

Your

# Country Neighbor

FREE!



June 2007



Beautiful country scene on a country road near Nebraska City

## June Events in Southeast Nebraska



June is a great month to visit Southeast Nebraska! In Nebraska City there's a 'free admission' day at the Mayhew Cabin on the 16th, commemorating historical *Juneteenth*. Wildwood golf course is beautiful this time of year, and there's always the Arbor Lodge; the peonies were still blooming when I was there in late May (color picture on page 8).

Their *Independence Day Celebration* is on June 30th. Whenever you visit Nebraska City, bring the "**Valentino's Buffet Coupon**" from page 16 of this publication (back cover). *Valentino's* was Leo's favorite place to eat.

Speaking of eating, you can "brown bag it" every Friday in Auburn and listen to music in the Legion Memorial Park.

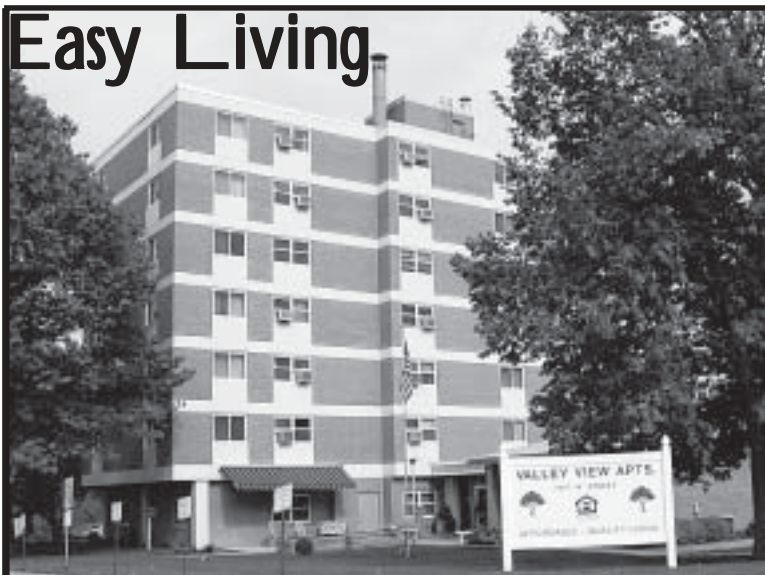
June 2nd is *Old Man River Days* in Peru, June 17th is Johnson's famous *Father's Day Chicken BBQ* at 5:00 p.m., and on June 30th there are Weeping Water's *Limestone Days*, Pawnee City's *Community Festival*, and as mentioned above, Nebraska City's *Independence Day Celebration*.



Free 8" x 10" picture signed by "Your Country Neighbor" photographer. See details on page 9.

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### *Dramatic Expressions*

### *Photography*

by *Your Country Neighbor* Photographer,  
Stephen Hassler

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by Stephen Hassler

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Your

## COUNTRY NEIGHBOR

### **Voices** from the Valley of the Nemaha

Publisher, Editor & Photographer: Stephen Hassler

#### Writers

Devon Adams  
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Merri Johnson  
Karen Ott  
Joe Smith  
Marta Smith  
Josh Whisler

Thank you!

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## *Your Country Neighbor*

**Delivered to the 4 corners of  
Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska**

**In Nebraska:** Auburn, Avoca, Brownville, Cook, Dawson, Dubois, Falls City, Humboldt, Johnson, Nebraska City, Nehawka, Nemaha, Otoe, Pawnee City, Peru, Shubert, Stella, Syracuse, Table Rock, Tecumseh, Union, Verdon, Weeping Water.

**In Missouri:** Mound City, Rock Port.

**In Kansas:** Axtell, Baileyville, Beattie, Fairview, Hiawatha, Home, Sabetha, and Seneca.

**In Iowa:** Hamburg, Riverton, Sidney.

## Garage Sale Day in Johnson

by Joe Smith

What a day! We hauled some garden benches into town for a chance to sell some. Wayne had a sale of all his stuff and he had a lot of it. I didn't sell any benches and really didn't expect to; just wanted to get them out in public so people could see what they were. But we did buy some things at the sale and got a new dog, which we needed like another hole in our heads. But she is a real sweet pup. They say she is a Cocker Spaniel. She is two months old. I think we will enjoy her. Marta missed having a dog since our Toby dog died. Of course there will be times we will wonder why we got another dog, because we go on trips so often.

It seems people go to garage sales looking for bargains. I know we found some. I found some nice hand tools and a big table saw plus a radial saw that I haven't figured out yet. All in all it was a good relaxing day. The weather was beautiful, not too hot and not too windy. Things were going our way. These types of activities are good for Johnson. It won't be long 'til we have the Fathers Day big feed, and then the tractor pulling contest will be coming soon. The more things like this Johnson can have and even sponsor the better off Johnson will be. We even had a birthday celebration for Marcille, I think she was 39 or somewhere around that. It was indeed a busy day for Johnson; even had a few bikers come through. They had a meet in Syracuse and some drifted down here.

That's all I know for now. Joe Smith

## Graduation Time

Joe and Marta Smith

This is a wonderful time for lots of young people. A lot of them are making plans to go on to college or another school of some type. Some are going to a training type of job. They will be getting paid while they learn. It is a very different time in their lives, the carefree days of school and home life are a lot shorter now. It is time they have to make hard decisions on their own. They have changed from children to young adults when they got that piece of paper telling them that they GRADUATED.

Now the decisions they make will have a direct bearing on how they survive this growing up period. I think most will do really well. There might be a few who haven't realized that THEY are the ones responsible now for how well they do or how much trouble they get into. Going to college will take a lot of careful attention as to who they pick for friends. The

colleges are full of sororities and fraternities. Some are good and some are just a place to get booze. They will wine and dine them to get them to join, just look twice before you leap. So I hope they go to these rush parties with their eyes open. This has been going on since I was in college. My, that was a long time ago. I never joined any of them. I don't think Marta did either. It all depends if you are going to college to learn or to have fun. You can do both if you do it right.

In this period of their lives it seems that they realize they have made it. It is a good feeling with some apprehension. "Now what will I do, I'm free, or almost?" The long summer has started. It could be short or long depending on what they decide to do with their life.

Recently we had a wonderful experience of a graduation at Johnson-Brock. They are a fine group of talented young people. Handsome young men and lovely young women who made us feel very proud. We wish them all the very best, as they go out into the world. The future looks very bright.

## Memorial Day

by Joe Smith

This is the weekend when we think about our loved ones who have passed on to the other side. It is kind of hard to go over to the cemetery. We have five graves in one block. You would think it would get easier as time passes, but it doesn't.

I lost one son because of Vietnam. We didn't win that war either. Now I have a grandson-in-law going over there to Iraq. That is another war we can't win. Oh we can kill a bunch of them but that doesn't make us the winners. We have lost the war on public opinion throughout the whole world.

Bush wants more money and more young soldiers to "fight" for our country in Iraq. With the money he just got from Congress it will probably mean we will lose another 1000 troops. Many of those troops are from our National Guard. Troops that were intended to protect our country here in the states, to help in disasters, floods, and such. I believe he called up the Guard to keep from having a draft. I just think about all the families who have been torn up and soldiers wounded for life, and for what? All we are over there is targets. They don't know who their enemy is nor who their friend is. Now Bush is ready to start something with Iran. Oh, he will make a good case out of it, probably like what the Iraq invasion was built on. I thought the new congress would shut him down. But they are just yes men also.

I don't mean to take away the meaning of this time of year; I'm just trying to make it stop. Children who will never see their parent again, wives and husbands who will never see their loved one again. There are veterans without limbs and crippled for life. Again I ask you, for what? Why are we there? We have made every country in the world mad at us with our 'we are better than you' attitude. We are going to rue the day Bush got into office. The main problem was the other side didn't have anyone any better. I'm not sure they do now. Joe Smith

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## Those Pesky Keys to Success

by Vicki Harger

It was a bit embarrassing, to say the least. There I was in the darkness of my daughter's yard, wielding a flashlight while raking through piles of leaves. Cars slowed on Lane Street, and I could feel eyes staring at me from the dimness.

My daughter appeared briefly in the doorway of her house, accompanied by her pampered little pooch. She stood looking at me with a dubious expression. "Find them, yet?" Karissa asked in a hushed tone—conscious of the fact that this was a respectable neighborhood, unaccustomed to rakish episodes after dark.

"Not yet," I said. "Just a purple pen and a pack of Smarties. But no keys."

Karissa sighed and said she would search through my purse again; then she and the dog disappeared into the house.

I couldn't blame her for ducking back inside. The poor girl had a fine reputation to uphold. Having a countrified Mama digging around in the yard, at night, certainly wasn't going to impress her prestigious clientele. Professional women, they were—multimillionaire directors of a famous cosmetics company. Karissa designed websites for women with names like Candice Hawthorne Grant and Vivian LaShay Trendsetter. Women who wouldn't rake a yard at night—not for a million dollars or a pink Cadillac.

Wearily, I raked leaves a while longer; then, feeling cold, I gave up and headed for the house. Inside, I found my daughter going through my purse, item by item. "This is a suitcase, not a purse," she said, "and it's a disaster zone. No wonder you can't find your keys!"

I'm used to her lectures. She's always fussing at me, telling me to get myself organized, to stop chewing on ice, to use this beauty product or that one—the skin crèmes from her beloved cosmetics company, of course. She was at it again, going full-tilt, when suddenly she stopped. "Mother! What is this crème in your purse?"

"Oh, that's just my under-eye stuff," I said. "It helps shrink baggy skin. Women have used it for years."

The expression on Karissa's face had turned to one of horror. "This is hemorrhoid cream! And you put it on your face?" Her eyes were wide, almost pained.

"Mother! How *could* you...!" She fell silent, looking utterly stunned—even betrayed..

No one but a cosmetically-correct woman could understand her feelings, I suppose. Those lovely women with tinted lips and arched eyebrows. Oh, how those perfectly-plucked eyebrows would raise if only they knew of the heresies I've committed!

No doubt about it. I was in serious trouble.

Karissa had recovered her ability to speak, now, and she lit into me with a vengeance—all the while rummaging through my handbag. The fact that she soon discovered my missing keys hidden there amid the mess, only added to her indignation.

In the next half-hour, a lot more than my purse was up-ended and thoroughly sorted. Both the contents of my hand bag and my entire life were scrutinized, categorized, and officially declared unacceptable. My daughter went so far as to carry my hapless purse to her bathroom scale.

"Five whole pounds, Mother!" She pronounced the words like a death sentence—a fitting punishment, I'm sure, for a crime of such proportions. "This packrat business has *got* to stop," she said, tapping the perfect tip of her index finger against the table. "Tonight, I'm going to help you put your life in order, and..." she paused for added emphasis, "and you are *never* going to use hemorrhoid cream on your face, again. It's for your fanny, Mother, not your face. Understand?"

I nodded wordlessly—unwilling to risk another verbal onslaught. But if I thought the worst was over, I was mistaken. My make-over had hardly begun.

With her pampered little dog tagging at her heels, Karissa marched into her office with me in tow. Her office was a showroom, filled with the evidences of her success—a pink display of all that was perfect in her life. Certificates, awards and diplomas were on every wall. In the first 22 years of her life, my daughter had managed to accumulate more accolades, than I had in an entire lifetime. Her clientele included national directors from every region of the country and from England, as well.

I felt duly chastised by the pictures of the prestigious women on her walls. They looked down on me disapprovingly. Me, with my bulging suitcase of a purse. Me, with the dreaded hemorrhoid cream

on my face, and the pieces of dried leaves in my hair.

Karissa began giving me terse instructions. Tonight, I would learn the keys to success; I'd learn what it takes to become a woman of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. My old, slovenly life was over. Understand? Over!

I could only look at my daughter with wonder and a hint of consternation. This was *my* offspring. I had created this model of perfection. It didn't seem possible.

For the next few hours, I was subjected to a bewildering barrage of lessons about computers, e-mails, websites and more. I knew it was hopeless—I felt totally out of my league. But then, Karissa mentioned something called a Motherboard, and I felt somewhat mollified. I *do* know about Motherboards—better known in my world as the Board of Education. They come in handy when dealing with unruly children. I seriously felt the need for one, right now, but unfortunately my daughter was just too big to spank.

With her nostrils flared, she was eyeing me narrowly. I tuned into her words just in time to hear her say, "So—do you think you can handle that, Mother?"

"Certainly!" I said, gathering the last shreds of my dignity about me.

Karissa sighed and picked something out of my hair. She took the glassful of iced tea out of my hand. "We'll see," she said. "In the meantime, I'm creating a website for you and your published articles. I've made you an e-mail address and business cards... Labels, and what else?" She paused. "Oh yes...."

She left the room and came back a moment later, carrying a laptop computer. It was incredibly thin and light. High tech. Top of the line. I was impressed by its sleek beauty.

"Here," Karissa said. "I'm going to lend you this laptop. It's ancient and heavy, of course, but it will have to do. It's been in my attic, gathering dust for ages."

Wordlessly, I accepted the ancient laptop. Wordlessly, I got ready to leave. It had been a long, difficult evening—but I'd gotten through it, somehow.

Feeling the need of fortification, I sneaked a chunk of ice from my tea glass, when Karissa's back was turned, then bending down, I picked up the only evidence of disorder in the entire office. A

*continued on next page* >>>>>>>

doggy snack, left by the pampered pet. I was standing there with the dog treat in my hand when Karissa turned back around.

I don't know how it must've looked—me, standing there holding a doggy treat while crunching something between my teeth—but I do know it had a very bad effect upon my daughter.

The expression on her face was the worst I'd seen all evening. It was one of those Tell-me-it's-not-so expressions. A look of utter despair. "**Mother!**" she said. "You aren't eating a doggy snack, are you?"

I started to laugh, then, as all of my pent-up emotions came rolling out. I laughed 'til I cried—'til my bladder nearly overflowed. I had to sit down on one of Karissa's prissy chairs.

My daughter's consternation only deepened. "Stop it, Mother!" she said, pulling me to my feet. "Don't wet on my chair!"

At that point, she hustled me to the front door and out of her house—handing me my purse as I went out. She and the pampered pooch stood in the doorway, watching as I weaved a bit unsteadily toward my locked mini-van. I was still under the influence of inordinate mirth as I stood there, delving into the dark recesses of my handbag.

It was fitting, I suppose, that the night should end this way—with me digging through my bloated purse—spilling its guts out all over the pavement. The newly-made woman, the Sophisticate-Wanna-Be, kneeling in the leaves at the dark curbside while a car cruised slowly down the street.

I heard Karissa's door go shut with a decisive click, and I found myself alone. Alone, again, without my keys—kneeling in a pile of leaves. Just me and my five pound purse.

A stray cat paused in his haunts, eyeing me strangely for a moment; then, he circled widely around me and disappeared into the shadows. A wailing siren went off somewhere in the night, and I sighed.

If it was an omen, it certainly wasn't a good one.

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## Dowsing and what it is used for

By Joe Smith

For years dowsing was called witching and other names, but basically they all use universal knowledge which is available to all that learn how to do it. Water witching gets a signal from the target vein of water, but we might get the same signal from a “thought form” of a water vein. So that changes it from the ground signal to a mind signal. The more we work with dowsing the more interesting it becomes.

To explain the thought form some more I will give you an example. If a dowser went out to a farmer’s place to locate a well, and the farmer already could picture the well in his mind sitting right next to the barn. The dowser comes out, doesn’t clear all the thought forms and finds the well site just as the farmer had pictured it in his mind. That well would probably be dry.

A fellow from Tecumseh taught me how to dowse when we needed a well to help in a drought 30 years ago. We use thought forms of water veins, mentally, while teaching dowsing. Sometimes the weather is bad, so we teach in a big room, placing veins for the students to find. Of course we ‘remove’ the thought forms after class. If we didn’t they would stay there forever. . They have no water in them; nothing but thought forms of water.

Lately we use dowsing for almost everything. Anything you can think up a question for, you can use dowsing to find the answer. In the last couple of months, I have cleared detrimental energy from people’s houses, looked for lost items, a UFO crash site, several oil well locations, a dozen water well locations, and many things I’ve forgotten about. There is no end to ways to use dowsing. .

We forecast the weather for ourselves and even use it to find out which stock to buy. Is it always right? No it isn’t, but most often it is right. This dowsing ability, you don’t have to be special to do it. Eight out of ten people can dowse if they want to. It is similar to intuition.

The Chinese have used dowsing for centuries. It was used in Europe to find minerals as well as water. All of our history has records of ‘water witches’ who found water for people. It was used in World War II to find water in the desert, and in Vietnam to find the enemy’s tunnels. Plumbers and electricians use dowsing rods to help them locate sewer lines and septic tanks. Most of our cities around the country have someone that can use the “rods”. There was a cable put in front of our house going to Johnson. The engineers had all kinds of fancy locators to find the water line coming under the road. They marked the line with a flag. The fellow that dug the line one morning, stopped, got off the backhoe, got a set of L-rods off his tractor, walked out there and checked the area again, ignored the flag and started digging, My wife and I were watching the whole thing from the kitchen window. We thought that was funny. The equipment the engineers used cost in the thousands and the backhoe operator had a couple brazing rods, probably \$2.00 worth. But he was right, and the engineers were off a couple of feet.

There was a nice harp stolen out in California from a building. Harold McCoy found it for them and it was returned. He wasn’t even there. He was using maps. That is documented. I use map dowsing all the time to locate possible water veins before I go to the area so I can do it quicker.

Lost pets are the hardest to find, they are on the move all the time. People are almost as bad, and some lost people don’t want to be found. They just decide to run away. But until you are asked to help it is better to stay out of it. If you find a body, you would be the first one that is suspect.

Dowsing the lottery and horse races? You’re wasting your time. The Dowsers Creed is Need, not Greed.

The Mid Rivers Dowsers will meet Sunday, June 10th at Fairfield City Council meeting room at 4th and D Street. Joe and Marta will be present at 10:30 a.m. to teach the basic skills of dowsing for anyone interested.

Bring something to share for a carry-in dinner at 12:30. Drinks and eating utensils will be provided. A short meeting will be held prior to the program.

The speaker will be Chris Goldsmith from the Kansas City area. He is an expert in Integrated Energy Bodywork and Intuitive Counseling. He is also a message therapist and was an EMT.

Chris is a hands-on teacher and will demonstrate techniques to show you how to do healing on yourself and others. Wear comfortable clothing and plan to enjoy the day. A free will offering will be expected to help with the speakers expenses.



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## Bird Report on May Arrivals

by Stephen Hassler

All these birds were here in May. The Cardinal has been around all Winter, the Oriole just arrived, the Grosbeak is passing through, the Goldfinch is looking his best, and the elusive Brown Thrasher was spotted in Indian Cave State Park. The Wren and Hummingbirds are back too, but their small size makes it hard for newsprint to do them justice...I will try to post them on my photo blog in early June. More bird pictures can be found at:

[www.yourcountryneighbor.com/photography.htm](http://www.yourcountryneighbor.com/photography.htm)



Tulips and Daffodils are gone; enjoy the peonies and iris now.



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From the Country Neighbor series,  
“Windmills from the Heartland”

by Stephen Hassler



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# Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report

by Josh Whisler  
(Photo provided by Author)



## Fishing:

The Missouri River has been a mess this past month. Spring rains have caused the river to swell to six feet over flood stage. Though this level was only for a few days, this was more than enough time to eliminate access to the river for several weeks. The receding waters left some good and some bad. There is a layer of settlement (top soil) over the entire area flooded by the high waters. This allows low spots that normally have water sitting in them to fill. And areas where water rushed through left holes that water is still sitting in. So the soil thing is a trade off, holes where there were none and previous holes filled in with silt.

Several bad things come with river flooding, one is mosquito breeding areas where the water is trapped or will not run off. We can most certainly expect a nice population of these pests.

Another item not very pleasant when flood waters recede is the smell of rotting vegetation and the dead fish trapped when the flood waters recede into the river. So the river fishing is on hold until the river settles out and the accesses and banks dry out. I'm sure the catfish are biting if you can get there because the water temperature is getting right for fishing.

## Hunting:

The 2007 Spring Turkey Season is drawing to a close. And it has been a dandy! I believe there was moderate success among hunters. The birds split up nicely, and as big as the flocks were there were plenty of single toms and jakes to be had, even though the wind didn't help hunters much, blowing most days since the season started, or at least most of the weekends that I hunted. Turkeys don't seem to want to talk a lot when it's

windy and lay pretty low as far as moving around. So you would have days when the toms wouldn't talk to you or come to your call. But if you stuck with it, it seemed you would finally have one come your way. It's been said to "stay where you are, they can hear you". Well, it worked for me to move if I had nothing answering my calls, to where I could get a response. You take the risk of being seen but sometimes it pays off.

## Mushroom Hunting:

This spring wasn't one of the best years for Morel Mushrooms, but some folks were lucky enough to find a few. I went several times and many times came up dry where I had found them in the past. Some have blamed the lack of truffles was due to the cold spell we had at the end of March where wind chills reached into the single digits and we even had a late snow and ice storm. Whatever the reason, the season was not the best around here.

Spring seems to have turned into summer with the 90 degree days recently. Higher temperatures mean river time to those who like to get into the Flathead cats. It's the Blues turn right now, in the cooler water, but as the water approaches the 70 degree mark, then comes Flathead season. We'll have a lot of good fish between now and the real hot weather so get out and get yourself some. You won't be sorry. 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."

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Joe Whisler and Jeff Dewitt Jr. with a fine pair of toms.



This month I have a different kind of hunting picture, with Joe Whisler showing a 3/4 pound Morel Mushroom found in the hills of Peru.

## Diary of an Unemployed Housewife

by Merri Johnson

Brace yourselves, dear readers. I'm about to reveal a dark, personal secret: I don't like clothes shopping. It's not that I don't like to get new clothes. I'm definitely in favor of new clothes, theoretically, anyway. But you'd think it was still the '90s if you looked in my closet and bureau drawers.

There's a yellow knit shorts set that I purchased for a golf outing in about 1994. Still wearing it. (It's a really good color on me.) There's also a blue knit shorts set that I distinctly remember purchasing for an outdoor concert by "America" in 1997. Still wearing that one, too; although only around the house. And I have a pink jacket that I got when we first moved to Auburn in — *drum roll, please* — 1987!! Yes, I am still wearing it. The color is a few shades more pastel than it used to be, but otherwise it's in remarkable condition.

When I find something I like, I hang onto it. The trick, of course, is finding something I like. Translation: finding something that I think looks good on me.

My daughter can wear just about anything. But I'm high-waisted, so I look like the stereotypical nerd in belted pants. On me, belted dresses look like they're supposed to have an "empire" waist. You remember that fashion style, right? That was a good style for me. You don't see much of it these days, and frankly, when you do, you wish the designers had left it back in the '60s.

Today's low-rider jeans and slacks help lengthen the torso and de-accentuate a bit of a pot belly. I'm all for them, as long as they don't ride so low that you have to wear suspenders to keep them from sliding right off your hips. (Tip: cotton undies, instead of slippery nylon ones, help keep the pants up.) The downside is that you have to wear longer tops to keep them tucked in or prevent midriff bulge from escaping. I heard a radio commentator describe the visual effect of tight low-rider pants paired with a short, snug top. He said it looked like someone had popped open a can of refrigerator biscuits, and suggested that perhaps those with "biscuit dough" figures should choose another style.

Which begs the question: how long can a middle-aged woman get away with wearing what's actually in style? Believe me, I'm not into showing my belly or cleavage (either above or below the waist), but I really don't want to dress like my mother yet, either. (If you're reading this, Mom, no offense, but you *are* 81 and I'm...not.) My daughter told me I don't have to be a slave to fashion, as long as my clothes don't scream "grandmother." A friend told me the goal is to dress like a hip grandmother. Somehow, I don't think I could pull off "hip," no matter what my age.

That's probably why I'm still wearing clothes from the '90s. Conservative styles are wearable for decades and they don't draw attention. That's why they're called "conservative." It's probably no coincidence that my politics match my wardrobe. Please, don't hold it against me.

But, if you see me at the polls in 2008 wearing something flashy or trendy, you can safely assume that I've broken ranks and voted Democrat.



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### EATING COOKIES IN THE LIBRARY

by Devon Adams

Think about going to the library, and contemplate the pleasure that will come when you actually get there. The process is similar to the imagination involved in baking chocolate chip cookies. Anticipation of the fragrance leaking from a hot oven, with cookie dough maturing into actual golden wafers holding melted chips, is enough to set your stomach dial to gorge. Then the cookies become real and the chips pull apart in gooey bites. It follows that books waiting on the shelves are like cookies to be savored, a sentence at a time. Except with books, you can eat them more than once.

### WAITING IN LINE

by Devon Adams

We all have to wait, now and then, here and there, for our turn to pay the price of merchandise, or to pay the necessary charges for existence. As each year falls away our patience wears through the fabric of our lives and we dance in anxious steps wishing that the line would move, that we could have been the first to check out at the register and run through the door, frantic to be finished with our list. Someday soon, our time will come and we'll take our turn, but it will be the last thing we do, and we'll wish we could move to the back of the line and start our lives over again.

### HABITS FORM US

by Devon Adams

My toaster won't pop, and it has left a hole in my day, because when a cherished routine is broken, there are consequences. Like a crashing line of dominoes, the other habits that sustain me are interrupted and changed.

My timing is off, and all things appear to be different. It is the small things of daily life that anchor our wellbeing. They are the cushion and springboard that propel us into the unknown. All the dangers of the day seem less intimidating when we confront them with the reassurance of normalcy on the home front. When a tiny cog is clogged, the machinery won't work as well and we feel less secure. Our confidence is compromised. We can see a minute crack in the sky that could grow with epic speed into a rift that blows apart our plans. We must summon the courage to ignore the ominous sensation of foreboding that will swallow us if we let it. However, routine exists to be disheveled. It is a challenge and an opportunity to embrace the random event and to use it to sculpt our day with imagination and creativity.

### FAMILY TIES

by Devon Adams

Our school was small, and classes were like families. We were sisters and brothers, as we helped each other through the school work, and the occasional mean teacher, and the social situations. Our folks took care of all of us, and we'd congregate at homes as each set of parents hosted parties, and rides to games and contests. Later, by some trick of time, we found ourselves in middle age, watching with alarm the aging of our parents. We still weren't brave enough to see the truth in mirrors, that we were older than we felt. But then one perfect summer day we gathered on the hill to say goodbye forever to a mother than belonged to all of us. From that time on, we clung to parents that remained, and cherished all of them. Blood ties were forgotten, and the only thing that mattered was the bond of shared experience, the ties to childhood that last a lifetime.

### VISIT

#### *Dramatic Expressions Photography*

by *Your Country Neighbor* Photographer, Stephen Hassler  
[www.YourCountryNeighbor.com/Photography.htm](http://www.YourCountryNeighbor.com/Photography.htm)

# The Face of Drought

## A Farm Report from Western Nebraska

Karen Ott

Dry, cold, and windy; 34 degrees Wednesday morning, 36 on Thursday.

After two and a half days of sorting and branding and hauling, the herds are safe and sound in their respective spring pastures. There's real grass this year, not the short crunchy stuff they're accustomed to, but succulent swaths of lush green; the cows are as excited as a bevy of shopping-starved women let loose in an upscale mall.

The bulls however find the larger pastures a romantic challenge; cruising for a date takes extra stamina and finesse when the gals are more interested in galloping from here to there than in a friendly neck nuzzle. Things will settle down in a couple of days when the new wears off, but until then the rejected bulls seem bewildered by the sudden lack of interest in their masculine charms.

It's an exceptionally busy time on the farm as bean planting, corn spraying and beet cultivating all need to be done right now. It's a little early for hay harvest but the tire shop sold its first swather tire today so at least one guy is thinking about it. The shop is busier than ever and we struggle each day to stay ahead of all the work that needs to be done. In that respect it's a lot like farming.

The construction crew will pour the footings for the new tire shop building Friday morning, and sometime in June the steel building will go up. It's been two years since we opened the business, and while I find its success gratifying I still find myself wishing for the good old days when my life revolved around our farm and my family, not the buying and selling of tires and vehicle service.

The crops look good but they could use a rain: even half an inch would help hold off first irrigation. Earlier this week the weather bureau forecast a 'potent' storm system capable of heavy rain, damaging hail and flash flooding, but it turned out to be a weak and sniveling imposter. Scottsbluff got a nice shower but we received nothing but a sidewalk-dampening mist. It must have looked a lot meaner on radar than in person.

The men start planting pintos tomorrow; a little early if you listen to the coffee-shop old-timers. From the fifth to the fifteenth...those are the historic planting dates for beets, corn and beans: April 5-15, beets; May 5-15, corn; June 5-15, beans. Bean acreage could be down this year as farmers try to cash in to the corn price, but then again beans need less water to produce a crop, and in this area that's always an important consideration.

The valley is about to become a micro-cosm of the food vs fuel debate: Torrington Ethanol is going great guns; investors are gathering funds for a plant at Bridgeport; and according to a radio broadcast the Bayard plant is still a go. I'm no expert but I wonder if our drought strapped fields are capable of providing sufficient corn and sorghum (Bayard plant will apparently use this alternative grain) needed without upsetting the historical rotations of sugar beets and dry edible beans. Do you suppose when America's breadbasket turns into America's gas station the rest of the world will feed us?

Now for the story of the week:

We eat supper late this time of year, many evenings finishing up after nine. If I'm especially tired I'll load the dishwasher but leave the electric frying pan soaking in the sink overnight. Monday was one of those nights.

The next morning, before chores, I filled the pan with a little extra water and scrubbed at the bits of leftover gravy, splashing water this way and that; splish-splash, blurb-blug, blurb, blurb, blurb....squeak.

Squeak?

I couldn't believe it. A mouse was doing the breast stroke in my expensive electric skillet. A flurry of questions crossed my mind: How long can a mouse tread water? Where had it been and what had it been doing prior to its frying pan swim? How did it get into the house, and more importantly, how was I going to get it out of the house?

I briefly considered tossing the house cat into the sink but discarded the idea as too

gruesome. Besides, he hadn't eaten anything but dry cat food for the past five years and I doubted he'd have any idea what to do with a mouse even if he was lucky enough to catch it. A large soup ladle offered two possibilities; I could fish the wet mouse out of the water like a chunk of potato from a kettle of vegetable soup, or I could knock it in the head and carry the unconscious body to the trash barrel in the back yard.

Nope to both.....The Yuk factor of hitting a mouse on the head was intimidating, and the idea of carrying it through the house in a soup ladle was ludicrous. What if it jumped to the floor and scurried under the refrigerator? Then I'd really be in trouble.

I finally settled on trapping it in an empty sour cream container; once the mouse was inside I snapped on the lid and carried it out the front door.

Half an hour, and a cup of bleach later, the sink and skillet were spotless. Mission accomplished.

I realize mice are in inevitable fact of farm life but why aren't they satisfied with the brooder house or feed shed? Do they aspire to owning a nest in the house like some people crave a Beverly Hills mansion or a suite on the top floor of a New York high-rise? I can see the beady eyed little devils now....huddled beneath the floor of the hen house.....making plans.

"I'm head'n for the big house tonight; I hear it has an indoor swimming pool."

Have a safe holiday weekend.

Karen

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# Scenes



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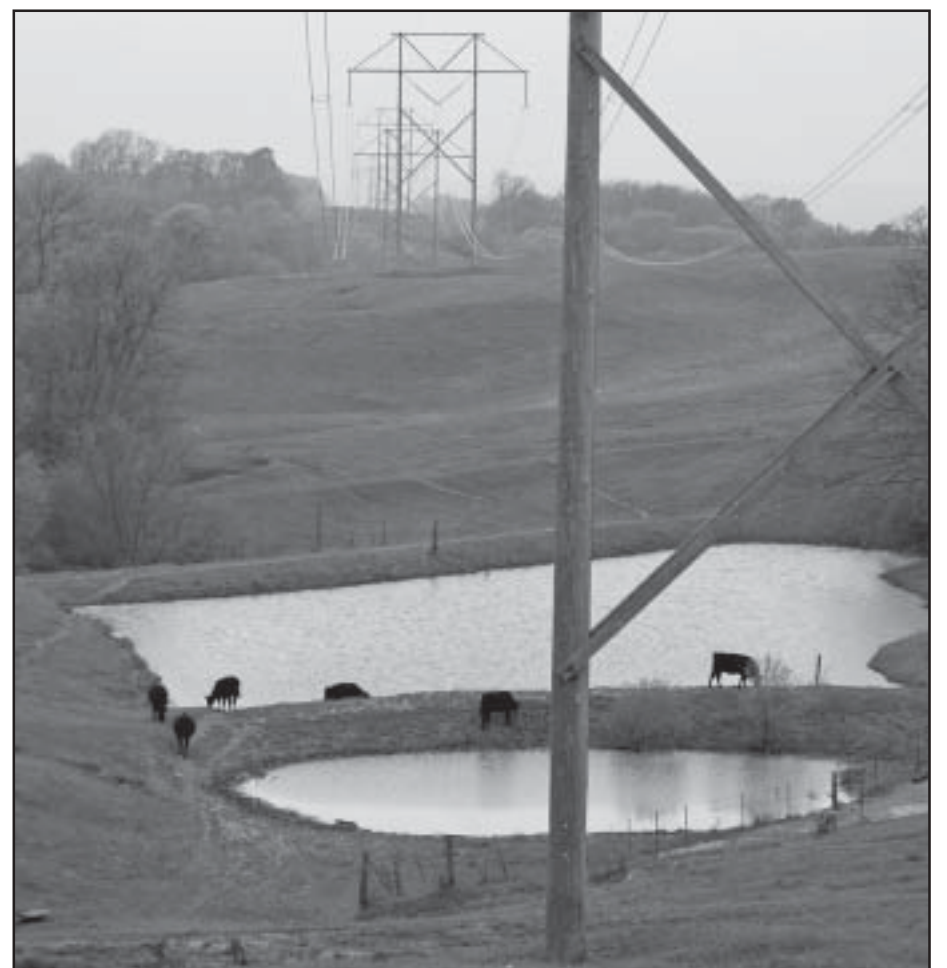
Windmill between Falls City and Rulo.



Most of my pictures I take without getting out of the car.



Raccoon scavenging spilled sunflower seeds. My feeder is squirrel-proof, but not raccoon-proof. Back to the drawing board.



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