



Let's everyone 'Hang In There' during 2011,
and make it a Great New Year!

Voices from your Valley

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Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

Writers this month

Devon Adams
Merri Johnson
Shirley Neddenriep
Vicki O'Neal
Karen Ott
Marvin Thomas
Josh Whisler
Marilyn Woerth

Thank You

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Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

Here we are, stepping into another new year. Many of us wonder what this year will bring. If you pay attention to the news, you're all too aware of all there is to feel uncertain about, economically, politically, socially. But all of that is presented in societal, and even global, terms; on a scale so large that it's difficult to really grasp what it means for you personally. Unless you're out of work. Then it's pretty clear how the unemployment rate, or mortgage foreclosures, or lack of health insurance affects you.

But I'd like to take the focus off all of that big stuff. Not that those aren't important issues to think about, but thinking about them too much just may be counter-productive.

As you may recall from last year, I'm not one for making New Year's Resolutions. But I am very much in favor of New Year's Wishes. Wishes don't have to be grandiose. "Peace on Earth" would be nice, but no one in their right mind actually believes it will happen as long as man is in charge. So, what to wish for? I believe there's a case to be made for keeping our wishes small and simple. Perhaps when we start wishing for – and seeing – the everyday miracles, we'll realize that life is pretty darned good, despite the news to the contrary.

So allow me the liberty if you will to make a few wishes that I'd like to see come true this year.

For bird watchers, I wish you the thrill of sighting a bird at your feeder that you haven't seen before. And enough time to grab your binoculars and field guide so you can identify it before it flies away!

For gardeners, I wish you the surprise of spying that first tulip poking through the bare ground, and the anticipation of planting something new from one of those catalogs arriving daily in your mailbox.

For woodworkers, I wish you a project just big enough to occupy you through the cold winter months.

For farmers, I wish you a restful winter and timely spring rains.

For that rare person who actually likes winter, I wish you snow!!!

For everyone suffering from cabin fever, I wish you a January thaw so you can take a walk, shoot some hoops, maybe even play a round of golf, or just go to the mailbox without a parka and earmuffs.

For readers, I wish you the coziness of curling up with a blanket, a cup of cocoa and a good book.

For those who've lost touch with an old friend, I wish you a memory that motivates you to reconnect.

For all who struggle with troubles of any kind, I wish you the uplifting power of praying for someone else who struggles.

For all who wish that others were kinder, more generous and more responsible, I wish you a mirror. You are that "other." If we all live the way we want others to live, we just might get a little closer to "Peace on Earth" in 2011 after all.

PEGGY KUSER

Certified Public Accountant

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Poetry by Devon Adams

LITTLE TOY TRACTORS

When he was very small
he loved to play in the dirt.
He would supply the sound effects,
as busy wheels rolled tracks
through a well-worn patch of dirt
that was reserved just for heavy duty
equipment. Granted, it was a collection
of miniature trucks, tractors, caterpillars
and trailers. But to him, they were
as real as the sky was blue.
But that was then. Now he drives
the really big tractors, and they take up
more than half of a two-lane highway.
He rides high above the motorists,
floating on his monster wheels,
gunning his mighty engine until it belches
diesel smoke and fumes, breathing fire
like a dragon from a long-lost world.
He is the king of the road. He is also
the happiest kid that never grew up,
because he still gets to play with his toys.

TURN AROUND

When the sun is low on the southern horizon,
and days are hiding behind the curtain of night,
there is a point of turning, when the earth tilts
back toward summer, that is a signal for hope.
Shadows reach their long blue fingers across
the billows of frigid snow, like complicated lace
woven from the cold white light.
They will melt in time, leaving nothing but
faded fragments of winter.

WHITE TALES

They saw me first,
and flashed their tails
behind them as they
sailed over the fence.
Who knows what
wild stories they
tell each other,
about the creatures
walking on two feet.
It can't all be good,
but some stories
would be about
how they spend
their time watching
me, watching them.

STACK THE WOOD

Wood smoke curls blue ribbons
above the houses on the hill.
Fires are bright and warm inside,
and there is more to come,
with stacks of wood waiting
to be fire.

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by Devon Adams
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GARDEN CATALOGS

Soon they'll be arriving in the mail,
with glossy pictures tempting gardeners
to order spring ahead of time.
There is magic in those pages,
and a busy mind can conjure images
of fabulous flowers blooming shamelessly
outside the kitchen window.
Forget the actual view, of ice and snow
clinging to the trellis, and making mounds
on top of all the pots and planters.
Reality isn't important.

STIR THE BEANS

Whatever you do, don't quit
and think about what if,
or remember yesterday too long.
Don't think too much,
or your doubts will spark,
and you'll crash and break.
Just stir the beans,
because you have to eat,
and if you don't, you won't,
because they'll stick and burn.
It may sound simple, but it's hard
to wake up in the dark, and move
ahead until the sun comes up.

Where Life is Good

by Marilyn Woerth


A doctor once told me if it hurts stop doing what you are doing. Unfortunately, I kept on shoveling. Which is saying a lot since I am very close to my sixties, short of stature, overweight, somewhat out of shape with two artificial knees. Whew, even that wore me out. (And remember, I am clumsy.)

Living on three acres out in the country comes with its challenges as well as its rewards. Living out in the country last winter was definitely very challenging, especially since we have one of those curved, long driveways that everyone hates to pull into. My dear sweet husband told me once that we did not need a blade for the lawn tractor or a snow blower because we only have to shovel out a couple of times a year and it is good aerobic exercise. Hmmm, and then the winter of 2009/2010 hit. (So much for a little aerobic workout.)

Now being me (see above) is a challenge. It takes me three to four times longer to do anything than it takes normal people (like my husband). So last year we were shoveling out the end of the driveway after the snow plow had come through for the umpteenth time and I am thinking a snow blower sounded pretty good to me. But another year has passed and no snowblade, no snow blower; just two snow shovels, and two willing and two not so willing hands.

So I guess I am stuck with the snow shovel, braving the cold and the wind and the beauty of it all. Yes, I said beauty. The Lord knew what he was doing when he slowed me down. When you move slower and take away needless noise and distractions, you concentrate on your own breathing and the sights and sounds around you. Then you remember why you enjoy this season and all the seasons, out here living the good life.


When I stopped shoveling and looked up, it was like the sky was raining diamonds. One of those breath-taking moments when falling snow crystals are caught by the rays of the sun and this astounding scene rocks you to the very marrow of your bones and takes your breath away. Yes Virginia, as it has been said many times "This is the good life." Embrace it!




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FEEDING THE HUNGRY

Shirley Neddenriep

Granddaughter lives and works in Springfield, Missouri. She shared news with me recently. You might say she is our guest columnist this month. She is qualified, having just completed being one of a panel of five judges of Missouri State University Public Speaking Showcase. There were 50 speakers narrowed to the Top 5 for the panel to judge. After the judging, an MSU faculty member approached her about participation in a mock interview day at the college. Another day away from work!

Her work in the Public Relations Department of Ozarks Food Harvest requires the ability to write and publish newsletters and mailers, including graphics; interviews on radio and television, planning fund raisers, travel to other areas. Her company recently sent her 'home' to Omaha for the ConAgra-sponsored Feeding America Conference. The nonprofit direct mail that we are all familiar with is done for Ozarks Food Harvest by a firm in LA who specialize. Thanksgiving and Christmas mailers are actually how the majority of the budget is raised for the year. She says it is neat to see how everyone's gifts add up!

However, there are people who believe too much money is spent on mailers. In fundraising, money MUST be spent to make money. That, she said, is the way it works. For example, quote: "Yesterday I received a call from a woman who was extremely upset that we mailed her a Christmas card!! She does not understand that we are a part of Feeding America, the nationwide network of food banks. They provide us with a lot (like Christmas cards). Feeding America is also the nation's leading hunger relief organization. Did you know every county in the U.S. is covered by a food BANK? People often confuse food BANKS with food PANTRIES. Food Banks are large — act as a warehouse/distribution center to serve hundreds of pantries and other hunger relief organizations like soup kitchens, homeless shelters, low income day cares and senior centers . . . basically any nonprofit organization that serves food, but doesn't charge for it. There are 200 Food BANKS in the country, but thousands of food pantries and emergency food assistance sites."

By receiving and reading her company's mailer, she explains, I can see what she is doing at Ozarks Food Harvest. She goes on to explain the spelling. I have heard of the Ozark Mountains. Seemed to me that it would translate into Ozark Food. No, she said. It is Ozarks — with an S on the end — we live in the Ozarks, not Ozark. Ozark is a city and also a county. Ozarks is a region. We serve the Ozarks. Twenty-eight counties in the Ozarks. So now I know that. And so I hope, does the reader.

Products Of My Own Exaggerated Humor

by Marvin Thomas

The majority of my two friends have suggested it might be time to write the memoirs of my long experience as an architect. That would be a big order, but perhaps a few brief notes would help this and succeeding generations to understand my important role in the history of design and construction. You may find it difficult to believe these recollections of my previous reincarnations, but they must be included to make these memoirs complete.

The Egyptian Pyramids: After rescuing a small boy from the bulrushes along the Nile, the Pharaoh rewarded me by appointment to work with his chief architect to establish a monument worthy of the ages. After enumerable design studies I suggested the form of a pyramid would make a real "point."

Walls of Jericho: I designed massive walls to fortify this ancient city. Only later did I learn that the masons had mixed iron oxides with their mortars, which set up resonant frequencies when the harmonics of rhythmic blasts from a tribal chieftain's horn amplified the vibrations to destructive proportions. Fortunately, I was on another project in a far country when the walls came tumbling down.

Solomon's Temple: I worked with Hiram to devise a monument worthy of King Solomon. I found we had many differences: he measured everything in cubits instead of feet and inches and he insisted in using timbers made from the cedars of Lebanon, which burned easily. The building was burned and destroyed but my foundation wall still stands.

Archimedes asked for my advice when he was inventing his spiral, initially as a means of lifting water. I told him his design showed promise, but he'd have to work out some of the kinks.

The Leaning Tower of Pisa: With great classical design we built tier on tier of heavy stone to towering heights. It had been difficult to raise the construction funds - times were tough - these were the "lean" times.

The Ark: Noah never told the full story. He needed help and thought my engineering mind could help solve some of the structural problems of this floating zoo. But my efforts were wasted, for after two skunks were taken aboard all the other animals abandoned ship and the project was scuttled.

Stonehenge: One of my stellar accomplishments, designed to serve as a sort of seasonal sundial and an observatory for the solar system (we left the roof off for that purpose). For the dedication ceremony we recruited a rock band.

Machine Design: While working in Ireland I designed a machine to help the farmers slice the huge potatoes they were growing. With the outbreak of hostilities on the continent the French stole a model of my design and adapted it for their Revolution. I believe the named it the Guillotine.

The Alamo: This was somewhat of a problem for I couldn't speak Spanish, but the good padre asked me to conceive of a design for the facade of his new mission church at San Antonio. After years of toil, the building was completed only to be taken over by a band of Texicans preparing to resist a siege from the Mexicans. I told them it was wrong to fight in a church!

The Texicans wore Davy Crockett hats and were armed with rifles and Bowie knives, but the Mexicans cheated - they used cannons and disgracefully blew holes in such a nice piece of architecture.

San Francisco: This was a huge urban development project with unique masonry buildings from Knob Hill to Fisherman's Wharf. But when the San Andreas Fault

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shifted and caused the Earthquake of 1906 the buildings fell like dominoes. Some suggested the buildings should have been better designed - but honestly, it wasn't my "fault."

Fallingwater: I was serving on Frank Lloyd Wright's staff during the design of this project for the beautiful wooded area of Pennsylvania. The house was designed to sit on the "brow of the hill", as he phrased it, but when it slid into the creek he simply had some boulders pushed up against it and diverted the watercourse to make it appear it was designed that way. He was a genius - even when he was Wrong he was Wright!

These are only a few of the better-known projects I've been affiliated with. It's an honor to relate these experiences to you, and I hope I have dispelled some of the erroneous myths and legends surrounding these edifices.

Marvin Thomas, AIA



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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler
(photo submitted by author)

Fishing:

The River has been quite a sight the last month. Talk about changing of seasons - it was Summer to Winter just like that. We didn't get a whole lot of Fall, not with temperatures in the high 70's at Thanksgiving. Two weeks later it was single digits. It didn't take much of that kind of weather to put ice flow in the river. Ice flow is from bank to bank right now and the river level is dropping as well. The sound of the ice grinding against itself and against the bank is sobering with its constant half crunch - half squeaking sound. You know that the water is cold now - the notion of taking a boat on it now is the last thing on your mind. Come on Summer! Can't wait to get rid of it and can't wait to get it back - go figure?

Hunting:

Out of the Fall hunting seasons and into the Winter hunting seasons. You really don't have to worry about what seasons are open anymore, but when they are closing. Check this year's brochures from the game and parks closely to make sure the species you want to hunt is still available to hunt. I am listing my take on the seasons with their closing dates also listed.

Upland game and seasons are as follows:

Species	Bag	Possession	Open/Close
Cock Pheasant	3	12	Oct 30-Jan 31
Youth Cock Pheasant, Quail and Partridge Seasons	2	4	Oct 23-Jan 31
Quail	6	24	Oct 30-Jan 31
Squirrel	7	28	Aug 1-Jan 31
Cottontail	7	28	Sep 1-Feb 28

Turkey Season Dates - Fall

Archery and Shotgun - Sep 15 - Dec 31

Permit Limit: Two turkeys per hunter

Bag Limit: Two turkeys per permit

Deer Season Dates

Archery - Nov 22 - Dec 31

Muzzleloader - Dec 1 - 31

Season Choice (antlerless) - Sep 15-Jan 18 (**archery**); Dec 1-31 (**muzzleloader**) and Dec 26-Jan 18 (**firearm**)

Some Deer Season Permits are still available over the counter or on-line until the close of all remaining deer seasons.


With the recent temps and minus wind chills, it doesn't take long to get ice on a lake or pond. So look to getting out your ice fishing tackle to bring home some fanfish. Late Deer Season Permits are still available and give you an opportunity to put some venison in the freezer.

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 river picture is of The Brownville Bridge that is being renovated. Look closer - workers are on the platform suspended under the bridge. Now that's got to be cold!

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The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



Blizzard

The cows turn their backs to the wind and hunker down, silent as statues; others shelter themselves in stands of weeds or cornstalks. They're heavily pregnant now, the babies they carry snug and warm, protected from the biting snow and bitter cold. Until the temperature warms the men will haul hay to the fields and break ice on tanks and creeks. The men's breath freezes in such weather, whitening their nostrils, and sometimes their eyelashes with frost, but they carry on nonetheless, living by a code which requires they look to their animal's needs before their own.

The first flakes fell early Thursday morning, portents of a New Year's snow we'll measure in drifts and days rather than inches; initially the flakes were tiny things, but near sundown they muscled-up, growing in strength and size as the weak winter sun disappeared for the night and temperatures dropped. When we went to bed it was still snowing.

It's Friday morning and the snow continues to fall. I can hear the wind rising, and if the swaying tire swing is any indication, we're in for a nasty day of closed roads, white-out conditions and cancellations. The pivot-tire swing is more durable than those decorative nylon windsocks you see hanging in most yards; Wyoming's winds are famous for chewing anything cutside to shreds and spitting out the remains a mile downwind. Drive any back road and you'll find the colorful dead carcasses entangled in barbed wire fences already decorated with tumbleweed 'pearls.' The only way to remove the unsightly mess is a pair of scissors, and a bucket of patience.

Other than preparing for tomorrow's New Year's Day celebratory meal Dale and I haven't plans for New Year's Eve, so there's little disappointment on our part over the almost certain travel restrictions.....although I wouldn't be surprised if, come 3 am, there isn't a tipsy driver pounding on our front door

who believes he's lost in the wilds of Wyoming when in reality he's only 3 miles from his Nebraska home. That sort of thing happens more often than I care to admit since anyone who's been drinking chooses our gravel road over the more heavily patrolled hi-way a mile south.

This particular blizzard, arriving as it did on the cusp of a new year, came with a silver lining: free refrigeration. A north-walled, walk-in-closet is doubling as a second refrigerator.....open the door and you'll find shirts, sweaters, jeans, coats, office supplies....and potato salad for tomorrow's noon meal; if the wind-chill drops a few more degrees I believe they'll even be a freezer section, amenities you won't find in any modern, fairy-tale turreted residence.

In terms of snow this isn't a 'Great Blizzard' but a mediocre one; the windows aren't plastered shut, and drifts (thus far) are manageable in size. If there's anything 'special' (can

I use that word to describe a storm?) it's the wind-chill; -25 is cold by anyone's standards...even those of us familiar with Mother Nature's whims and fancies. Next week's temperatures are expected to climb into the thirties...not warm by any means, but certainly better than single digits.

That's all for this last day of 2010.....it seems I've lost another 365 days to the mists of time, and squandered countless hours in pointless pursuits...again. Maybe 2011 will be different....perhaps I'll be different; as my mother says "Where's there's life there's hope,"

New Year's greetings from the snowy high-plains, and may God's blessings fill your home with hope in 2011.

As Always,

Karen

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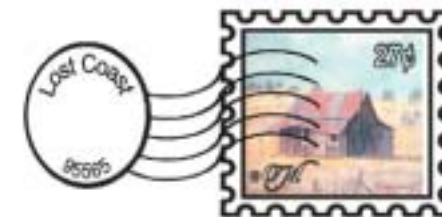
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Old Home Place
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At The Stroke Of Midnight

By Vicki O'Neal



Outside, snow is falling in the darkness.
Swirling...Drifting. Inside, the house is warm and cozy.

We sip hot cocoa by the fireplace. A radio rambles to itself in the corner... The cuckoo clock tick-tocks sleepily, the little bird snug in his bed. A typical evening, it would seem. Ah...but tonight is different.

The hands of the old clock are sweeping onward... Upward... heading toward midnight.
30...29...28...27...26 minutes to go.

The countdown has begun. The final moments of this year—of this decade! It's the death of the old... And the birth of the new.

Watch it all on satellite... See the revelers in Time Square with party hats and confetti. Roaring crowds and all the hoopla.

But if you want an even bigger picture, click on Dish Network. You'll see live footage from cameras in outer space. Planet Earth spinning slowly, silently on its axis. You'll see our world—our continents, our cities and neighborhoods—plunging through darkness, heading toward midnight.

Ah yes! 2011 will be the best year ever! The DJ's are talking about it on radio talk-shows everywhere. Talking about the year just ahead. They're playing the crazy theme song: "It's the End of the World as We Know It—and I Feel Fine!"

25...24...23...22...21.....

"We've only got one more year 'til 2012!" the DJ's say, "and from the looks of it, 2012 could be just awful, folks! This world's a mess!" They talk serious...then they chuckle. They cut up and carry on. "We don't know how it's gonna end—but we've gotta do our very best living, right now!"

20...19...18...17...16....

The DJ's words gallop on. Exclamation points mark every word. "Looks like we're in trouble here on Planet Earth—so it's time to give it your best shot! What do ya have to lose?"

They're right. We can't push the pause button and stop it—this mad rush toward the future. Can't rewind the past year and relive it. But at least we've got another year ahead of us... A brand new year—a clean slate—as white and untouched as the bank of snow outside the window.

15 ...14....13....12...11....

The year 2011...Mysterious. Beckoning. What does the new year hold? Great joy and opportunities? Sorrow? Surprises?

We sip our hot cocoa and muse to ourselves—thinking deep thoughts. Next year will be different than the last one, we're sure...And it's a good thing! We want to leave 2011 on a higher level than 2010. We had so many goals and expectations for this past year. Where did they all go?

10...9...8...7...6....

We take a deep breath...the final seconds are ticking by. The little cuckoo bird is about to pop out his door...He's about to announce to the world that a new year has arrived.

There's hardly a moment left. Here lies the epitaph of our year! It's written in stone...Can't be changed, now. So much unfinished business—scattered pieces here and there. Not as tidy as we would've liked it. But...ready or not, here it comes!

5...4...3...2...1...0....

In Time Square, the ball drops down...down...down...! For just a moment, we hang suspended in time—poised between two worlds—the past and the future.

Then everything melds together at the stroke of midnight! Past...Present...and Future...They all become one at that magical moment.

On every radio and TV network, the crowds burst into cheers. Fireworks explode. Car horns honk. The racket awakens the sleepy little cuckoo-bird. He pops out his door and delivers a belated announcement, before ducking back inside.

We laugh. We throw open our front door and scream into the night: "It's 2011...! Happy New Year!" We say it to everyone in the world, and to no one in particular. To the inhabitants of our planet—to all those continents and cities and neighborhoods spinning through darkness.

The sound echoes into the chilly countryside. Then silence falls. It's a soft world out there...Smothered in feathery white...Like somebody burst open a big pillow, releasing tons of downy feathers into the darkness.

The snow drifts downward, blanketing our new year...Covering us in white, revealing clean blank pages for us to doodle on....Just waiting for us to

write a new chapter. A new story in the pages of our lives.

It will be fun. We'll fill the empty pages with adventures. We'll cancel out all the bad stuff. No more squabbling, or fussing. Just peace and harmony and maybe a piece of apple pie-a-la-mode with happiness...whipped cream...laughter...and a cherry on top.

We're feeling giddy. Drunk on the champagne of life.

Feels so good to have a new year to fill up with wonderful things. It's like winning the Sweepstakes, or having a big shopping cart at a Free Shopping Spree...Pushing the cart down the aisles of Life, picking out what we want. Nothing ugly, broken or tarnished. Nothing from the discount rack of Expectations. No more bad attitudes or foolishness.

Just the good stuff, folks. Just the good stuff.

And there you have it, my country neighbors!...It's official. We're in the year 2011. We've got another year to make things right. To accomplish goals and to make friends of our enemies...To love the Good Lord with all of our hearts.

Live this year well! Spend it wisely. Love and laugh like there's no tomorrow. You have a new lease on life. A clean slate!

And just think....

It all happened at the stroke of midnight.


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HAPPY NEW YEAR!