



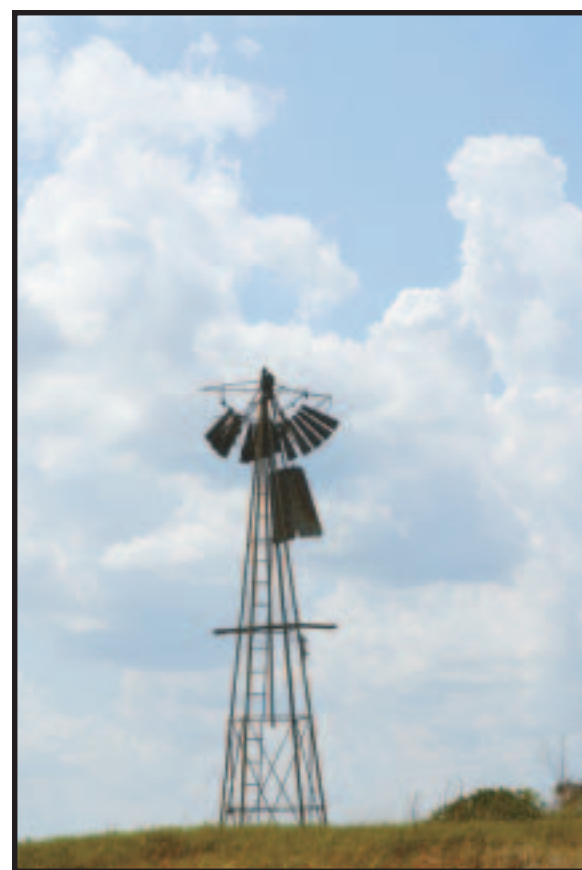
Southeast of Peru, Nebraska



East of Syracuse, Nebraska

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Writers this month

Devon Adams
Larry Christy
Merri Johnson
Vicki O'Neal
Karen Ott
Joe Smith
Josh Whisler

Thank You

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Editor's note:

More than four years of this publication are online at:
www.yourcountryneighbor.com



Canada Geese and goslings, Squaw Creek NWR.



Columbine variety...Brownville area garden

Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

Flying used to be glamorous, back in the days of TV ads showing perky attendants in chic uniforms offering passengers pillows and serving coffee in china cups. It sounded pretty impressive, too, when the strains of Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," United Airlines' old theme song, swelled as a jetliner lifted across your television screen.

I believe I took my first flight in 1971. Honestly, I don't recall much about it, except that I'm pretty sure the return flight was delayed, as we arrived home in the small hours of the morning. That's almost standard operating procedure now.

Last month, my husband and I flew to Savannah, Georgia to visit our daughter and son-in-law. Security at the Kansas City airport was a breeze. I had been a little concerned that I might be questioned about having a rhubarb pie in my carry-on. *What?* you're asking. You read correctly. I had a rhubarb pie in my carry-on. My daughter loves it, so I baked it specially as a surprise for her. I knew she'd get a kick out of it. I mean, who packs a pie in their carry-on bag on an airplane?

Anyway, the pie cleared security along with everything else, but then things started to go downhill.

Take-off was delayed for 45 minutes. Our scheduled one-hour layover in Atlanta had seemed like a stroke of good fortune initially, but cutting it to 15 minutes was cutting it a little too close. We dashed off the plane and made an exhausting run for the shuttle in a desperate attempt to get from concourse B to E before they closed the airplane doors. I knew in my heart that it was all in vain as the minutes to our departure time ticked off. But when we got to the gate, lo and behold, our connecting flight was *also* late. What great fortune! We hadn't missed our connecting flight after all.

But, remember that hassle-free security check at Kansas City at the start of our trip? It seems that was too good to be true. The bottles of cosmetics exceeding the 3.5 ounce maximum capacity that raised no concerns in Kansas City were taken quite seriously by the crack team of Savannah airport security agents. I could either spend \$15 to check my bag, or let them confiscate my items. The choice was pretty much a toss-up money-wise, but my natural aversion to waste is pretty strong. *What do they do with all those tubes and bottles of cosmetics and shampoo?* I wondered. One could hope they at least go into kits for the homeless. I wouldn't mind donating them. But I expect that hygiene laws, being about as nonsensical as airline security rules, would prohibit that.

Ultimately, I gritted my teeth and handed over my self-tanning lotion and other skin care products. As the security agent tossed them into the "potential bomb components" bin, I grinned a little grin of self-satisfaction: at least they hadn't gotten my rhubarb pie.

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Poetry by Devon Adams

QUIET TRACKS

The gravel ends a quarter mile
off the busy paved highway.
Not so many people venture
this far away from speed and
the limits of time that propel their
vehicles like missiles flying
past today into tomorrow.
Local residents who live
in quiet houses at the end
of long peaceful lanes
drive past the gravel onto dirt.
Nothing is softer and more silent
than tires rolling on packed, smooth soil,
a muted humming sound emanating from
the contact between rubber and road.
There is a different sound when mud
is slick and deep. Wet clunks and thunks
echo as wheels throw up great clumps
of gooey earth that splat on windshields
and body until a vehicle appears to
be wearing camouflage paint.
Then there is the sucking sound that comes
from feet being pulled out of the muck.
But, in good weather, there is no better experience
than riding a horse down a dirt road, leaving
quiet tracks, listening to birds and wind, sniffing
the scent trails drifting over the breasts of the hills.

EVENING SONGS

The last light of a summer day
touches the hill with golden fingers
that caress fragrant flower petals, and
the mourning of the doves and the prayers
of the thrush fill the still air with evening songs.

PLANTING DREAMS

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They dream of being flowers,
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PATIENCE TAUGHT BY A PET

by Joe Smith

This is a story about our pup, Sugar Baby. She is a wonder to watch. Every morning she brings you her ball or whatever she can find for you to throw for her. She will drop it in front of you if you're walking and watch it. If you walk on by and don't pick it up she will pick it up and get in front of you and drop it again. She will do this in hopes you will pick it up and throw it again. She would chase it all day if your arm held out. We put the ball up when we are busy or don't want to be bothered. But first thing in the morning and right after supper are her ball times. If one of us gets tired and says, "That is enough," she will take it to the other one and check them out. She will drop the ball right in front of just about anybody that stops in, and stare at it, like, "Pick it up dummy and throw it".

We turn her out first thing in the morning as she has chores too. When we turn her back in at breakfast time, she has a special place under a desk on a pillow. She will try to sneak off and get under the table just in case somebody drops some food. Marta and her go after it almost every day, "Sugar get back on your bed," and she usually does it. Sometimes she argues a little. She will

take advantage every time she gets a chance. When she is in the house with us and needs to go out, she will jump up in Marta's lap and put a foot on each shoulder and stare at Marta. Marta will ask, "Do you want out?" Sugar will jump off and go to the door and wait on her to get there.

When it is time to feed all the neighbors' cats, about 15 of them, including our two. Sugar takes her ball and goes along. Without the ball she wants to chase them. They are not afraid of her. She plays with several of them. Once in awhile she gets swatted, not serious, just playful swats. When a new cat shows up they are afraid of her but it doesn't take long until they get used to her and don't pay any attention to her. She would love to chase them and does if they will just run for her.

Sometimes we let her in and she is wound up, she flies through several rooms at top speed. When she stops, just stamp your foot once and she is gone again. Sometimes I will let her back in the morning, and if Marta is not up yet she will barrel up the stairs and jump on her bed and try to push her out of bed. It isn't long before she has her up.

If you get the idea she is spoiled, you are probably right. But for a couple of old coots like us, she is good company.
Joe Smith

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Summer Garden

by Larry Christy

With his bare knees pressed in the gumbo, he watches the rough skin of a fat toad hopping slowly away from him. Away through the shade that is cast by the canopy of two rows of tall, hearty, mint green tomato vines, staked up in his grandma's back yard garden. It is mid summer. 1975 maybe? Seven years old....

The grass in the horse pasture on the other side of the bur-nished, rusty wire fence is long and green. Cucumbers and cantaloupe vines sprawl out from their planted mounds of earth. The beans are crisp. Grasshoppers watching him, chew their tobacco, wave their feelers and slowly side step around to the back side of a stem.

The toad pauses for what seems like a very long time.... As if listening to the droplets from the sprinkler as they fall and pound lightly upon the earth. His grandmother is on the edge of the garden with her ample bottom turned up, working with a hoe, cutting out the weeds and throwing them into his wooden wagon.

His hair is short, fine and red. His bare white back and skinny arms are getting pink beneath the 11 o'clock sun. He has a yellow bicycle in the front yard with training wheels and a black banana seat. He is big enough to turn the TV. antenna at the back corner of the house and knows which direction to point it to pick up the public broadcast station from Topeka when they show Sesame Street.

His best summer time friend, Heath Bonnett, is spending the summer at his own grandparent's house, just up the road.....and his year round friend, Rodney Hanshaw is right next door. There will be stunts and fights and dares and games of hide and seek that start every night at sundown.

The toad sits as motionless as a clod of iron in the shade beneath the tomato vines. Motionless, except for his throat that pulses quickly, steadily, breathing in the itchy air of the mid summer garden. The blooms on the vines are yellow. The sky is blue.....

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Welding Family

by Joe Smith

Over the last couple of weeks we have had a lot of family show up for different things. I got to seeing how many of my kin were welders. Almost all the grandkids are welders, and making a lot more money than I ever did. I took welding in college. I already knew how from my dad's shop. My Dad was a good welder also, when he needed to be. So I guess it must be in our genes.

When I first started farming I did a lot of welding for neighbors, then when we moved to the Tukumcari area we needed extra income, and I went to work for the Irrigation District as a welder. That lasted about a year and I started my own shop. We had it for a couple of years and it paid a lot of bills and put food on the table, It really saved our necks more than once. Then we moved to Nebraska and started a shop in Brock. That did good as long as I was able to do it. But with my back I needed to get off the concrete. We moved to the Johnson area and farmed south of town for three years before we bought the place we are on now. No matter where we went, I ended up doing welding. I made a shop out of a big old horse-barn. That worked until lightning burned it to the ground. It didn't take long until I had a new shop built on the same spot. Since then we have added to both sides. My sons and grand-

sons have been around the shop all their lives. They can weld circles around me now and make a good salary, much more than I ever made. The only son I have left is also a good welder but he makes his living as an Occupational Therapist in Missouri. His son is a welder also. He works way up in the air on these plants. The one he is on now is in Springfield, Missouri. I hope he doesn't fall off. He does seem to push the envelope a lot. Don't know where he got that from?

Well I think my welding days are past now. I just watch them and smile. We have a bunch of great grandchildren. I wonder if any of them will turn out to be welders. It is kinda in the blood I guess. Joe Smith

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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler
(Photo provided by Author)

Fishing:

The Missouri River has risen with the recent rains. The Spring rain run-off fluctuates river levels a lot this time of year. More boats were out on the river last month, so fish have to be biting somewhere to cause that much interest. I also haven't heard of anything of any size being landed either. But the water is warming up and so enough of the flatheads will be moving in. From what I've seen it's been small channel cats along with the drum, sturgeon, and the 'Old Reliable Carp'. I say that because if you aren't having any luck - hit a sand bar with a night crawler and you'll get some action. The carp's first hit is always the show-stopper because you think you have a monster on. And if you don't watch your pole, it's in the water because they do pull that hard. If you set the hook without pulling it out of their lip - The Fight is on. The way a carp swims in the river current tries even the best fishermen to coordinate the drag and take up any slack as it maneuvers to escape. I believe it's the flat body as it turns against the current that replicate a 50 pounder. Never the less they are fun to hook and play out although you may even get splashed in the end. That is also a trait of the carp - splashing the fisherman with it's large tail in it's last effort to escape. The water is 64 degrees now and soon the fish will be spawning and feed more regularly. But for now we will just have to wait or take what we can get.

Mushroom Hunting:

It's that time of the year, but for the amount of rain we received this spring, we didn't get a bumper crop of morel mushrooms. Don't get me wrong - there were plenty found but not as much in past years with wet Springs like we have had. The initial thought is the temperature was still dipping down into the 40's at night so the ground temperatures stayed low. When that happens, the weeds take over and not as many mushrooms get found. When the weeds get like that, the ticks seem to be more prevalent also. I picked more ticks off of me this year than I picked mushrooms - That's not good!

Hunting:

Spring Turkey Seasons are open and it's your last chance to buy your permit at the Game & Parks Web page <http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/hunting/hunting.asp>.

The Spring Turkey Seasons closed this year on May 31st. This year a hunter can have up to three permits for this Spring season.

Spring Turkey Season is finishing up and there are still plenty of birds out there. Fishing is getting better as the weather warms up. Soon the river will come alive with fishing action. So get prepared, if you're not already. It's coming at us fast. 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."



Joe Whisler with a mess of Morel Mushrooms picked from the hills Peru.



Father/son team - Bruce and Jim Yelick from Plattsmouth with a 28 lb Tom sporting a 10 inch beard. Jim is 87 years young and still loves the sport.

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(Dedicated to my patient husband...and my dear old Dad)

June, at last!...Such a wonderful month.

It's all about Daddies and Father's Day. All about weddings and nuptials and blushing brides...

Well—maybe not *blushing* brides. Nowadays, the blushers are few and far between! They've turned into Drama Queens. Drama Diva's. Drama Mama's...They're proud of themselves, too.

Which brings us to the subject at hand.

Daddies...Don't let your baby girl grow up to be a Drama Queen. For the good of Society. For her husband's sake. For all of humanity—for crying out loud!

And now, folks...I have a terrible confession to make. I think you ladies will understand. I hope. Maybe you can even learn something from my mistakes....

Recently I had a Drama Queen episode. It happened one night not long ago. I was feverish and sick with a bad cold. There's really no other explanation for my poor behavior.

My husband had made me homemade pizza for supper—my favorite kind with pineapples and mushrooms. Michael did the dishes and cleaned up the kitchen. He took me on his lap so we could watch a good movie together. He patiently endured my sneezing and snuffling for many hours.

Then abruptly, Michael ruined it all. Without a word, he got in the car and drove away into the night.

Now, tell me. Where does a man go at 10:15 pm?

For the life of me, I couldn't figure it out. My feverish brain began to whirl with strange suspicions. I thought of all the ladies who find my husband fascinating. They gaze into his blue eyes. They look at his golden curls and glorious muscles. And they follow him around...Asking him directions to the bank. The spa. The theater.

Hmmm. I thought about all those ladies.

Five minutes ticked by. Ten. Fifteen. *That's it*, said the Drama Queen. I'm out of here! I can drive around in the middle of the night, too! And while I'm doing it, I'll look for my lost husband.

Getting in my car, I drove into the dark countryside...still sniffling and sneezing and wheezing. But where do you go at 10:30 pm? Our nearest town was five miles away...and I hate going to town—especially near midnight.

I drove around aimlessly, finally ending up at our mailbox. I looked inside.

Aha! I knew it.

In the mailbox was a suspicious-looking envelope addressed to my husband. A thick letter with a woman's name in the corner. And what a name! "Mimi Stang" from King's Valley. Who has a name like that!? Some voluptuous cowgirl! A Mustang Lady with a flying mane...prancing about in her fancy boots...prattling and flirting her eyes at my husband.

Mimi Stang, indeed. I'll teach you, Mustang Lady!

I opened the envelope and glared at its contents. Hmmp! It was a flyer and a packet of info about a Family Reunion this summer. The

annual gathering of my husband's relatives at King's Valley—where all the prestigious kinfolk get together each summer.

And Mimi Stang...? She was just a family spokesperson. A rather elderly one. No voluptuous cowgirl. No flying mane. No mustangs.

Well. I beg your pardon, Mimi.

Sheepishly, I slid the letter back into the envelope. Then I pulled my car into the driveway. My husband was home, by now, and he was waiting for me upstairs in the bedroom. There on my pillow was a brand new bottle of cold-medicine...A big bottle of Nyquil for his sick wife.

Oh.

So...maybe I needed a good dose of common sense to go with the Nyquil. So...maybe I'm not quite sane. So...maybe I'm the worst kind of Drama Queen—worse than all the *Drama Diva's and Drama Mama's* combined!

Still sniffling, I climbed into bed and pulled the covers up over my head. I wept. I snuffled and sneezed. This was all Mimi Stang's fault. She was to blame.

My husband patted my shoulder and slipped me a Hershey's chocolate bar. Just a little one. Not enough to make me fat—but enough to keep me sweet..

I'm glad to say that I've recovered from both my sniffles and my *Drama Queen Syndrome*. I really have. I know you folks don't believe me, but I'll share another quick story to prove my point....

The other day I was busy making dinner in the kitchen. Everything was under control. No disasters had befallen me, of late. The blueberry muffins were golden brown. The chicken looked splendid, and so did the salad. Spinach was simmering gently on the stove. Everything was perfect.

I was ready to call Michael to the table, when suddenly the spinach pan turned ugly on me. Its handle went into my side-pocket as I passed by the stove.

Splat! The pan hit the floor. Hard.

Well. I had a choice to make. I took a deep breath. I did *not* have a Drama Queen outburst.

Moments later, Michael came into the kitchen to find me calmly slicing tomatoes amid a splattering of chopped spinach. It was all over the stove. The floor. The walls. The cabinets. The fridge door—and everywhere in-between.

There was a long silence, then my husband leaned down and picked up the offending cookware. "Obviously," he said, "you've had a Spinach Outbreak." He looked at the pan. "A *Pan-demic*, wouldn't you say...?"

"Indeed..." I said, stepping past the green blobs on the floor. "Are you ready to eat, darling?"

Michael sighed and didn't say another word. He just got a handful of paper towels and went to cleaning up the mess.

You see, ladies...? That's how you do it. No Drama Queen routines or Drama- Mama syndromes. Just stay calm, cool and collected.

Your man will appreciate it, I assure you....

Just ask my husband.

Vicki O'Neal
www.VickiO'Neal.com

The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



I've breathed the dust of drought, and tossed and turned in a bed crowded with water worries. I've seen pastures go from hopeful green to desiccated grey, and walked in shrunken rivers turned ankle deep and bath-water warm by barren skies. I've spent hot summer afternoons reading empty clouds, crisp winter evenings remembering the snows of my childhood, and every day in-between praying for relief.

And it has come.

For the first time in years the valley is experiencing a 'wet' Spring: the Wyoming watersheds will provide ample runoff; the irrigation districts will deliver a full complement of storage water; the fields have adequate sub-moisture; and pastures welcome hungry cows and calves with something more substantial than the scrubby, here-today-brown-tomorrow, cheat grass.

To a people who regularly measure rain by tenths, instead of inches, the greening of the valley seems almost too much, the lush Spring growth almost too luxurious; several times over the past week I've found myself startled by the emerald green appearance of the area's generally buff-colored bluffs, amazed, like the Wizard of Oz's Dorothy, at the richness of color. It's a sight rarely seen....even in good years, and it takes some getting used to.

To be sure there are a few isolated areas which could use a shower; on a recent drive to Scottsbluff I passed a small number of fields being irrigated up, and for several weeks farmers have been watering winter wheat and alfalfa where surface water is available, but that stems more from a sense of duty to the water table than any real need of the crop; the urgency isn't there....just an obligation to the land.

The valley's beet and corn crops look good...but both could benefit from some warm weather. When I stepped outside early Wednesday morning to shake the kitchen throw rugs I was surprised to find a film of frost coating the lawn and the pickup windshield...not a damaging frost, it was too short-lived for that...but still, June is just days away.

Fields are being readied for dry beans, and if the weather holds we should begin planting Friday or Saturday. Thanks to the intervention of Governor Heineman, Senator Ben Nelson, and many others, Great Northerns (white beans) are back on the market after months of inactivity; the past winter proved to be a frightening experience for farm families who planted, raised, and harvested a crop only to find they couldn't sell it at any price. Every-

one, farmers and elevator operators alike, are happy to put that chapter of bean history behind them.

While rain has been welcomed here like an old friend, farmers in Indiana and Illinois would just as soon see its backside. Some commodity experts/analysts point to last year's soggy conditions in those states and recall farmers planted and harvested a record crop, but what they've failed to take into account is the difference in corn price; 08's seven and eight dollar per bushel price was a great motivator....09's four dollars not so much.

It's off to bed for me; the tire shop has been exceptionally busy these days and each afternoon I return home tired and stressed. The nation may be experiencing a deep downturn but you couldn't tell it by looking at our daily schedule; we're booked solid (auto repair and tire work) every minute of every day.....and the phone never stops ringing. At four years (we opened four years ago May 15) the business continues to expand its offerings and grow its customer base.....and that's a good thing.

What's not so good is the fact that I've yet to plant the across-the-road-pumpkins, or change the scarecrow's winter clothes for some snappy spring duds.

I'm a business woman who'd rather be a home-maker, an office manager, shop foreman, and decision maker who'd rather be mowing the lawn.

If I could choose I'd go back to being just "a woman who loved a good rain", but until farming provides families with a more stable income I'll keep doing what I'm doing...for my husband, for my sons, for all of us.

Because that's what women do.

Karen

Melinda D. Clarke, CPA

Tammy Westhart, Accountant

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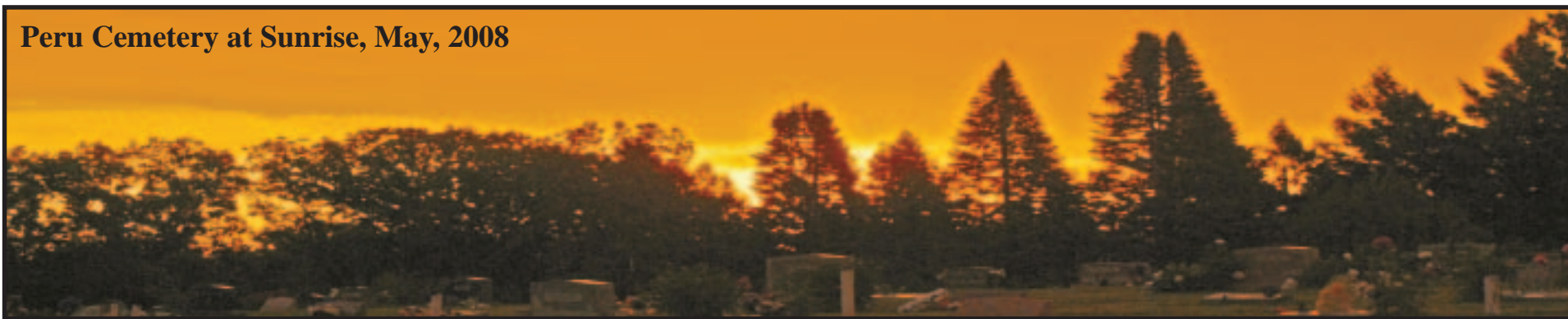
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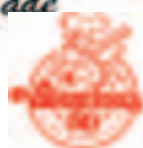
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