

Country

Neighbor



December brought ice again to the 4-corners area; ice, beauty and slippery everything.

Voices from your Valley

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Snow Geese arrived at the *Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge* in early December. Colder temperatures froze the wetlands and sent the geese further south. They'll be back.

Cities and Villages in *Your Country Neighbor-hood*

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Your

COUNTRY NEIGHBOR

Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

Writers this month

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

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Thank You

Your Country Neighbor

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Editor's note:

*More than three years of
this publication are online at:*

www.yourcountryneighbor.com

Country Scenes



Freezing rain coated everything for a time last month.



Open Trail at Optimist's Lake



Same tree, different mood.



Roadside Scene

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January 2009

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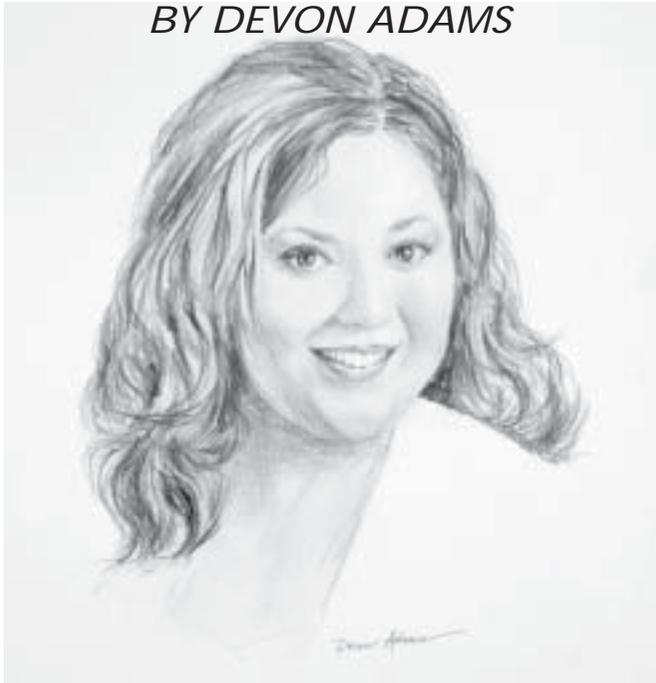
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BLUE BOTTLES

by Devon Adams

There is a big bay window facing south that has blue glass bottles aligned along the top edges of the bottom panes. There are different sizes, and shadings from powder, to turquoise, to cobalt, to deep ultramarine, to almost purple. They catch the sunshine falling through the glass and hold it inside, until they glow like jewels, instead of empty vessels holding time inside their bellies. Sometimes they are overshadowed by the summer green of trees that grow in groves beside the house, but on cloudy, frosty days, when snow covers the ground with frigid blankets, the bottles are lonely colors against the pale face of a winter day. On nights of the full moon, when silver light flows like molten pewter poured from a white-hot bowl, the blues are ethereal, a ghostly floating image of unearthly hues that echo the reality of the sun.

RAILROAD SIGNALS

by Devon Adams

There is a slight disturbance in the cold night air that spreads out like ripples from a rock dropped in a smooth pond. A nervous tremor shakes through the frozen earth, translating up through houses and into bodies sleeping in their night beds. The subtle message causes living creatures to be alert, as the train rumbles on its long dark track. The engine cuts a tunnel with its headlights through the falling snow, as the storm begins.

LOOK INTO THE FIRE

by Devon Adams

The world shrinks to the size of one room when an ice storm cuts the power, and the wood fire is blazing hard inside the old stone fireplace. Nothing matters but the warmth, and the random process of our thoughts and dreams.

I COULDN'T SLEEP

by Devon Adams

It is a long and winding road
that leads us into dreams.
We are on a journey
without an end,
an unpredictable adventure.
Morning only interrupts the story,
and sleep will once again propel
our unleashed thoughts into
unexplored territory.
But I couldn't sleep.
So, the next best thing
to sleeping is writing.
Writing is like dreaming,
and, more often than not,
it takes us to unexpected places.
Traveling can be frightening,
just as dreams are sometimes
scary and intimidating, but
the trip is always exhilarating.
And the insights and enlightenment
that come along the way are priceless.



Visions of Robert Frost

January 2009

Fire

by Joe Smith

Fire, the good side of fire was started way back with the beginning of man. Man found out he could stay warm and cook his food. I was sitting in the den watching our fireplace. It seems to mesmerize you. So I thought it would be a good subject to write about.

The word curfew came from the cover that people put over their fire coals. The English would ring the bells when it was time to cover the fires; hence the word curfew is now used for a different meaning. But it was started to tell people it was time to settle down, cover the coals of the fire so they would be able to start a fire with the coals the next day. Curfew meant fire cover. Years ago drums were used to tell members of the community that it was curfew time, Fires needed watching for several reasons, one being to keep it going and to keep it from spreading or from some one stealing it. From this, communities were started. The Indians had their council fires. Fires were both symbolic and superstitious. Altar fires were kept sacred, a symbol of religion, but later all people used the fire as the center of the home, with its hospitality and good cheer. The fire still has remained one of the strongest instincts of the human race. How many of you love to back up to a fire to warm yourself? I have a neighbor who comes over and sits on the couch in front of the fire and nods off to sleep. The heat from the fire relaxes you. Watching the flames is relaxing also.

Fire does have its down side, but that is another story. For now we will just talk about the good side for man. Joe Smith



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Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

It's the last Saturday before Christmas. I'm still in bed, half-asleep, groggily organizing my mental list of things yet to be done. But it's cold and snowy, a good day to lie in bed until the sun comes up officially. My husband reaches for the remote control and turns the TV on to the network morning show. We watch for about ten minutes and conclude that we haven't heard anything newsworthy yet, so we roll out.

He pushes the start button on the coffee maker; I take care of cat duties. He begins frying sausage for his own breakfast; I debate with myself between oatmeal and Malt-O'-Meal, or maybe yogurt with granola. Malt-O'-Meal wins. So far, we're off to our predictable and slow weekend start.

After breakfast I cart the hamper to the laundry room and toss in a load of pants and shirts. I find this is the least jarring way to actually start chores. You feel like you're accomplishing something while expending very little effort. I'm awake enough now to notice a fair amount of grit on the floor and make a mental note to sweep after I get dressed.

Returning to the kitchen, I notice an unfinished Christmas card on the counter. Better get that done. The mailman pulls up out front just as I'm licking the envelope. I could run out and holler for him to wait, in a jovial, neighborly sort of way, but I'm not dressed yet. My breeding is *just* good enough to restrain me from deliberately making a spectacle of myself.

I decide it's time to get cleaned up. While brushing my teeth, I notice that the sink needs to be cleaned. Might as well give both bathrooms a once-over. That was easy enough. Now I'm motivated to make the bed. I'm still in my bathrobe when the washing machine timer dings. I hang up the pants and shirts and toss in the whites. It's nearing 11:00 a.m. when I finally overcome my wardrobe inertia, and trade my PJs for sweats.

Hubby has been in the basement for awhile now getting geared up to install shelving in the guest bedroom closets in preparation for holiday visitors. He requests my assistance. We note the width of the shelving unit we purchased some months back and realize it's too small. "We can make this work," my husband assures me. His plan is to rig up a bracket on one end of the closet instead of mounting the shelving to the end wall. "That will leave a foot of inaccessible space in the corner," I point out. "Better to return this unit for the right size." It takes very little convincing to bring him around to my point of view. Everything goes back in the box. We tape it up. I spend 20 minutes looking unsuccessfully for the receipt. Oh well. They'll take it back without it.

By now it's after noon. Hubby fries himself a burger and takes a nap. I opt to sweep (a quiet task) rather than unload and reload the dishwasher. Hubby wakes up when the phone rings. Since he's up, I ask if he can get the treadmill ready for use after its year-long hiatus in storage. He agrees, and we spend the next 20 minutes searching for the owner's manual, which we both know has been lying around somewhere in plain sight since I first brought up the subject about a month ago. Aha! The manual is found (nearly in plain sight) and hubby gets the job done. He even takes the treadmill for a test run.

It's 3:00 p.m. What have we done so far today? Not a whole heck of a lot. Specifically, very little of what's on my yet-to-be-done Christmas list. But it's only Saturday. I still have four more days. Yikes! Only four more days! I'd better get cracking!

A Resolution Solution

Merri Johnson

The writer is Project Director and a volunteer for Nemaha County Neighbor to Neighbor, Inc., a non-profit organization providing daily living assistance to senior citizens.

New Year's Resolutions and the People Who Make Them. Now there's a real love-hate relationship befitting a reality TV program. All the good intentions and all the failed attempts could make for some entertaining, if not exactly uplifting, revelations.

We've all been down that road.

I WILL exercise at least every other day. I WILL stop nagging my spouse about (you fill in the blank). I WILL do the ironing the same day I wash the clothes.

How many New Year's resolutions have you made? How many have you kept?

We all have our excuses for why our resolutions fall by the wayside so quickly. Sometime they are just plain unrealistic. Sometimes they are all drudgery with no pleasure. But it's no secret why most resolutions don't pan out: most of us simply lack the capacity for self-discipline for more than about two weeks at a stretch! When you think about it, the very fact that we feel compelled to "resolve" to be better in some way, means that we don't have the capacity for self-discipline for extended periods of time. If we did, we wouldn't need to keep re-resolving.

Allow me to suggest a New Year's Resolution that practically keeps itself and rewards you automatically as you do it. **In 2009, resolve to personally help others by becoming a Nemaha County Neighbor to Neighbor volunteer. You need possess only enough self-discipline to make a phone call to Neighbor to Neighbor (402-274-4277) and schedule an interview.**

You choose the area of service that works for you. Maybe you could do light housekeeping for an hour or two a couple of times a month. Maybe you could drive senior citizens to medical appointments. Maybe you could perform occasional home handy-man tasks or do seasonal yard work. Maybe you could just sit with someone who needs a little supervision, to allow family members to get out for shopping and a break.

You aren't obligated to any particular number of hours of service. I call you when a volunteer opportunity arises and you decide whether you can fill that particular need.

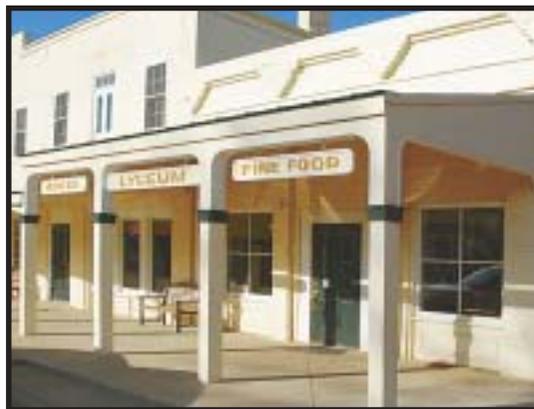
So, what about that "reward" I mentioned? It's a whole lot of satisfaction, knowing that you have made someone else's life a little easier. It's friendships made with those you help. It's gaining perspective on your own life's challenges.

And you get all of that without any out-of-pocket expense. No health club membership fees! No stop-smoking medication expenses! No diet meal plans or appetite suppressants to purchase! You don't even have to pay for gas to get to your client's home. Neighbor to Neighbor reimburses all volunteer mileage. And volunteers who meet age and income requirements are eligible for a small hourly stipend.

Volunteering with Neighbor to Neighbor is a resolution you can keep! Do yourself a favor. Call me today.

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Moonrise, December 12

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West of Nebraska City

I Love it. It's a Darling Little House.

by Frieda Burston

There's no rose growing by the front door, but there are six camellias. And there are two dog houses but I have quit wanting a dog—the yard is so tiny it would be cruel to have one. It's a tract of houses, but while the houses are all similar, the yards are all different sizes and shapes. Mine is just right for me.

The land rolls here, a yard can be up on one side, down on the other— and about two blocks away the land is so broken that they didn't level it and fill it in, they just let it go uphill and downhill all it wanted to. When it got down to a little creek, they made a Protected Wildlife Habitat out of it. I went out walking and talking, and they showed me the sewer pipe in the street at the corner—in the day time the lawn water flows down it to the creek and at night the raccoons and turkeys, the skunks and possums, and other interesting things, come through it and visit us. This morning I saw a mocking bird type in my backyard—next week I'll start bird-feeding and see what comes in for a snack—I hear egrets can fly up from the Delta, too.....

My only problem is how the controls work on everything. You may remember me as being third world when it comes to technology. Well, moving hasn't changed me. I just can't catch on to modern mechanics. The kitchen stove is fantastic, you can even cook on it with square pans—but I can't figure out how to turn it on. I've read the manual. Didn't help.... My new washer and dryer are great, they turn out clothes that are almost ready to put on—I can set all the dials, I just can't remember how they turn on.... I'm freezing to death, but I can't figure out how to work the thermostat for the gas heater. I don't know how to set the temperature on the water tank. I don't know how to do

this, I don't know how to do that. D-D tells people, "My mother is not technologically advanced"—that's a kind way of saying "My mother isn't exactly an idiot, BUT...."

And did I say "freezing to death"? It's worse than that—the weather is cold up here, there is frost on the lawns in the morning, when D-D took me to Farmers Market my breath froze in the air. It's so cold that my hair quit curling and hangs down flat. It's so cold that my skin peels off and my carrot-juice-color slithers right off of me. It's so cold that I can't move fast enough to shiver. IT'S COLD!

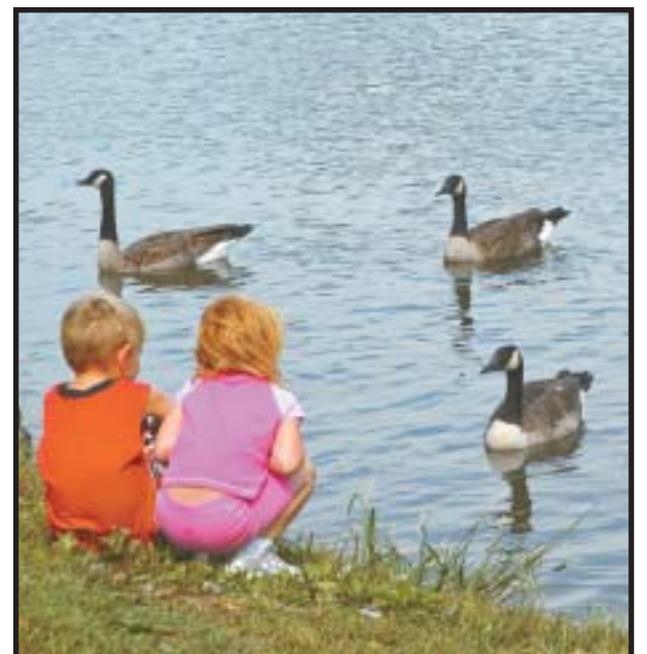
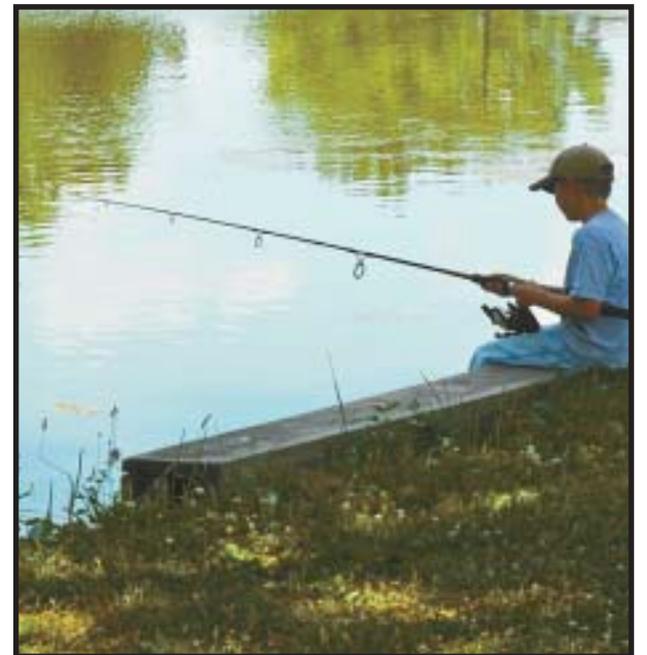
I went walking down my street this morning just to walk in the sun, and saw some trees that were new to me—I met a householder who said he was a titled Master Gardener, and he named trees for me—a really weird one was a camphor tree that looked like it was out of an ad for round-bellied trees that needed to go on protein diets. It reminded me of children's first pictures of trees in kindergarten, but it really grew like that. And honestly, there was a squirrel sitting in a bottom branch, chattering at us.

I notice that the sun goes all around this little house, so it will probably be hotter than hades come summertime, but I don't care. I'll pick up a paper and just fan away like the ol' folks did when I was still young folks. I love the local newspaper—it's full of social news like the announcement of a big Singles Dance, with the added note: "We are not into Liquor or Language"—Just my speed.....

I'm happy. The technology takes a lot of getting used to, and so does the realization that now D-D is Mama and I'm the little girl, but I thank God that my life is ending here and this way, not someplace else alone.....

Best wishes, Frieda

Photos from Warmer Days



Whisler's Hunting

& Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler
(Photos provided by Author)

Fishing:

The Missouri River is running fairly high and clear with ice patties pretty regular. So fishing is pretty well out of the subject. The temperature has been in the single digits and the wind chill well below in the last month. It's kind of funny how the weather will change and bring the migratory birds into the area. Although the Missouri River is not one of the major flyways for migratory birds headed south as is the middle of the state along the Platte River, it gets its share of birds and the predators that go with them. The Bald Eagles are pretty common place right now as they watch for a crippled or struggling bird along the river's edge. They are truly a site to see and you can see them from quite a ways away due to their size. There is no mistaking them for a hawk. They are the real deal.

Hunting:

Winter hunting sports are wide open right now – you can just about pick your season on what you want to hunt that day. Muzzle Loading Deer seasons are open right now and always create a problem in the bitter cold due to the deer starting to herd up. You are limited to about 100 yards with most muzzle loading rifles as a safe kill range. But with the deer in larger numbers you'll find that the more eyes and ears around keeps them a lot more leery of wandering your way. It's not hard to figure out their habits as they don't move a lot in the bitter cold weather. But you still need to be wary of how close you can get without spooking them.

Hunting is cold but good if you can stand that kind of weather. Snow and bitter cold is not for everyone. And with the bitter cold comes the thicker ice that will allow you to get out and catch some panfish though the ice. So get out and give the outdoors a try. There's always more to see in under-brush and grasses when the snow gives the normal cover away. You'd be surprised what you'll see out there. 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."



The Mighty Missouri with ice patties accumulating.



Joe Whisler from Peru with a Whitetail Buck harvested with a 45 caliber muzzle loader.

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NEW YEAR... NEW NAME... NEW EVERYTHING

by Vicki Harger

At this time of the year, we take a hard look at our lives. Scrutinize. Analyze. We wonder where we're heading...

Take back those Library books...6 months overdue!
Put caulking around the windows...6 years overdue!
Clean out the back-room and make it into a cozy niche...!

That's what we need to do. But will we ever get it done?

Well, folks—I don't know about you, but I'm doing things differently this year. I'm not just making New Year's resolutions for 2009...I'm starting life over, it seems. I've been turned inside-out and upside-down. Even my name is different. The old Vicki Harger is gone. Vicki O'Neal has replaced her for good.

How did it all happen? I'm not even sure, myself.

It started last spring, you know... Remember my California capers? The country gal who wandered off to the West Coast seeking a soulmate...? There I discovered that internet-romances leave much to be desired.

Ah me. The agony of it all.

I tried so hard to fit into the wacky world of my city-bred suitor, but it just didn't work. Remember my apartment balcony garden? And the Great Soil Heist? And the piles of beachcombing-treasures I accumulated? What a mess that was!

Disheartened, the country girl prepared to leave the beautiful paradise in NorCal...But then the good Lord intervened. I met Michael, a country gentleman—a prince of a man whom I'd met once before at my church, when he was traveling in the Heartland.

Michael was overjoyed to see me, again. He couldn't believe I was here on the West Coast, living in his own locale. Belatedly, we both realized that we were meant to be. The Lord had brought us back together through a series of uncanny "coincidences".

We discovered that we have so much in common. Beachcombing, gardening, camping...listening to the songs of crickets and meadowlarks.

Hearing a meadowlark sing is so much better than hearing the racket from urban-dwellers and city-slickers. (Michael calls them "Flatlanders".) We often discussed their city-slickin' ways as we explored the countryside...or while working together in Mike's fall garden...Our garden, I should say.

Although proud of that lush garden, Michael

sometimes viewed the veggie jungle with wry concern.

"I don't dare send anybody into that jungle for a tomato," he'd say with a sigh. "Those plants are monsters. They'll climb all over you if you don't watch out..." Then he'd smile at me, and his eyebrow quirked so adorably.

At that point, I had to hug him, of course—for he is the dearest man on earth. He's my God-given soulmate and we get along famously.

Speaking of famous—my Michael has become rather well-known on the West Coast. You see...he lives in one of the most beautiful—but most controversial—places in the world. At the entrance to the Avenue of the Giants.

Conservationists have been fighting the timber companies here for decades...And with good reason! High on the mountaintop, the clear-cutting of 2500-year-old trees has caused massive erosion.

A nightmare scenario was brewing.

One rainy night, an avalanche of mud and stumps roared down the mountainside...a deadly tsunami descending on the sleeping town of Stafford. Fortunately, Michael heard it coming, and ran to warn the community.

No one was killed, and Mike's home was spared—but many other houses vanished in a moment. The battle against the greedy logging company had begun in earnest. Michael became the lead plaintiff, fighting the huge corporation in court. It drew the attention of Conservationists from around the world.

Environmentalists were in desperate need of a hero—and they'd found one in Michael O'Neal. Flatlanders descended on Mike's home from every corner of the world....

One particular day 7000 people, including the Governor and movie stars, marched in a procession to Michael's doorstep. They all pitched in to help protect his home from future mudslides. Celebrities like Woody Harrelson and Bonnie Raitt shoveled dirt and tossed sandbags. Joan Baez and Winona Ryder chatted with Michael and invited him to dinner.

CBS was there. Fox News. ABC. CNN.

The "debris torrent" of flatlanders soon equaled the devastation brought on by the avalanche. Reporters and authors and singers. Indian chiefs and Buddhist monks. National Geographic writers. EPIC and Earth Talk...

Michael's life had become a jumble of noise, cameras, press releases, and documentary screenings.

(You've heard of Julia Butterfly Hill? ...the gal who lived in a huge Redwood tree for two years, without once coming down...? Well, that whole episode took place on the mountain above Mike's property, near the mudslide. Julia used Michael's telephone as a transmitter, linking the Redwood tree to the world. It brought even more folks to this area...)

The story is unending, really. Over the last decade, Michael's story has been told in books, documentaries, on TV, and on dozens of radio programs. He's had to testify before Assembly men and Senators at the State Capitol.

Mike's words have been heard by tens of millions on National Public Radio, and elsewhere. He was profiled in a book called *Hope and Heroes*, (London St. Press) along with more famous folks like Billy Graham, Art Linkletter, and Nelson Mandela.

To cap it all off, just the other day a production crew came out to film Michael for a new documentary. They wanted to film our house, and our garden jungle and—

Oh, I know. I know. It's unbelievable. I'm not sure I'd believe this story myself, except I'm looking at stacks of news-clippings, and photos and books and documentaries.

My, oh my! It's all rather overwhelming to a country gal from the Barada Hills! Who'd ever dream that my California capers and coastal escapades would lead to an adventure such as this?

But enough of that! I'm done prattling, folks.

We just got back from our road trip, and I've got a million things to do. But mostly, I've got to write down our honeymoon adventures. (You can't imagine the mess that a country girl can get into on a trip to Sacramento and San Francisco. But I'll tell you about it in good time, my Country Neighbors...)

Take care, everyone. Keep on hoping and praying and dreaming...Then put foundations under those dream castles. Start your new year off with a bang. Be bold. Be adventurous.

If you need inspiration, you might join me on my website: "Adventuring with Vic". (vickioneal.com) 'Til next time...!

Vicki O'Neal
www.vickioneal.com

The

Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



“You might say every one of us is a fiddler on the roof trying to scratch out a pleasant simple tune without breaking his neck. It isn’t easy. You may ask, why do we stay up there if it’s so dangerous? Well, we stay because (Anatevka) is our home. And how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in one word: Tradition.”
Fiddler on the Roof (screenplay and movie)

They began arriving just before noon, family and friends so accustomed to holiday meals at our home they didn’t bother ringing the doorbell, but instead simply rapped the porch’s grasshopper door knocker twice before entering. Stepping into the warm, humid, kitchen they were greeted by hale and hearty greetings of “Happy New Year”, and, after shedding winter coats and rearranging the kitchen counters to open a place for their contributions to the anticipated meal, added their voices to the chorus of easygoing chatter, the affable pleasantries mingling with the savory smell of roast potatoes, carrots and goose.

Before the meal was served there were toasts, and New Year wishes, offered in German, and Grace lisped by the oldest child, six year old Devon, who took his job of calling Jesus to be our guest seriously, admonishing us to fold our hands and close our eyes before asking God to bless our table...and all those who gathered around it. Next January, in honor of his great-great grandparents who left Russia at the turn of the century, sailing to America on a ship named ‘The Frankfurt’, he’ll recite it in German. He doesn’t yet realize what a gift they gave him...but someday he will.

A chocolate coin wrapped in gold foil lay at each place setting in remembrance of the Volga-German custom of presenting each child of the family a shiny silver dollar on New Year’s day,

and alongside it was a copy of my favorite New Year wish: Wir wuenchen euch ein Glueckliches Neues Jahr, ein langes leben, gesundheit, friede und einigkeit, und nach dem tod, die ewig glueckseligkeit. Translation: We wish you a Happy New Year, a long life, health, peace and goodwill, and after death eternal happiness.

The day ended much as it began, only in reverse; one by one our guests donned their winter coats, packed up empty casseroles dishes and pie plates and scattered to the four winds of the New Year, taking with them the pleasant simple tune of our shared Volga-German heritage and its simple traditions.

When the world looks as shaky as a fiddler on a roof, the constancy and strength of that tune helps steady our balance, it’s the tie that binds generations together, a connection which offers a glimpse of the future from the perspective of the past. There’s comfort in knowing that regardless of crashing stock markets, Mideast mayhem, unstable commodity prices, and unpredictable weather, some things never change.

Glueckliches Neues Jahr from our roof to yoursand God grant us we all keep our balance in 2009.

Karen

Melinda D. Clarke, CPA

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<<<<<<<<<< *Continued from page 8*

was enough to turn the horse. I have never figured out how you would rope a calf holding one rein in each hand. These new horse trainers, like the one from “down under”, make a lot of money, so they must be doing something right.

When I was teaching a horse that I wanted to rope from, I would swing a rope on him 'til he was used to it, and then use a neck rope. I ran the lariat through the neck rope and then tied it to the saddle horn. This made the horse look down the rope when you roped a cow or calf. It only took one time and the horse remembered that.

One example of this was when I was 15 years old. I was working at my uncle's ranch (100 sections). I had a young bronc named Blaze that I was breaking. He was a nice green horse but gentle. I knew where there was a blind cow that had pink eye real bad and needed doctoring. The day before I had seen her but I was riding Buck and I didn't feel he was ready for the rope work. I played with the rope all the way out there, probably five miles from the headquarters. When I found the cow I dropped a loop on her and when the cow hit the end of the rope, the horse had no other choice than look down the rope. I had to ride by her and flip the rope behind her and throw her on the ground. There was a washed out trail nearby that I drug her over to. This cow was pinkeye blind and would fight anything he could hear. I got her down in the trail with her feet sticking up. I took my medicine bag and treated her eyes and painted her face with Globe 62. That was a screw worm medicine. It was black as night. But it kept the sunlight off the eyes 'til they could heal. Needless to say this cow was really getting ticked off. I got Blaze to give me a little slack on the rope and I slipped it off her head and put it around both rear ankles. I got back on the colt and pulled the cow out of the ditch. She jumped up and was searching for something to fight. As soon as she got up the rope fell off with the slack I gave it, and I took off with the cow trying to find me. Oh, to be young again. The chances we took would turn a mother's hair gray.

Back to horse breaking. I believe time was the controlling factor in the way horses were broke then and the way they do it now. We used raw broncs, some had never been around a man,

never seen a rope, or a saddle. These days there is a lot more money in horses, and people spend a lot more time and money on them. It is a completely different ball of wax. I would think there are still places that use the old methods to break horses out in ranch country.

The RFD programs show people getting on horses with a real loose rein. I never did that. It would be inviting a mouth full of dirt when your

horse dropped his head and started bucking. Some body is going to get hurt doing that for sure. You have to know your horses and their reactions to different things. RFD shows people saddling horses from the right side. I would hate to try that out on somebody's ranch, and I can just picture a cattle cutting contest where the rider is using two hands to rein the horse. Things have changed a lot. Not all to the better me thinks. Joe Smith

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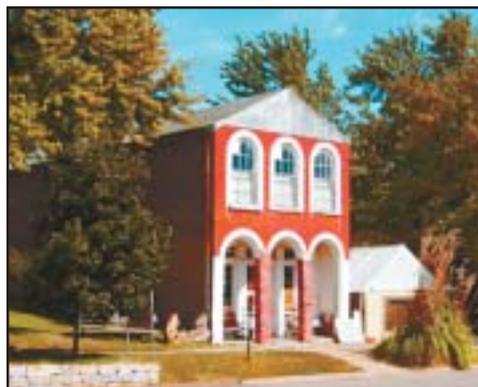
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