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PROGRESS

By Shirley Neddenriep

“Interesting; so it wasn’t just a rumor. It’s been fifty years, maybe that’s why they said they didn’t find a horse. Progress . . . Peony Park for a strip mall, Indian Hills Theater a parking lot and the winner’s circle with the buried famous horse for a parking garage.”

On May 15, 1959, horse-racing’s 1935 Triple Crown Winner, Omaha, was laid to rest in the Circle of Champions at Ak-Sar-Ben Race Track. A monument to Omaha was erected for the 27-year old horse who had spent the last few years of his life on a farm south of Nebraska City.

Omaha was one of only 11 Triple Crown Winners since 1930. The winner must be a 3-year old thoroughbred race horse who wins the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness and the Belmont Stakes all held in five weeks of racing each May-June.

Ak-Sar-Ben (Nebraska spelled backward) Race Track closed in 1995 and the land taken over by UNO. Early in the design planning for the new complex, the ‘Circle of Champions’ of the old Ak-Sar-Ben race track would have been the centerpiece of a round-a-bout for automobile traffic. When the search for the famous Nebraska race horse ended with no horse to honor, the concrete winner’s circle was demolished to make way for the new development: Aksarben Village - Omaha’s first mixed-use community. After the demolition of Ak-Sar-Ben, the area may have become a blighted area but for the foresight of land development engineers, building owners and architects.

The February 20, 2009, issue of Midlands Business Journal featured an article about the new community under construction in the old Ak-Sar-Ben area of Omaha. Olsson Engineering constructed a new edifice including its offices as well as apartments. The new development in the core of the city is a residential/commercial mix, organized for pedestrian traffic. For example, a grocery is located within walking distance of Olsson and surrounding existing homes.

It is significant that the new Aksarben Village is a new community in an existing area (Ak-Sar-Ben), a new development within the core of the city. For example, grocery stores, cleaners, beauty salons, located near the new Olsson Associates edifice; apartments, a residential/commercial mix - organized for pedestrian traffic, e.g., wide sidewalks, as well as streets for auto traffic. This is progress, green progress.

Omaha, rest in peace.

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You can also see current and past issues of *Your Country Neighbor* online at:

www.yourcountryneighbor.com

Diary of a Part-time Housewife

By Merri Johnson

I've started to write this column three times now, but I keep hitting a wall. That's what I get for assuming my fortieth high school class reunion, held last weekend, would surely yield some funny anecdotes to share. I guess, in a way, it did.

I discovered I'm intimidated by the "boys" in my class.

I had no trouble catching up with my female classmates. It was hugs all around and easy chatter. None have gone to seed, although a few are already retired. Some are practically raising their grandkids; others are making frequent road trips to help their parents. Others, myself among them, live just close enough to both grandkids and parents to enjoy them or get to them in an emergency, but not so close as to be always on call.

But those boys, um, men...I just couldn't figure out how to walk up to them at the reunion and start a conversation. We're all going on 60, for crying out loud. Why was I acting like a teenager? Maybe there's some time warp that automatically goes into effect at reunions. Suddenly, everyone reverts to the pecking order of high school. Jocks first, then smart kids who aren't nerdy, then smart kids who are, then fringers, then the real outliers, and finally those who were completely unremarkable.

I was a fringer: a friend of the kids who were athletic, popular and smart. The high school equivalent of a bridesmaid.

Maybe I should have had a second glass of wine at the reunion to get my nerve up. I feared that if I just pulled up a chair where the guys were sitting and said "Hi," that no one would know what to say next. I should have done it while the most popular girl from high school was sitting with them. They were all listening to her with rapt attention – just like the old days. I could have slipped in and just acted like I'd been there all along. Perhaps I could have pulled it off.

Maybe this fear is all just in my head. I got out my yearbook today and re-read the "good luck" notes on the senior photo page. All of those guys wrote things to me indicating that we had actually had conversations and friendships in high school.

*Keep up the great arguments!
Remember our great speech class.
Don't forget econ class.
I'll never forget driver's ed.*

Good grief. I don't remember any of those things especially. I wonder if they do now.

In five years I'll get another chance to overcome my insecurities and have a friendly conversation with those guys. I won't be able to avoid it because I volunteered to be on the committee.

So, I'm making a pledge right now to grow up in the meantime and be prepared to actually have a conversation at our 45th reunion. I'll say something witty and relevant. Something like, "So, you still driving?" I'm sure that will lead to an insightful, bonding gab fest. Wish me luck!

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Notes made of blue silk
rippled on the wind
by the clear creek.
Under the thick wood planks
of the rickety country bridge,
a colony of frogs made
mud prints of their bodies
next to the singing water.
Two exotic electric green
dragonflies hovered like
misplaced jungle jewelry,
as the indigo bunting flashed
through the liquid sunlight.

LOUD COLORS

They wear their flashy colors
with a certain nonchalance, as
their voices flow like honey
on the rivers of wind.
Each feather is part of a design,
like a puzzle piece, because the
birds belong to separate tribes.
Their markings are distinctive, and
like bright ornaments, they flit
through the trees and pause
just long enough to broadcast
their presence.

SLEEPING THROUGH THE STORM

The dark of the storm rolls over the hill,
pushing a wall of wind before the rain,
and throwing lightning bolts like spears.
Thunder bombs explode, the sound coming
slightly behind the flash, confirming a
connection between the sky and the ground.
Below the hard stones that write their names,
the previously living souls sleep without dreams,
oblivious to the chaos that roars above them.

Poetry by Devon Adams

BY THE SEA

From a high point on a bluff,
the view is long and lush,
with lovely hills rising steeply
along the line of the coast.
Green trees fringe the shimmer
of the water, and offshore islands
dot the vast expanse of distance.
Tiny boats and larger vessels float
serenely under the great blue silk
scarf of the sky, as small planes
seem to hang on the thermals, like
their feathered cousins that belong
to the clan of the turkey buzzards.
However, this is not the Riviera.
The water is a muddy river flood
that covers fields of corn and beans, and
surrounds the buildings of the farms
and towns on the plain that follows the
Missouri into the Mississippi. In a close up
view, the distant illusion becomes a disaster
looking for an explanation.

FRAGMENTS OF FIRE

In the war between the clouds,
thunder booms across the plains,
as instant fire blooms in hot stalks
that grow from the ground up into
the furious, boiling storm towers.
Images of lightning trees fork
thousands of feet high, even as
they dissipate. In the back of the
human eye, though, the retina retains
the branded lines, until our vision pathway
tells our brain that we are seeing
a forest of unearthly origin, seared
across the horizon, born in hell.

THE RIVER WIDE

Long ago, the river was free to roam
from bluff to bluff, in lazy loops that
wandered randomly, depending on
the wanton whims of rain and snow.
The prairie was a wild and lovely
place of peace and storms, balancing
the wet and the dry, the fires and the rains.
Humans were few and far between, content
to let the land be what it was.
But then they saw the value of the bottomland,
and chained the water like an inmate in a prison,
sentenced to life forever bound and gagged.
However, time flowed past the point of no return, until
an ancient truth once more became a mighty river.

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Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

Writers this month

Devon Adams
Merri Johnson
Shirley Neddenriep
Karen Ott
Josh Whisler
Marilyn Woerth

Thank You

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Editor's note:

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

www.yourcountryneighbor.com

Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

Whoever coined the phrase lazy days of summer wasn't a gardener. Especially, if it is hot, with little rain, hazy summer. During this time of the year I really develop my muscles. Do you know how much a 100 feet of heavy duty garden hose weighs? Me either but I can tell you it's a lot (like a gazillion pounds). And I drag those babies up and down our hill.

So you may ask yourself why don't they have a sprinkler system. Funny I asked my husband that also. His reply had something to do with cost, maintenance and efficiency. Which is true, I'm not sure about the cost, but I do know that some areas would be watered too much, too little or not at all. And most "green" gardening books and magazines really discourage using them. (Besides my husband has me.)

So every summer and fall and like this year, spring, I throw those hoses over my shoulders and troop up and down and all around our yard on my short, stubby legs. Luckily, I have learned, that we Americans (have you noticed how we Americans are always blamed for excesses) water too much. But this time it is true. Most plants (not all) require one long soaking, infrequently instead of the usual dose of frequent sprinklings administered by most land owners.

And if you're really savvy, you learn to plant native plants (check out Great Plants for the Great Plains website). Now why you may ask is it more important to water for a longer period of time less frequently. Well if you water frequently those roots stay at the surface they have no incentive to dig down deep, which would happen if you water less frequently. So when the hot summer sun scorches that top soil, those roots will literally cook. While those roots that have gone in search of water way down under stay crisp and cool.

So you see the only plants in my life that need extra tending during these hot dry spells are my container plants and the vegetable garden. Still use the old stick your finger in the soil with your container plants and soaker hoses are great for the vegetable garden but make sure even there that you don't under or over water, all vegetables are not created equal.

Of course, this year we are scratching our heads as we look out at the ole Missouri getting closer and closer as our yard gets drier and drier. But I will be thankful for my dry hill gardens and send prayers to those down the valley.

Oh and getting back to my statement about not being lazy this time of the year, I'm heading out to do some deadheading (cutting off spent blooms), picking up sticks, removing weeds, pulling out bolted (gone to seed) lettuce and spinach (cool weather veggies), removing maple tree sprouts, spraying for black spot (roses), cleaning up doo-doo from the raccoons, turn the compost pile and other various chores that give me muscles and a splendid yard.

So you see when you live where life is good, even the most disagreeable chores have wonderful consequences. I have learned to dig down deep in order to blossom where I am planted.

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Probably waiting for me to fill the bird feeder.



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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler
Photo Submitted by Author

Fishing:

The River flooded to levels that haven't been seen since the 1993 flood due to the Missouri River reservoirs west and north being filled to capacity from large snow run off from spring melting, and abnormal rain fall in North and South Dakota. The bad thing is that there is no where to go down stream either with the Mississippi well over flood stage also. To add to it there are the local thunderstorms throwing even more water at you. Diehard Fishermen have still been going out fishing in the flood waters with pretty good success. Even though the waters that are being fished are a mile or more from the river itself, the fish are foraging for food at the new river's banks (i.e. farm field or levy). You can give it a try, but you better take some Deet if you go - the bugs have moved in for the summer. The sheer amount of flying bugs is unreal due to all the water that's sitting around right now.

Hunting:

Are you ready to go hunting? The seasons are coming back around. Nebraska Squirrel Season opens August 1st. Too early to hunt you say - you know what - that's nothing. The State of Missouri's Squirrel Season opened May 28th. Where Nebraska's bag and possession limits are 7 and 28 - the State of Missouri's bag and possession limits are 10 and 20. So get your rifle out and sharpen up - the hunting seasons are coming.

DEER HUNTING

Fall and winter deer hunting application/permit time is here:

1st Application period for Fall Deer Seasons is May 16th thru June 3rd.
2nd Application is 1st come 1st serve for what is left July 11 thru the close of season.

You need to go to The Nebraska Game & Parks web page and check the 2001 Deer Seasons out now!


<http://outdoornebraska.ne.gov/hunting/guides/biggame/deer/BGdeer.asp>


Fishing hasn't been the best around here unless you want to fish the flood waters so a lake or pond may be the best right now. Again, Fall Deer Permits can be purchased right now. So get your permits and start planning your fall deer hunt. 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 fishing picture is of Trent Mertes from Brownville shown with a nice Blue Cat caught in the flood waters near the bluffs north of Brownville.

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The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



It was a Lions, Tigers, and Bears night.

Torrential rains, winds in excess of sixty miles per hour, and hail hit us hard, undoing all the work we've done these past weeks. The emerging beans were totally destroyed, while the corn, already three weeks behind in development will be set back another two.

The hundred acres of newly cut hay was either hammered into the mud or washed to the bottom of fields, while the wheat, with its golden promise still locked in its developing heads, was laid-over by the weight of the rain and the push of the wind.

It almost makes a person want to walk off into the sunset and never look back.

The sky didn't clear following the deluge, nor did a rainbow appear; instead, another storm followed...and then another which settled in for the duration of the night. With the extended forecast calling for showers and thunderstorms almost every day next week getting back into the fields will be a challenge.

Dale and I, with the two little boys in tow, spent the evening opening clogged drains, or cutting new ones. The boys, armed with adult sized shovels, took the job seriously, tackling a blocked culvert with man-sized

determination and childhood enthusiasm. When the final bit of debris had been cleared, and water began to flow, the eight year old let out a wild whoop of accomplishment: We did it...We did it!!"

Sopping wet and streaked with mud they leaned on their shovels and grinned, and in their faces I saw a rainbow...God's promise of better days.

We won't be able to do much today except maybe clean up a cottonwood tree which toppled into the field across the road; only two prairie gi-

ants remain of a tree row planted over one hundred years ago, and I mourn each one that falls.

It's daybreak and sun's rays are just beginning to slant over the wounded fields; Eleanor Roosevelt is reputed to have said "Do one thing every day that scares you.".....today that was getting out of bed.

Here's to better times....when the living is easy.

As Always,

Karen

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The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



The sign read 'Road Closed- local traffic only'.

Since I was as local as a person can be I drove on, sloshing through river water as I'd been doing all week. But a day's worth of traffic had deepened the road's wallowed-out pot holes, and the car high-centered long enough to scrape gravel.

From now on I'll be taking the long way into town.

With Horse Creek acting as a buffer between our land and the North Platte our fields remain dry, but for how long is anyone's guess; even Horse Creek is out of its banks, running fast, like some high-spirited plains pony trying to impress the rest of his herd.

Big things begin to float in this much water...cottonwoods, bridge planks, dead cows.....and the hay-stack-like piles of Russian olive trees cut down by well-meaning conservationists who, unfortunately, left the dead trees lying in the Platte River's flood plain. These tangled messes wash up against Irrigation diversion dams and bridges, lodged so tightly it's almost impossible to break them free.

Thank heavens we never got around to pulling out the olive trees that edge parts of Horse Creek....they're the only thing strong enough keep the bank from eroding.

I can hear spray planes this A.M. as they treat area wheat fields for rust. It was discovered south of Morrill last week and is spreading across the panhandle like wild-

fire. If hailstorms and river-woes leave us alone we'll be combining in July...if they don't the world will be short a few more bushels of hard red winter wheat.

The valley's corn is behind schedule with plants ranging from just emerged to three to four inches tall. If we have a late fall, and first-frost holds off till November we'll be OK. If it freezes in September it's all over but the crying.

But those are common, every-year worries, familiar farm challenges dealt with since the first man planted his first crop; we live with them, pray about them, and deal with them when they come.

That's our life.

My baby chickens are doing well. At three weeks the thirty roosters (for frying) and twenty hens (to replace the ones killed by the dogs) are turning from adorable toddlers into gawky youngsters...testing their wings and getting into fights. Even the

females are a feisty lot, standing up to the males with an almost street-wise moxy. The girls will be red-feathered and lay brown eggs while they guys will sprout white and black feathers...until they turn into drum sticks.

Three 'extra' surprise-babies, free from the hatchery, are charcoal black with olive green legs and feet; I'm not sure what they'll grow up to be.

In that respect they're a lot like human babies.

That's all for this week, I can hear morning's siren song....charming me from my quiet upstairs office, calling me out into the fray of daily duties.

I'm burning daylight....and I'd better get a move-on.

As Always,

Karen

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Coffee • Sandwiches • Desserts
Cookies • Truffles

Open M-F 6:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Saturday 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

618 Central Ave. Nebraska City
(402) 873-7537

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