274-4410



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Titmouse after the Ice Storm

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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler
(Photo(s) provided by Author)

Fishing:

The Missouri River is low and filled with lots of ice lilies right now. It's flowing slowly along and it looks a little timid and harmless – not like the raging, swift river of the summer months. The cold weather has pretty much put fishing out of the question all together around here with temperatures reaching into the single digits several times last month. Something that is a little ironic is that the ponds and lakes don't have a lot of ice on them, not enough to fish though anyway. The last month has been a rollercoaster ride of temperatures with 70 degree days just 30 days ago, changing to rain that changed to freezing rain that turned over to sleet and finally turning into eight inches of snow. If it's fishing you want, you're going to have to go further north to thicker ice or head south to open water.

Hunting:

2007 Fall Turkey Season is open and permits can still be bought now. All permits are available online at www.outdoornebraska.org, by mail through the Lincoln office, or over the counter at any Commission Permitting office.

2007 Fall Turkey Season Dates were:

Shotgun: Oct. 14 - Nov. 10 and Nov. 20 - Dec. 31.

Archery: Oct. 1 - Nov. 10 and Nov. 20 - Dec. 31.

2007 Fall Deer Muzzleloader Season Dates were:

Dec. 1st – Dec. 31st

2007 Late Deer Antlerless Season Dates are:

Jan. 1st 2008 – Jan. 15th 2008

The 2007 Fall Deer Muzzleloader Season was a cold and wet one. It definitely makes you think about the old-timers keeping their powder dry. Like I stated previously, the last month has been a hunting nightmare with rain, then freezing rain icing your gun over, to the condition where it's plain hard to walk in the timber. It was slick, then came the snow before the ice had a chance to melt. So you have to be pretty sure-footed when you're moving around out there and sometimes you just have to take the fall and move on. The deer aren't having much more luck moving around either, like not at all at times. But there is always the old saying that pretty much falls true that "If they aren't moving in the morning, they'll be moving in the evening," and vice versa. It takes a lot more time to hunt this time of year, it seems, for that very reason. Either you see a million of them or nothing at all.

Things have slowed down and the hunting season with them. Seasons seem to be closing one by one. But that was to be expected with the end of the year approaching. It's never here long enough it seems, to get all the hunting in that you want. But it doesn't stop me from trying. 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."



Jeff Whisler (right) from Peru and fishing partner Sid Powell showing their catch at the dock with 7 Grouper taken from the Gulf of Mexico last week.

Loyd Buchmeier shown with a nice White-Tailed Buck taken during the Muzzleloader Season. The rack scored over 120 inches.



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THE WRITE TIME

by Devon Adams

Sometimes, in the night,
or any time at all,
I write my thoughts
with pens that suit my mood.
I like the colors of the inks,
but most important is
the easy flow of pigment
coming from a fine line tip
that glides across smooth surfaces,
with blue lines measured into spaces
wide enough for loops and
printed letters in a slanted script
that echoes family members'
relatively related styles, like
cousins standing side by side,
whose bones repeat each other.
We carry in our hands
the blueprints for the words
that we will write through years
of daily tasks and trials,
and I wonder whether
we inherit only penmanship.
Do we also call, from deep
within our genes, the codes
for certain thinking patterns
that lead us into lives
repeating those that
came before us?

SMELL THE COFFEE

by Devon Adams

I thought I'd never see
Grandma's lace curtains again,
but there they are,
holding back the black
of night so deep in cold
that the house is groaning.
The dawn is halfway
round the world,
while steam hisses
from the kettle on the stove.
Coffee is the potion strong
enough to wake me
from the feather bed,
and I guess that Grandma
smelled it too, and came
to hang her frosty patterns
on the panes of glass,
just for me to see.

DON'T GO

by Devon Adams

I've been sitting here an hour
and my legs are going numb,
but my cat is sleeping
on my lap, and wishes
not to be disturbed.
Each time I try to move,
her paw shoots out
and grabs my sleeve,
with claws embedded
deep enough to hurt
unless I settle back
in exactly the position
I was in before.
One slitted eye regards
my discomfort with disdain,
and she resumes the purr
that lets me know
how much I love her.

Editor's note: You can read previous poems by Devon Adams online in Your Country Neighbor archives; just click on "publications" at: www.yourcountryneighbor.com



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The Face of Drought

A Farm Report from
Western Nebraska

by Karen Ott

For the first time in years we're experiencing a real winter....and I don't like it one bit.

Daytime temperatures rarely climb out of freezing territory, and even if they do it's only for an hour or so...not nearly enough time to melt the packed snow and ice that has accumulated since November.

Even though we've had more than our share of storms, and the landscape has been white for over a month, we really don't have a serious accumulation of snow....maybe five inches or so here on the home place. (An all-day snow on Thursday left us with an additional inch) Our real problem is the snow never has the chance to thaw but instead has slowly settled down to a crusty ice; just walking across the yard takes courage, perseverance and a perfect sense of balance.

But walking and driving are the least of our worries. For weeks now the men have been hauling feed as the hard layer of ice/snow makes it impossible for the cows out on corn stubble to find anything to eat....and calving season is just around the corner. (That's a nightmare in the making)

Our Christmas day proved a bit hectic. While I entertained family and friends, Dale and our son Matthew sat in the hospital's emergency room with a screaming five year old. Ordinarily we would have taken Devon to his pediatrician.....or the Morrill medical clinic.....or Quick-Care.....or Urgent Care, but on Christmas day not a single option was open but the super-busy, understaffed ER.

After spending most of the afternoon with a loud, frowsy haired woman in a pair of fuzzy pink bunny slippers, an over-sized gal too big to fit in a conventional wheelchair, a man who had thought cleaning his clogged snow-blower with his bare hands was a good idea -- and a myriad of other ill-fated citizens of Scottsbluff county -- my unlucky three-some

arrived back home hungry, cranky and out of sorts. According to Dale Hollywood has never produced a TV show with as much medical drama.

It was one of those days we'll file away in our book of Christmas remembrances, alongside The Chicken-pox Christmas, The Broken Ankle Christmas, The Blizzard/snowmobile Christmas, and the unforgettable 'Someone Forgot The Mashed Potatoes So We Had To Eat Chips' Christmas.

I'm hoping New Year's Day turns out to be a bit less memorable.

And now for a public service announcement:

Wednesday morning a single father and his two kids came to the tire shop in search of a large inner tube. "Taking the kids tubing" David said as his young, blond-headed son and pretty teenage daughter chattered about previous spills and thrills riding a tube pulled by a four-wheeler. Less than forty minutes later the flight-for-life helicopter was landing in the large lot just a block east of the tire-shop.

The boy had slipped from the tube (his father was driving the four-wheeler) and slid head-first across the packed snow into a light pole. He was awake and crying when they loaded him on the gurney....and tonight he's lying in the Scottsbluff hospital with severe head injuries, his life irrevocably altered.

SO.... start the New Year off right. If you're snowmobiling, tubing, four-wheeling or pulling someone around on the hood of an old pickup (something we frequently did when the boys were young) make everyone involved wear a helmet.

Nine chances out of ten they won't need them.....but maybe...just maybe they will.

Stay safe and warm this week.

Editor's note:

You can read previous articles by Karen Ott online in Your Country Neighbor archives; just click on "publications" at: www.yourcountryneighbor.com

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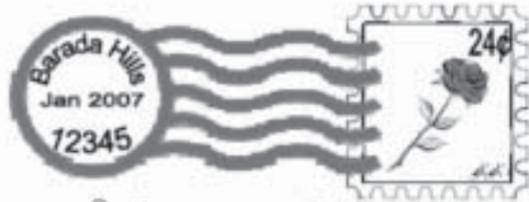
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Saga of a Flower Shop

by Vicki Harger

It was an answer to a prayer...it really was. I applied for a job at the *Flower Cart* in Falls City, and a week later, I had it.

I couldn't believe my good fortune. How many years have I wanted to work at a Florist's Shop! It was a dream come true—to work amongst the "little people" with upturned faces...daisies, roses, pixie carnations and the lovely Gerbera's...*Gerber Babies*, as I call them. They're like fragile children and I've loved them from the first moment I saw them looking up at me.

I talk to the flowers when there's no one around. I don't know what folks must think of me when they find me whispering to the *Pixies* and *Chocolate Kiss roses*...but no one has said anything. Not yet.

My new boss, Linda, is one of the nicest ladies in Falls City. Like a radiant *Pixie* flower herself, she runs her shop with a cool head and a warm heart. Her customers aren't just clients. They are her loyal friends. She greets them by name as they come through the door.

"Oh my dear Jan," she'll say. "It's been a while since we've seen you! How are the grandbabies? And the puppies, of course...?" She knows them all. Knows their kids, their pets, their parents...knows if they've been sick or well. It's the duty of a florist to know these things.

From the very first day, I was fascinated by the mysterious workings of a flower shop. Andrea, the designer, was there, weaving magic with her fingertips. I watched in awe as simple petals turned into magnificent creations before my eyes. They were breathtaking. How would I *ever* learn to do that?!

I studied the arrangements. I took notes in my ever-present notebook. But eventually Andrea put a stop to my incessant note-taking. "Put down the pen and paper, Vic. You've got to do this *hands-on*."

Andrea was tolerant of my first attempts at flower arranging. Her patient heart is made of gold, and it's a good thing, too. I'm such a novice. I did bouquets in Home Ec class, but that was a hundred years ago.

"Relax!" Andrea said. "It'll come to you. Just notice the way the flower stem flows." With sure hands, Andrea reached for my bouquet, rescuing the babies from my torturous fingers. The blossoms responded to her touch. A moment later my dysfunctional arrangement had become a thing of beauty, rather than a hodge-podge of anxious flowers.

Apparently, they haven't learned to trust me yet—these fragile children nestled amongst the *babies' breath*, but Andrea assures me that someday they will—then I, too, will weave magic with my fingertips.

There's so much to learn! So many wrong ways of doing things. I fuss quietly to myself, worried that I may never learn the mysteries of *greening-up* a basket with *Pitsaporium* and *Sallal*...

Then there are the mysteries of Mylar balloons and ribbons and winding the tendrils of raffia on a hot curling-iron. The mysteries of working at the front desk...business transactions...Teleflora wire service.

Oh dear. Oh dear.

The gals left me alone in the shop one day, not long after I started working there. Linda and Andrea left me wallowing in ignorance at the front desk. They had to go to the cemetery for something.

"Tell the customers to come back in 15 minutes when we return," they said. "You can handle it, Vic."

I wasn't so sure.

I watched them go uneasily, knowing that calamity could descend on me at any moment. Murphy's law has a way of finding me, no matter where I hide. It could easily find me here, perched on a stool at the *Flower Cart*.

Sure enough. The gals were hardly gone a few moments, when the front door opened and a customer entered from the cobblestone street. A lovely lady. I knew I'd have a hard time telling her I couldn't help her, that I was really just a stooge sitting on a stool—unlearned in the ways of the cash register and business transactions.

The lady smiled at me, but she looked a bit sad, too. "All I need is a rose," she said.

I started to say that she'd have to wait for the owner to come back, but her next words stopped me.

"I want a single *Chocolate Kiss rose* to place on Jacob Fritz's grave," she said. "You know, the soldier who died in Iraq?"

I nodded, my words sticking in my throat...Jacob Fritz, one of our local heroes. He'd died in a tragic ambush a year ago in January, died fighting for an American cause. And I couldn't help to honor him...couldn't sell a rose for his grave, because I didn't know how to open the wretched cash register.

I felt terrible.

"Um," I said, stalling for time. I explained the situation to the lady as best I could.

She nodded graciously. "I can leave you the exact change," she said. "And I can fill out the sales slip, myself. I used to work at a place like this."

I'm not sure how, but in the next few minutes, the two of us managed to complete the transaction. She even created a lovely ribbon to tie around the rose.

We stood looking at the flower, bedecked in its gingham ribbon. An afternoon sunbeam slanted through the window, polishing the rose petals to a high sheen. The flower came alive with color...a golden brown rose, rich in sweetness and symbolism. Special moments and phantom memories—they were all there, tied up in the embrace of a florist's ribbon...loving memories cut short by an untimely death in distant lands.

How much we take for granted, I thought, staring at the *Chocolate Kiss* rose. Our soldiers risk all to do what our country has called on them to do. They suffer blown-off limbs, mental anguish, and shattered lives. They've died by the thousands, and have been injured by the tens of thousands.

But we're hardly even conscious of their sacrifice.

I touched the rose's soft petals. Soon the flower would wither away and die, just like many of our brave young soldiers, languishing in cold graves somewhere.

I sighed.

The woman gave me her money, and I watched her take the rose and leave—the lovely lady with a sad smile, heading for the cemetery.

I turned to look at all the other roses standing tall and serene in their vases. They, too, awaited a grave to rest upon, phantom memories to embrace. There were weddings to adorn, and graduations to attend. Anniversaries, birthdays, confirmations and funerals...celebrations of both life and death.

I went to straighten the bouquets in the cooler, pausing to drink in the beauty around me. The fragrance of roses and *Alstramaria* blossoms, fresh-faced daisies, and the lovely Gerberas. The glint of sunshine on our windowfront display.

Outside, passersby lingered to admire the sparkle of our window decor, and from the cobblestone on Stone Street came the sounds of joy and laughter.

The axis of our world pivots around a Florist's chambers. The cadence, the rhythm of planet Earth: war and peace, hope and romance, laughter and tears, living and dying. The factors that make up our lives.

It's a Florist's legacy...a celebration of life, itself.

It is the saga of a Flower Shop.

Editor's note: You can read previous articles by Vicki online in Your Country Neighbor archives; just click on "publications" when you go to:

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