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Voices from your Valley

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Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

Writers this month

Devon Adams
Frieda Burston
Merri Johnson
Vicki O’Neal
Karen Ott
Joe Smith
Josh Whisler

Thank You

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Writers

by Joe Smith

I had a chance to take a writer's class. Maybe my writing will improve, small chance of that though. You get my age you are pretty well set in your ways. They say you can't teach an old dog new tricks. There are some authors near here, one is in Humboldt and one in Nebraska City, Grand Island, Omaha and others. I think there are over 35 authors in the class or like me, wannabe authors. There is a nice lady in Omaha giving the class. There are people from Canada and even Australia. So with a little luck and a lot of work I might get to sell some of my work instead of giving it away.

I wouldn't change writing for the Rag or the Country Neighbor, They come first as long as they don't throw me out. Some of the things I write about it is a wonder they still let me write.

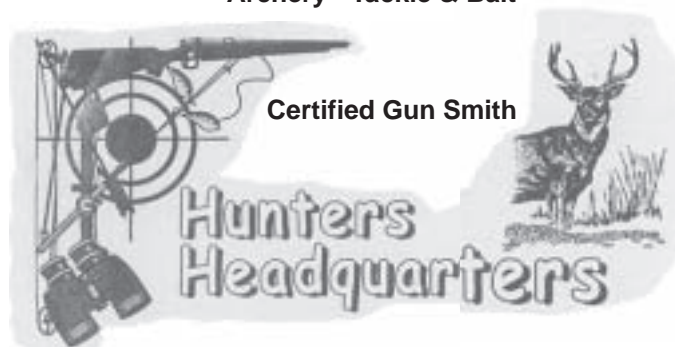
This class is mostly women. I think I'm the only male there. That's all right I'm harmless anyway so you don't have to worry. Nebraska Writers Guild, of which I am a member, I think sponsored this class. So far it has been very interesting. I hope this helps me learn how to improve my writing and to contact people that might be interested in publishing my book. I do this by the seat of my pants anyway. When an idea hits me I sit down at this computer and try to get it on paper. Just like right now, I got the idea to write this story about the class and here it is. There are several people in the class that have a lot of books out. Not me, I have only written the one. I have another one about done. First I have to find out if the first one was any good. Personally I think it is but I'm biased. The writing game depends on your name as a writer. I have read some best sellers and I think my book is as good or better. There is a fellow in Branson that is a John Wayne look-alike that writes books. I bought one which didn't impress me that much, BUT he has sold 10,000 books. So your skill as a writer is just one of the things that sell books and definitely not the most important. But that comes through the publisher I'm sure. With a name like Joe Smith who wants the put out his book?? Maybe I need to change my name? Harve Bodine alias Joe Smith



Neal Park in Peru; Shadows on the Snow

Due to software difficulties, *Your Country Neighbor* cannot insert Merri's 'Diary' this month. Much more effort will be made to accomodate Merri in April.

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Poetry by Devon Adams

OYSTER SHELLS

The sky is a fragile shell,
curved over the earth,
its shiny, satin surface blushing
like the palest rose.
The long reach of the land
kisses the pink air
and becomes a dreamscape,
perfect in its composition,
momentary in its existence.

THE WEB

The room is silent, as dust motes dance
in the slanting sun knives that are
cutting through the windows.
Empty air fills the house.
Then the phone rings, and the
TV is turned on, and a computer
starts to hum, and quiet evaporates.
Invisible signals draw lines of communication
that are like string strung through all the spaces,
until we are trapped inside a spiderweb
of technology that holds us hostage
from the natural world.

WHICH WAY

They've been here most of the winter,
flying by at sunset and sunrise,
their undulating arrows aiming
north and south and east and west,
confused by confusing temperatures
that say spring today, winter tomorrow.
Who's to say that soon the earth
won't turn upside down, and then
these geese will lose
their gyroscopes altogether.

THE SHADOW SIDE OF WINTER

Snow is lovely on the shadow side
of the pretty hills.
It is blue, in many shades of cold,
and it lasts and lasts, and
sometimes never melts.
Until April.

GREEN DREAMS

If you take an early walk through
the last of the melting snow
that wraps around the tree trunks
in the timber by the creek,
you'll find moss glowing green
and growing in the mud of spring.
It is clean and fresh and thick,
in mats that hold the soil
over layers of limestone
left from an ancient sea.
Its tiny fingers wiggle in slow motion,
reaching for air and light, and
the busy raccoon takes time out
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Yes, there are Snakes in Paradise (continued)

by Frieda Burston

Not me. I'm still happy that I'm here. I open the front door a lot and look out in this dark and misty weather to see what's moving around in my little Paradise. Nothing big and scary. Yesterday I stood there in the open doorway and watched a hummingbird only a few feet away from me, drinking out of the tall flowering whateveritis by the door. He paid no mind to me. I might as well have been rooted in the floor myself, as far as he was concerned. The hummingbirds at Heritage Pointe always shot straight up in the air, if I came around. Not this one. He wants me to know that he's here, and I'd better get used to it. I'm happy for it to be that way.

My kitchen ends with a dining area that opens on the patio. I usually sit there and look out while I dry the dishes. This morning there was a flash of blue, and a couple of bluejays were screeching across the fence. I laughed. It reminded me of a Chinese fortune-telling game we bought when our girls were young. Every card predicted a greater calamity, but no matter what card you turned up in the last place, you always got some cheery variation of "The bluebird will yet sing in your back

yard." It got to the place where every time they or their friends didn't get what they wanted, someone shrugged it off with "The bluebird will yet sing—"

I know, I know. Bluejays are not bluebirds. But bluejays are blue birds, if you want to be picky. And here were two blue birds, not exactly singing, but definitely in my back yard. And at the end of the game, so to speak, singing. Well, not exactly singing, but pretty much near the end of MY game, anyhow. I've carried that game around from one place to another until here. Maybe I ought to lay it out tonight and see what greater calamities I have avoided all these years. I've only focused on the ones that hit me— maybe those bluejays are telling me that I ignored the ones that missed me, instead of rejoicing in having escaped them....

Will the bluebird yet sing in your backyard? Or particularly in these days, are you too focused on the greater calamities that may happen, to notice how many you have escaped?

Think bluebirds...Best wishes, Frieda

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Nemaha Valley Museum Sets Goals for 2009

The board of directors started 2009 reviewing the activities of 2008 and setting goals for the 2009 year. The newly elected officers are Sue Remmers, President, Duane Palmer, Vice President, Mary Schlange, Secretary, and Dennis Norvell, Treasurer. Board of directors at large, Dave Thomas, Maxine Schatz,, Ben Hall, Suki Fischer, Bill Grow, Mary Kruger, Lonnie Neddenriep, and Margaret Piper. There are four slots open for board of director positions and contact with any of the above can bring your wish to serve to the board.

Special projects designated for 2009 are the Plant Sale in April, Farmers Market, County Fair booth and float, and Christmas on the Square. The designated town to be featured at the fair this year is Brownville. Ongoing projects include bi-monthly displays at the museum, continuing the assessments of items from the Stocker-Rhodes gift, accession of museum items with a possible training session to new members of the board. The maintenance to the Museum buildings is a long list and needs to be reviewed and listed to priority and budget status.

The importance of the need for volunteers at the museum in many areas and for varying time slots was stressed. Questions about volunteering may be directed to any of the officers or board.

Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler
(Photo provided by Author)

Fishing:

The Missouri River had its ups and downs last month, but still hasn't produced a lot of fishing opportunities. I saw some folks giving it a try in last month's warm days, but I've not seen much coming out of the attempts. And now with the recent weather it seems like the interest in river fishing has been put on hold again until better weather.

The area ponds and lakes can no longer support fishermen on them. The ice was there one day and gone the next. All it took were a few 60+ days and the wind and the ice gone for another season. That doesn't mean the fish aren't hungry. Soon enough the water will open up to let a line in. until then we'll just have to wait.

Hunting:

Winter hunting seasons have drawn to an end, and The Game & Parks has already started setting seasons for this coming Fall – reference the Game & Parks Web page <http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/hunting/hunting.asp>

The Spring Turkey Archery Season starts already on March 25 with the other seasons to follow. This year's permits can be bought starting 'The Second Monday in January' – YES you can buy a spring turkey permit NOW! This year a hunter can have up to three permits for this spring season.

2009 Spring Turkey Seasons:

Shotgun Statewide — April 18 - May 31

Archery Statewide — March 25 - May 31

Youth Archery — March 25 - May 31

Youth Shotgun — April 11 - May 31



This month's Hunting Picture is of a flock of turkeys foraging for food.

Hunting is on hold for now, but the Spring Turkey is fast approaching so get your permit now. Fishing will opening up soon enough too. So prepare to get with it when the weather breaks. You'll be glad you did when you bag that first Tom or stringer of fish. 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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Country folks say that a full moon can make you act goofy.

But the Ancient Greeks had a more optimistic outlook on life: *"A full moon means a happy marriage,"* they said.

Well. Michael and I got married during a full moon. We weren't superstitious, though. Not in the least.

At our Wedding Luncheon, we were given fortune cookies. We opened them with care-less good humor. The first cookie said: "Your spirit of adventure is leading you down an exciting new path..." The second was a bit more explicit: "Pleasure awaits you at the *Seashore*," it said.

Indeed.

As planned, we spent our wedding night at the *Inn of the Lost Coast*—a place of wild beauty. Raging surf. A full moon. Blazing fireplace, and a private balcony.

No—the bride did *not* fall off the balcony into the sea...Nor did she plunge through the big French windows. Almost. But not quite.

In the morning, the groom bundled his silly, sleepy bride into the car and headed down Highway 101 toward San Francisco.

Eventually, we pulled into Michael's old neighborhood—the Berkeley Hills. I gazed in awe at the ritzy mansions perched on the mountainside.

"Oh my!" I said, staring at the \$3-million-dollar home where Michael had spent his childhood. "Oh my!"

We rounded a corner and came to a stop at the Hotel Claremont—a beautiful white castle overlooking the Bay. My mouth fell open. I really doubted that a country girl belonged here at the Claremont—even on her honeymoon.

"Michael! This place is outrageous," I said. "The parking fee, alone, is 25 bucks! I bet these rooms are \$1000 a night! Surely we're not staying here...?"

But my groom was resolute.

He parked the car and picked up our suitcases, heading for the elegant lobby. I grabbed some granola bars and a bag of fruit from the car and ran to catch up with Michael.

"A Claremont candy bar," I warned him, "...will cost 5 bucks!"

"Relax and enjoy this!" he said. "And when you see the *concierge*..."

"What's a *concierge*—?" I started to say, but then my words trailed off.

We had entered the hotel. The lobby was enormous, as big as a ballroom. Huge mirrors and sparkling chandeliers. Butlers and stilted words. Everyone conversed in hushed tones.

I felt overwhelmed and uneasy. I was in need of a restroom, but there was none in sight.

Michael signed us in at the desk, then steered me down a corridor to the elevator. It

was there at the elevator that things started to go wrong...Mostly because I didn't know where we were going.

We rode up a few floors on the elevator, then it stopped and Michael got off. I started to follow, but my bag of fruit tumbled to the elevator floor, blocking my exit. The doors shut and Michael was gone.

The elevator rose, bound for destinations unknown. I was trapped for the moment...Me and my renegade fruit.

Apples and oranges rolled about the floor...I was trying to corral them when the elevator hummed to a stop. Doors opened. Butlers and pompous folks stood looking at me...well-dressed guests who had never seen a gal scrambling for fruit, while clutching her bladder.

No one would get on the elevator with me.

They just stood there, mute...expressionless. Staring at me. Then the doors slid shut, and I found myself rising up and up and up.

Folks always say: If you're lost and don't know where you're going, you should just stay put 'til someone finds you.

So I did.

I rode up and down the elevator—waiting for my groom to find me. But Michael never did appear. Never did come to claim his hap-less bride. Every time the doors opened, it was always someone else staring at me. Never my groom.

At last, I knew I had to get off.

Gathering my fruit and my last shreds of dignity, I stepped from the elevator. I found a staff member, and was busy explaining my predicament, when I looked up and saw my groom standing there in the corridor.

I hurried to him, the bag of fruit bouncing against my side. Michael didn't say a word...Didn't say that I'd embarrassed him, or that I'd made a buffoon of myself. He took my bag and led me gently, but firmly, to our honeymoon suite—high up in the castle.

Suddenly, I forgot all about my mortifications. The view from the window was stupendous. Dizzying. Breathtaking.

The earth stood still. Then slowly it began to revolve, again—revealing a panoramic scene that spanned the horizons.

I saw stately palms...a sparkling Bay...the Golden Gate Bridge...San Francisco. I stared and stared. I was like a princess in a big white castle...But a rather discombobulated princess, at that.

It was the beginning of a strange evening for me—a time of learning and discovery. Learning to be stiff and stuffy. Learning to give the attendants a big fat tip every time

they lifted a finger. Learning to eat fancy crackers and goat cheese.

(I hate it. It stinks like goats.)

Strangest of all was the prospect of exploring the hundred-year-old hotel. We took a leisurely walk through the Claremont's historical past—climbing the stairway toward the tower rooms where Generals and nobility had slept in splendor.

We looked past the finery to the mysterious shadows in the corners, and we wondered....

I never saw a ghost at the Claremont, but I heard one—I'm sure of it. Strange sounds late at night. Around two-o'clock in the morning, I heard shuffling footsteps crossing the floor. I heard Venetian blinds being raised.

I had a hard time sleeping the rest of the night. I got up several times to check for intruders...even going so far as to take flash photos in the darkness. A number of white orbs appeared on the screen of my digital camera. But nothing else.

I asked Michael about it in the morning.

"Ghosts?" he said. "It wouldn't surprise me." He was silent a moment, then added: "Come to think of it, there was something in the room last night that woke me up."

"Really!"

"Yes. Someone in a pale robe." He looked somber. "I only got a glimpse of her, but she seemed to have a real nice figure..."

"Oh Michael!" I hit him with a pillow. He was too much! But I knew, then, that he'd forgiven me for my transgressions...for embarrassing him in the elevator.

We loaded up our suitcases after that—leaving the Claremont castle with its gorgeous view, its mysterious ghosts...and high-falutin' people.

It had been an experience, to be sure.

Michael and I had already learned several things as newlyweds. We learned to not take each other for granted, especially in an elevator. And we learned to never take the words of a fortune cookie lightly—especially during a full moon.

And as for the proverbial wisdom of the Ancient Greeks? Well. We decided that the Ancients must have known what they were talking about....

"A full moon means a happy marriage."

We were quite sure of that.

Vicki O'Neal
www.VickiO'Neal.com

The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



I don't like to say "I told you so.", but when Texas-based Valero Energy, the nation's largest oil refiner, announced plans to buy five huge ethanol plants, including a brand-new refinery in Welcome, Minnesota I couldn't help but remember something I wrote several years ago outlining my belief that the newly-born ethanol industry would never survive into healthy adulthood, regardless of substantial government subsidies, until big-oil had pried it from the hands of farmer-investors and had it safely ensconced in their own deep pockets.

I didn't know how the shift in ownership would come about, or when, but I knew it was coming as surely as winter follows fall and summer follows spring.

Was I clairvoyant? Did I have a crystal ball? Did I know someone, who knew someone, who knew someone in the top echelons of the entrenched energy industry? Nope; I can't claim a single prescient bone in my body, nor was I privy to a shred of insider information.....but I know farmers and agriculture in general, inside out and upside down.

I know how farmers think and how they react when push comes to shove. How agriculture's short-lived booms, and long drawn out busts, affect the bottom line.....and what a man will do to protect his land, and his way of life, from creditors.

In the beginning, when the production of ethanol was considered more fairy-tale than actual fact, oil executives, exhibiting the David vs. Goliath mentality which had served them so well in the past, chuckled indulgently at the notion of biofuels, while neophyte farmer-investors interested in diversification, and the prospect of expanded marketing, heard opportunity knocking, and opened the door (and wallets) to plant construction.

When blueprints turned into buildings battle lines were drawn, and when production chugged along despite the efforts of Big Oil's PR departments it was open war.

So how did we get from there to here? Why did an industry built as an alternative to oil suddenly end up on Valero Energy's acquisition list?

Was it the specter of carbon regulation that caused Valero to hanker after ethanol plants, the realization ethanol wasn't going to go away, or was it a visionary peek into a future where bio-fuel production translated into big profits?

Whatever the reason Valero's timing was impeccable: bankrupt Vera-Sun's five ethanol plants were

on the market at fire-sale prices just as corn futures spiraled downward, guaranteeing cheap inputs, and an Ag sector desperate for cash.

If Valero Energy is successful more sales will surely follow, and in a few years the dream of a home-grown rural renaissance based on ethanol production will be a fading memory. It's the way things are in rural America, it's the way things have always been; when outsiders hold all the cards and all the money...family farmers are left barely holding on.

But enough of what might have been. Let's talk romance.

I'm not much of a romantic in the classic sense; I enjoy a dozen red roses as much as the next woman but age, practicality, and the stark realism of day to day farm life, have a way of wringing sappy sentimentality right out of a person, replacing it with a more down to earth definition of "and they lived happily ever after." Contrary to what Hallmark and Hollywood have led us to believe, real life romance is more about ordinary people doing ordinary things than singing cards or perfect people wearing perfect clothes dining out at perfect restaurants.

I don't own a single piece of diamond jewelry: even my wedding band is a simple circle of gold. But I treasure the tiny nubbin of colored corn Dale plucked from a truckload of golden kernels just because he thought I'd find it pretty, and all those summer evenings he's opened the kitchen door and called, "Come watch the fireflies with me" mean more than if he'd purchased two tickets to Paris.

I rarely drive anywhere in the winter where he hasn't warmed the car in anticipation of my leaving home, and except in a truck driven during harvest, I fill fuel once in a blue moon. He rubs my head when I suffer from a migraine and my hands when they ache from arthritis. He's built shelves and bookcases, laid carpet and installed new windows....not because he loves carpentry but because I asked him, and he's been known to stop and remove a dead rabbit from a county road because he knew the sight of it would bring tears if I passed that way. And yes....the flowers, cards and trinkets he brings home every chance he gets are nice too...but if he never brought me another bouquet he'd still be the world's best Valentine.

That's true love.

Karen

Melinda D. Clarke, CPA

Tammy Westhart, Accountant

Combined: 18+ years experience

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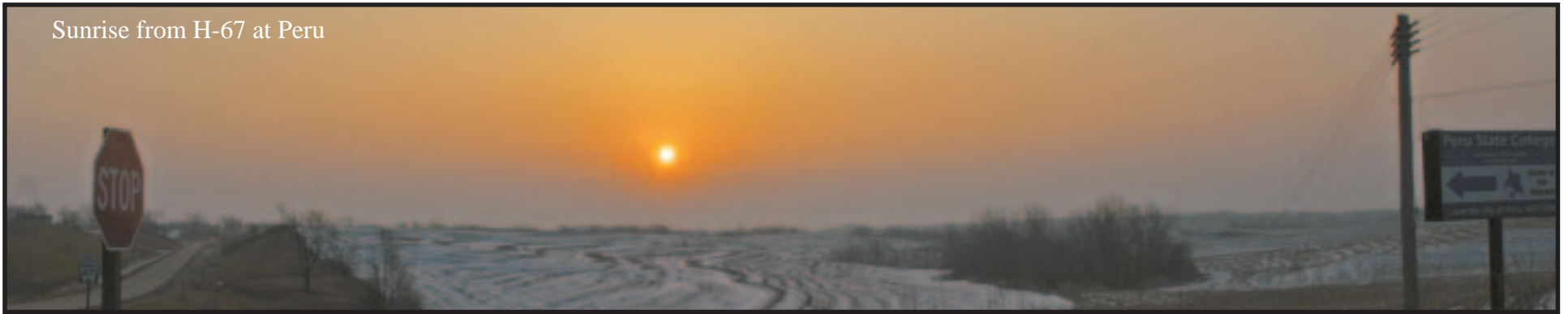
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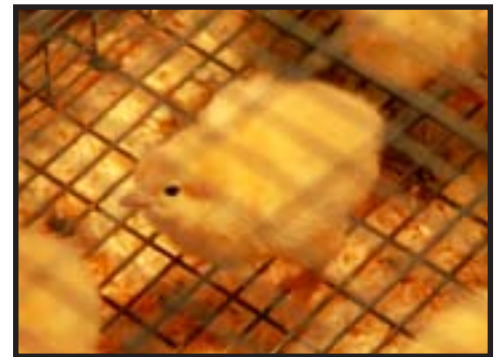
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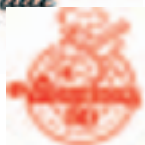
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