

Your *Country* Neighbor

FREE!
July 2014

A Magazine for Small-Town America

A Cardinal pauses above a backyard birdbath on a warm Summer day, and a Bumblebee turns on final approach to a Canada Thistle.

More Flora and Fauna in the pages that follow.

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Thank You

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Close-up of some Modern Agriculture; June 25th, 2014.



Cottonwood Trees along the Missouri River.
July, 2014 *Your Country Neighbor* 3

Poetry by Devon Adams

STEP FOR STEP

When you were toddling on unsteady legs, he was there to catch you in a fall, as he was when your bike went wobbling down the street. His lips were sealed when you learned to drive, his only comment being positive, so that you learned to drive and stay alive. Then he had to let you go and grow and be on your own, but even though you can't see him there, he continues walking with you, step for step.

THE JELLY TREE

It was huge, when I was small, and it got bigger every year. In spring it was full of blooms and bees, with the aroma of growing cherries filling the air. But by the light of the solstice, things were moving right along. It was when the cherries pulled the branches down, and waited to be picked, that was the height of anticipation for a little girl who could smell cherries cooking in her dreams, and taste the pink floating foam, swirling atop the luscious, viscous mass that was the distillation of summer.

SOFT ON THE WIND

Silent flutters fling them through the pollen soaked air, as they ride currents of scent, these butterflies of summer. Their magic passage from caterpillar wiggles into wings of velvet is beyond explanation. But, without worry about what or why, they make their merry way, caught in the net of the moment.

NEVERLAND

There is a place just over the hill, caught in the fleeting, failing light of the falling sun, where wishes are made into reality. Forget facts, because they won't fit inside this kind of puzzle, where we make the pieces fit our picture instead of letting the pieces make the picture. But it isn't there, this magic place. It never was, and never will be there, no matter how badly we want things to be the way we want them to be.

DAY LILLIES

Stealthy stalks explode from under the soil, sneaking through the night to meet the bright fingers of morning. Then the extravagant petals unfurl, their glowing colors burning. With smiling faces, blooms follow the arc of the day before they wrap their shapes into shrouds, hiding in the dark

NO PROBLEM

When fear grows into a jagged range of mountains, our view is blocked, and we feel trapped in a valley of despair, without options. But, instead of stomping over the peaks in a heavy pair of climbing boots, we sometimes deny there is a problem at all. Any excuse will suffice, if it can be used to prove our shaky theory that if a situation is ignored long enough, it will disappear. Eventually, a landslide comes roaring down the mountain slope, hurling rocks and boulders that smash to smithereens our fragile framework of faulty defenses, and we must face the mirrors of reality.

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Wild Chicory along the roadside; H-67 just southeast of Peru, the back road west of Brownville, Johnson approach usually has a good display.



A wild rose; a weed in the pasture, a blessing along the road.



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Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

“Flowers always make people better, happier, and more helpful, they are sunshine for the soul. “ —Luther Burbank an American botanist, horticulturist, and a pioneer in agricultural science.

Now most if not all gardeners would agree with Mr. Burbank, I know I do. But to produce all those beautiful flowers in the gardens another process has to happen, and the instrument used is the gardener. Gardeners know that they are blest to be outside in Mother Nature working the soil and oh yes, wandering into her little surprises; mole crickets, ground nesting bees (a stinging experience), ground nesting wasps, ants, termites, grubs, larvae, snakes, snake eggs, and my favorite, a decomposing carcass that another critter buried in my strawberry patch.

I recently had a new Mother Nature surprise experience. While going to get the mail on a fine day in June I passed through the white arbor that is in the middle of a row of cedars that line our county road. The arbor has two clematis on the west side, one purple, and one a bell shaped pink. On the east side is a white climbing rose. Coming up to the arbor I smelled a stench and figured some animal had died under one of the cedars. I crossed through the arbor, picked up my mail from the box, and proceeded to cross back through the arbor. I could still smell the stench and hastened my step, and then I heard a sound. That sound lead me to about a gazillion flies covering what looked like a seven foot snake hanging on the east side of the arbor, stuck in the netting placed there for the climbing rose. I did not linger.

Now I am not a real squeamish woman. I pop grubs, slugs, and snails with my bare fingers, and those snake eggs were dissected in the name of curiosity. I mean were they snake or

turtle eggs? Actually I still couldn't tell you. But I do have my limits and I think the whole scenario; the sound of the flies, the flies, the smell and the snake would have to be cut down in chunks from the netting was more than my Victorian sensitivities could handle, thank you kindly.

Now, hubby is out of town for the week with work, and when he comes back he is very busy, (yeah right). Finally he decides to cross a task off his weekend honey-do list by taking the snake in the arbor down. While I make myself scarce retreating to the farthest part of the yard I can find, he heads out with clippers and a pick-up-snakes (and other nasties) tongs. Soon he is involved in his project and I am involved with one of mine.

Coming out of the old garden shed I am confronted by my husband with his hands behind his back. “You know that seven foot snake? It wasn't a seven foot snake”, he grins. “Oh what was it?” I say in wonder. Whipping an arm out from behind his back and shoving his gloved hand holding three snake heads into my face, he then says “It was three snakes.” Husband knows why he is in the dog house, but delights in my reaction.

Mr. Burbank my yard is full of flowers; there were flowers right next to the snakes. Mr. Burbank, flowers do not take the age-eight mischievousness out of 64 year old men.

Now how does one wipe that sight out of one's mind? By staring into the most fragrant rose you can find and keep repeating over and over, “I live where life is good, I live where life is good”.

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Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

Three years ago hubby spent a July afternoon perched on a 19-foot-high limb of the large male mulberry tree in our back yard installing a swing. While the swing was ostensibly for the benefit of our then-three-year-old granddaughter, the death-defying feat of hanging it from that limb was motivated partly by hubby's need to prove that, even though he had turned 60, he could still behave just as foolishly as if he were still a kid.

This year, he plans to build a tree house for our now-six-year-old granddaughter and her 18-month-old brother, and also to prove that although he will turn 63 in a few weeks, he is still young at heart. He freely admits that this will be the tree house he never had. It will be large enough for adults, but outfitted with kid-style amenities. At 8 to 10 feet off the ground, it will have a railing for safety (ours, if not the grandkids'). One end will be enclosed for secret goings-on and a partial roof will shield heads from falling walnuts. It will have a trapeze bar and a swinging rope beneath, and maybe even a zip-line for a little extra pizzazz.

Earlier this year, hubby shared his intentions with our granddaughter. She enthusiastically helped him pace off the distance between the trees and even drew a picture of the envisioned tree house. She is imagining a princess-style castle, while hubby has more of a club-house in mind. I'm sure she'll be thrilled, either way, but I have a feeling she's going to get a good lesson in patience before it's all done.

I chided hubby for sharing his idea with her so far in advance of being able to deliver on the promise, but his inner ten-year-old got the better of him. While design and planning is progressing, no lumber has appeared on the site yet. Hopefully, there will be something to show her when she comes for a visit late in July.

I suppose there's no huge rush. It's not like she'll outgrow it anytime soon. She's only just six.

And then there's little brother to enjoy it for years after Breckin has moved on to other things. And, of course, hubby and I will be sitting up there, surveying our kingdom, until we're too old to climb up the ladder. Or, more likely, until we're too old to climb *down* the ladder. We don't intend to start acting our age for at least another decade.



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Alzheimer's Affects Us All



Brain Boosters: The Lazy Person's Way to a More Powerful Brain
By Lee Nyberg

Everyone needs a brain. You know this; I know this. You probably think there is nothing you haven't heard about keeping your own brain healthy. You've even been studying how to encourage your older adult parents to do more with their brains than play golf or work the crossword.

Doesn't it feel like you have too many things to do already and you'd rather just let your brain take care of itself, for Pete's sake?

Good news. A lot of what we midlife adults do, such as work and life management, keeps our brains healthy and active. In fact, according to Roberto Cabeza, PhD of Duke University's Center for Cognitive Neuroscience, the midlife brain (40-60 years old) may operate more efficiently than a younger brain because older brains tend to use both left and right hemispheres. So just by virtue of being people of "a certain age," we're already in a good spot.

With so much concern about developing Alzheimer's disease, it is easy to question the old saying, "with age comes wisdom." Other experts have found the midlife brain to rival younger brains for several "wisdom" related qualities, such as the ability to interpret/find meaning, handle ambiguity, and moderate temperament.

Even more good news is this: "use it or lose it." According to Dr. Michael Maddens, Chief of Medicine at Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak, MI, we truly will lose our mental sharpness if we don't work to keep it. This really is good news, even though it sounds like more work, because it means we are not at the mercy of a relentless, uncontrolled free fall of mental ability which people thought happened as a natural result of aging. We can use "mental fitness" routines to bulk up our mental abilities. Authors Sandra Cusak and Wendy Thompson of "Mental Fitness for Life," created a 7-step course based on research on 2100 Canadian seniors. Like breathing, some of these you're doing unconsciously now. Check out this list anyway to see what you might want to tweak.

1. Set Personal Development Targets: Learn to play the bassoon or rock climb, i.e.
2. Clean House: Out with your old ideas of self-limited

possibilities and in with new convictions of life-long potential for growth.

3. Create: Grandma Moses began painting at 76. What do you want to create? Whether it is a white garden or a photo essay, make it happen.
4. Cultivate a Positive Attitude: Negative Nell and Ned need to be nixed! Researchers have found that positive attitudes can be cultivated. Positive people live healthier, happier, and longer lives. Think about the people you like to be with, of any age. Are they positive or negative? Change if you need to.
5. Never Stop Learning. This is a powerhouse exercise because active learning actually grows new brain connections.
6. Speak Your (Wise) Mind. Cusak and Thompson suggest starting a philosopher's café, which seems like a wacky idea, but you may have a de facto one going already in social groups where you discuss books or current events in a civil fashion. If you're an expert in your field and others seek your opinion, you've got this one nailed.
7. Work your Plan. Figure out which of these exercises is missing from your routine and then don't think about it, "Just Do It."

I have my paintbrush in hand—I feel mentally sharper already.

Sources: Experience Life Magazine, "Ageless Vitality" by Eliza Thomas

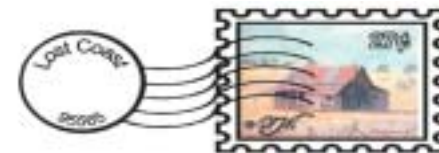
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Life
Is
Good!

Of Wagon Trails and Wedding Bells

By Vicki O'Neal



I was weary of traveling. The journey was long... 1800 miles of mind-numbing boredom. A trip that takes two full days, at best. I was on my way back from California, heading home for a wedding in southeast Nebraska.

My brother was getting married... My big, noisy brother! The ceremony would be held at great, great Grandpa Didier's cabin in Brownville, not far from the Mighty MO. It was a momentous event in the history of our family... and I had to be there, no matter how tired I was!

In western Nebraska, I pulled over to stretch my legs at a rather unique rest area. Getting out of the car, I followed the walkway, reading the signs along the path. "Pioneer wagon tracks," the signs said.

What...? Wagon tracks...!?

I stared at the old ruts embedded in the Nebraska sod. Pioneer tracks! They still remained after all these years?

I marveled as I walked along the path... following the trail of my forefathers. Pioneers like my great, great Grandpa Didier had made these wagon ruts... traveling back and forth on this route in the 1800's. History books say that my Grandpa Didier was one of the first white settlers in the state, and he must have known the trail well.

I wandered on down the trail, pondering the matter—thinking about sun-baked Pioneers in covered wagons. Crying children. The threat of Indian attack. The sweat, blood, and tears. And those miles. Those endless, agonizing miles.

I gazed at the wagon tracks disappearing into the distant haze of history. Then slowly, I returned to my car and continued my journey eastward.

I made the trip across Nebraska in record time. It took me only a few hours, whereas it would have taken my ancestors many weeks in a covered wagon. By the time I pulled into Brownville, I was feeling more nostalgic than ever.

This was the same town where my great great grandparents had wed, back in 1855. I braked to a stop and sat staring about me. Although much had changed in Brownville since 1855, some things would always remain the same.

The birds were singing cheerily... the same sound that my grandparents had heard on their wedding day so many years ago. The same sunlight was slanting downward, as well. The same tired shadows stretched out to slumber beneath the trees as the sun melted slowly westward.

I got out of my car, heading towards the log cabin in the center of the park... It was a reconstruction of my great, great grandpa Didier's cabin, fashioned from the old logs from his original house.

My footsteps echoed as I crossed the old porch. Tentatively, I reached out to touch the walnut logs. They were ancient... so old, in fact, their timber had been growing about the same time that George Washington was president. If only these walls could talk!

I nudged open the door of the cabin and peered inside the gloom. There were no ghosts. No visible ones, at least. But I could just imagine Grandpa Didier sitting there at the table smoking a pipe while Grandma stirred a simmering pot of stew nearby. The silence was heavy.

Suddenly, I heard footsteps. They jolted me from my reverie.

The ghost of my grandfather was standing in the doorway... No. Nix that. It was only

my father. He had arrived for the wedding earlier than anyone else.

"Ah there you are!" Dad said, "You made it back in time!" He gave me a hug. "Just think!... Grandpa Didier got married here in Brownville 160 years ago, and now your brother is getting married here, too."

Yes, indeed. It was remarkable! I couldn't help but think that It would be even more remarkable if my noisy brother stayed married just a *fraction* as long as my great, great grandparents. That would be a feat, for sure! But I didn't tell my father that, of course.

I watched the relatives gathering. They assembled in front of Grandpa's log cabin and stood there waiting in the sunshine, listening to the lilting song of birds. The whisper of crickets.

It was beautiful.

The bride walked slowly down the walkway toward her groom on the porch. She was smiling and gorgeous—so much in love she couldn't see straight, I'm afraid. Halfway down the walk, she stubbed her toe on the rough pavement.

"Oh...!" she said softly, dreamily. "It's a bit rocky, Isn't it?"

"Yes," I murmured. "Marriage is rocky too!"

I raised my camera and snapped pictures. I captured it all. The smiles... the laughter... The tears. The Kiss. At last, I put away my camera with a contented sigh....

It was good to be back again... Home with all my kinfolk... Home where my roots sink deep in the Nebraska soil... Where the birds sing along the Mighty MO, and the crickets whisper my name.

Ah yes. The trail homeward is long and tedious....

But it's always worth it in the end!

NOTE: Folks, come join us for the parade in Brownville on the Fourth of July. My father will be at the Didier cabin, and he will be happy to tell you the history of the old cabin where he spent the first year of his life. See you there!





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