

Your

FREE!

Country Neighbor



March 2006

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Springtime in the Midwest?

March is about...

Spring! Not a doubt about it, March is dominated by thoughts of Spring, and with the mild weather we have been having, we might expect to see more unseasonably warm (and dry) weeks ahead.

March is also about field work...getting a jump on preparing the ground, gardens, Bea's 'sprouted' tomatoes, Josh's favorite river, May's primary elections, and thoughts of Easter plans.

Keep up with reading *Your Country Neighbor!*

Your Window with a Country View.



Waiting for Spring, here at sunset, on a crest shouldering the highway between Horton and Hiawatha.



Got Oats?

Color Photos

at

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E-mail this publication

to your relatives and friends who live outside our 'Country Neighbor' territory.

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Your

COUNTRY NEIGHBOR

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this issue possible:

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Thank you!

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Window on Fifth Street

When I was old enough to understand the value of ‘things’, like a house, car, or farm, I soon learned the value of work and reward. If one wanted a car, one had to have a job and be able to save for the big expense. A house was an even bigger deal. And then there was the price of retirement. People used to receive a pension after being loyal to a company for 20 years to a lifetime. That’s not guaranteed any more.

When the concept of ‘credit’ came along, it became possible to “buy now and pay later”. As the old song went, “You can buy anything you need, for a \$1.00 down and a \$1.00 a week.” The “American Dream” became a possibility for nearly everyone. The number one value in America was owning one’s own home. Before long, that was modified to include a second car, then a boat. If you didn’t have the money or credit for a house, then you rented your home and put your money into a nice car. A Cadillac meant prestige.

Today home ownership is very common. And even teenagers drive new cars. These days all that is needed is a decent job and the “Dream” can come true for anyone. And a college degree is the promise, the key to the American Dream. Unfortunately, for too many, a good education no longer has the value it once had. The piece of paper is perceived as the key. And with all those empty chairs left by graduating ‘boomers’, the paper certificate is an easier sell by college administrators. But the corporate world has become skeptical of the BS degree. The bitter American workers who lost their pensions will be joined by bitter college graduates who can’t get a job. So what is the well educated college graduate to do?

The best way to use a real education in the 21st Century is to use your knowledge to create your own company. In the 20th Century, owning a home was the #1 American value. In the 21st Century that value will be replaced with ‘owning a business’. The

smart person will deliver a product of value to the public without having to work for a ‘middle-man’.

One value never changes; you don’t get something for nothing. If you want success, work hard, get an education, and it helps to have a view of the world like the one through my window on Fifth Street. And it won’t hurt you to call your mother.

Volunteers and Contributions Needed

Neighbor to Neighbor is a nonprofit program providing free services to the elderly, homebound, and disabled individuals who are disadvantaged and do not have adequate support. This program which began in 1996 is based in Auburn, Nebraska, and reaches out to those in all of Nemaha County.

Volunteers provide such services as friendly visits and companionship, reading, telephone reassurance, shopping, transportation, yard work, light meal preparation and housekeeping, respite care and escorts to service clubs and churches, some Life Line payment assistance, and Commodities pickup for those unable to get their own. Matches are made between what volunteers sign up to provide and the need of the client.

Neighbor to Neighbor wants to fill the gaps left by government cut-backs. It wants to find volunteers for all needs not provided by public programs and put a human touch to all the helping services it provides. Neighbor to Neighbor always needs more volunteers. Also, Neighbor to Neighbor wants to know of those in need of their services. Please contact Neighbor to Neighbor at (402)274-4277 for more information on how you can get involved in helping your neighbor or needing assistance. Training, supervision, and ongoing support is provided to all volunteers to ensure quality care for those in need and a rewarding experience for the volunteer.

Finally, Neighbor to Neighbor needs your financial support. We operate on donations from the public and grants. We need your help to make your elderly neighbors’ lives more livable.

WILL YOU HELP? VOLUNTEER TODAY!

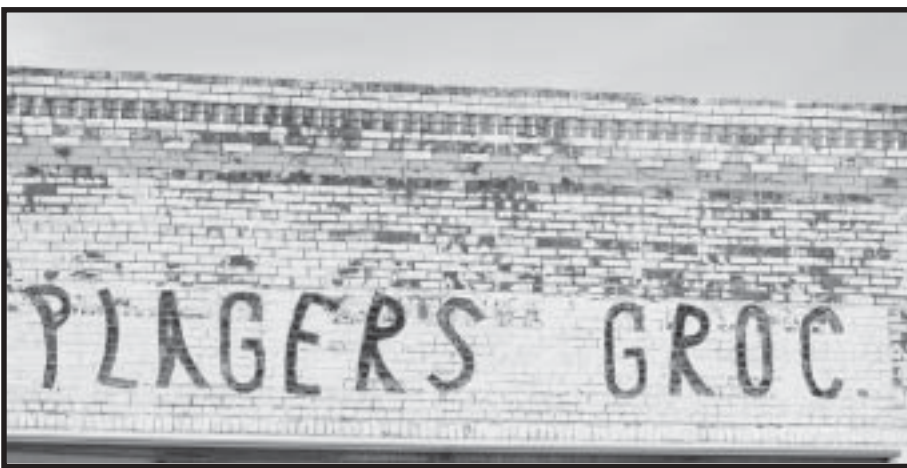
WRITE YOUR **DONATION** CHECK TO: NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR, P.O. BOX 82, AUBURN, NE 68305. Thank you for your help and concern!

Editor’s note: They were there for Leo.

Signs from last time.

Answers to last month’s question; notice these signs?

Not shown is the “Hubbard” sign on the side of Mary Howard’s Grocery in Barada



Elk Creek



Falls City



Weeping Water



H-67 southeast of Peru.

March 2006



Southeast of Peru at the intersection of highways 67 and 136.

Your Country Neighbor

My Son, the Alcoholic One

by Joe Smith

This a hard story to write, much too close to home. That article in a previous issue about the writer's mother was written after the mother had passed over. My son is still here. He is over 50 and should be able to take care of himself. At least he thinks he can. He has been to several clinics. When he is sober he is a good worker and has held some good jobs. He claims he inherited alcoholism. That I doubt; I'm not an alcoholic, nor were his grandparents. One great-grandparent drank a lot of whiskey, but was in control at all times. So I don't think he can use that for an excuse. But really any excuse will work for him. To top it all off, he is hooked on Xanax. He is now in jail because of a DWI, his fourth one in Nebraska. If there were a video of him wandering around in a zonked out haze, it might wake him up. My wife and I have just given until there is no more to give. Will this article tick him off? Probably will, but that is the chance I have to take. Reading the former article made me take a long look at my son's problem. What can a parent do for their children even though they are "grown up" (in years anyway)?

My son goes to AA meetings half zonked on Xanax. Why don't the other members get on him about it? A friend told me that a lot of people that go to AA meetings are high on something. What in the world do people get out of being that way? How do you help someone that is in this self-destruct mode? Surely somebody has an answer. Maybe they will wake up some time soon. I hope so; he is running out of options. He has no idea how many sleepless nights his mother and I have had because of him, not to mention all the money we keep spending on or for him.

His younger brother was an alcoholic as well, but has straightened out his life. He has been sober for a long time, and is doing well. They say you are still an alcoholic no matter how many years you have been off alcohol.

Have I been an angel? No not really. Have I ever been drunk? Several times over the years. Do I drink now? I drink a little wine once in a while in the evening, and maybe a beer with a steak dinner in town. My son was in the construction business as a welder for years and spent his extra time at the bars. His son is in the same business and seems to have learned what bar hopping can do for you, by seeing where it got his dad.

A post script to the story is as follows. My son's doctor is in the process of switching him to another drug, one that is non-addictive. He was aware of the information, but for some reason, known only to him and my son, he waited until a short while ago to implement the change. It is possible that things will change, I hope so.

Sometimes we wonder where we went wrong, what happened to cause this problem. You see family after family whose kids are doing good; good jobs, lots of grandkids, all nice people. My wife and I haven't been that lucky, if it was luck.

My first boy was killed six weeks after he got home from Vietnam. My daughter and her two daughters were killed in a house fire. So something went wrong somewhere down the line, I just haven't figured it out yet.

Editor's note: The story above was written around the middle of January. The following story was written one month later. >>>>>>>>

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My Son

by Joe Smith

My son Kevin, was almost 52 when he died on the 15th of February, 2006. He was born in Roswell, New Mexico on April 4th 1954. I remember the night. He was a fat little chub. He and his older brother were quite a handful to raise. Two more came later. But out of the our four children, Kevin was the hard worker, but also the hard player. He worked as a welder all over the country, even in Alaska. He made a lot of money, but that was part of the problem. He started drinking while he was on those jobs and between jobs. We sent Kevin to several clinics, and he would be all right for a time, but always came back to the bottle. Then he got on prescription drugs, which in my mind were worse than the whiskey.

I can remember Kevin stepping on stink bugs in New Mexico and then leaning over and asking, "Did I hurt you little bug?" He was about three. Then there was the time when he thought he was Roy Rogers. After I told him not to run the horse in the barn he had to do it anyway. His older brother Kelly came out and told me Kevin broke his arm when the horse slipped down with him. The mare slipped on the loose hay in the alley way.

Kevin was in sports and chorus in school. He had a beautiful voice and lots of talent in that direction. He could do any thing he wanted to and do it well if he wanted. Kevin had a good personality and loved to visit with people, loved to hunt and fish, and was good at it. He has many friends that still love him. He was a sucker to help people, and some took advantage of him. He loaned a lot of people money he didn't have. He had been married a couple of times and had three nice sons. I hope this will be a good lesson for them as what not to do. Maybe somewhere down the line we as parents failed him, who knows? The articles on Alcoholism that were in the 'Voice' really hit me hard, as we were looking at the same problem.

Kevin was picked up in Auburn on a DWI charge and the court gave him six months in jail. While he was in jail he fell and broke a bone in his leg; his arm was also re-broken. You can't believe all the pain the poor boy went through.

While in jail he did have a chance to get clean of the prescription meds and alcohol. He was feeling a lot better and was acting a lot better. Then someone started a fire in a wastebasket in the jail block. He went down hill from that point. That was early February. He never recovered from all that smoke. I wrote a story about this problem a couple of weeks ago but my wife talked me out of printing it because Kevin was still alive and she felt it would hurt him. Well, now I will go ahead and send this story in. Just maybe it will help someone somewhere.

Kevin is in a better place now as he made his peace with God several months ago while he was working with his younger brother in Missouri. Kevin went down to Missouri with his brother, Jason, last summer and did real well. Jason was his watch dog on his pills, so things started looking up for him. Jason told him that was the only way that he would take him down there if he gave Jason the pills. Then Jason gave them to a friend who lived right next door. With only 1/2 of a pill at night, Kevin did all right. Really teed him off, but it worked out all right. He started going to a small country church down there and found Jesus.

Kevin had a lot of pain in his life, but is out of that now. He is on his way to see his brother and sister in heaven. He had a bad addiction and couldn't help what he did, I'm sure. We have no idea what he went through, physically, and mentally. But we still loved him despite his problems, and he knew it. He almost made it around the corner, ran out of gas before he got there.

Kevin believed in living wide open until it caught up with him these last few years. A house blew up with him in the basement. That almost got him. We got him through that and thought he would straighten up. He did some, just not enough. He believed in the saying that life is not a journey to the grave with intention of arriving safely in a pretty well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming, WOW what a ride!!

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This majestic Cottonwood tree southeast of Peru has an interesting connection with the 'little red schoolhouse' near the Arboretum in Brownville. The connection is one of those anecdotes whereby some of what we take for granted everyday have hidden connections to the past. Eventually, some of those connections may be lost. Mary Alice Mertes donated the windmill that stands next to the schoolhouse. It came from her father's farm where this tree, planted the day Mary Alice was born still stands, a monument to a family farm and to a giving lady.

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Another factor is prompting the resurgence of “the old.” According to Zel and Reuben Allen, who generate vegparadise.com/heirloom, “Preserving heirlooms seeds gives people a sense of history and cultural heritage. By growing heirloom plants and saving the seeds, we can all participate in saving many varieties from extinction and preserving plants with special genetic traits. If you can learn the origins of your seeds, pass this heritage on to your family members and share these seeds with other growers of heirlooms.”

What’s Available?

Experts report that approximately 600 varieties of tomatoes (*Lycopersicon lycopersicum*) are known to exist. They have wonderful names, and Heirloomseeds.com lists these as their top 12 best sellers:

- 1 Besser } from Germany and the 1800’s - plants produce 3/4 inch diameter fruit in clusters of up to 12, very sweet, cherry tomatoes
- 2 Big Red } from a family in southern Illinois - large vines produce 16 to 24 ounce huge, sweet, red fruit, with just enough “bite” for that old fashioned, home grown taste - perfect for sandwiches, salads or just eating out of your hand
- 3 Black Krim } from the Crimean peninsula in the Black Sea - deep red, almost black color with green shoulders - the globe shaped fruit weigh 8–12 ounces each – has unique, salty flavor that is different from any tomato you’ve ever tasted
- 4 Bonny Best } often judged as one of the 5 best tasting - great, medium sized tomato (up to 8 ounces) with bright, scarlet red color
- 5 Cherokee Purple } originally grown by the Cherokee Indians - popular tomato for over 100 years - relatively disease free tomato has pink-purple flesh, with smoky, sweet flavor, and grows 10 to 12 ounces, while the vines provide dense foliage - very unusual
- 6 German Pink } from Germany - very sweet variety that produces large, meaty, 1 to 2 pound fruits - resists cracking and has few seeds – makes a great canning tomato
- 7 Green Zebra } commercially bred and released by Tom Wagner (California) in 1985 - very unusual variety - ripe fruits are bright green with light green stripes - 2 to 4 ounce fruits have a delicious, “real tomato” flavor - very vigorous
- 8 Pink Brandywine } introduced in the 1890’s - large vines have potato leaf-like foliage and pink fruit that weigh 1.5 pounds or more - slightly lobed fruit is mild and juicy, with a low acid taste.
- 9 Roma } standard paste tomato for making sauces and catsup - strong vines yield up to 200 red, pear shaped fruit, each weighing 2 to 3 ounces, with firm flesh and few seeds
- 10 Stupice } exceptional tomato from Czechoslovakia - great tasting, early variety that produces globe shaped fruit that are deep red, weigh 3-4 ounces and has potato leaf type foliage - tangy, real tomato flavor
- 11 Tigerella } beautiful red fruit has stripes in green to yellow hues – fruit measures 1.5 to 2 inches across - large vines bear a huge crop of this old time tangy and tart favorite
- 12 Yellow Brandywine } vines have potato leaf foliage - large yellow fruits that weigh 12 ounces to 2 pounds - exceptional quality, as well as the creamy texture - equals a gourmet taste that is simply delicious

Other names I found that sounded wonderful:

- 13 Big Rainbow & Hillbilly } large fruited yellow tomatoes with red swirls, having a mild, sweet flavor
- 14 Jubilee } released by Burpee Seed Co. in 1943
- 15 Mortgage Lifter } enormous, tasty pink tomatoes - saved a farmer from bankruptcy
- 16 Traveler } released by the Univ. of Arkansas in 1970

Gardener Advice

Keep in mind that heirlooms are fertilized by wind and/or insects, so random pollination can occur. Beware of different varieties planted close to each other. Depending on variety, you may want to stagger your planting schedule so you can have fresh tomatoes all season.


Ready to try something new (that’s actually old)? Personally, I have tomato plants about 3” tall in my starter box, and I can’t wait!

How’s your garden growing?


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Country Scenes



Downtown Emerson...*Shirley's* carries *Your Country Neighbor*.



School on scenic H-275 just north of Rock Port.



Malvern's library is growing.



This barn displays some of its many functions.



Canada Geese 'at the beach' near Hiawatha.



Little 'church on the corner' in Johnson.



"Rows" east of the highway leaving Sabetha.

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Fisher Rock, Inc.

Fisher Rock, Inc. at home in Home, Kansas
 by Penny Zeller

To look at Home, Kansas (population less than 300), located along U.S. Highway 36 in eastern Marshall County, you would never think that within its boundaries you would find a business that garners thousands of orders per year and distributes its product throughout the central states.

Come to Home and Find Fisher Rock, Inc., owned and operated by Shane and Joan Hartner, with the help of their sons, Cody, Chance, and Chase and approximately 18 other full and part-time employees.

Fisher's Rock Products was established in Marysville, Kansas in 1994 by Mike and Joleen Fisher. A Father's Day present for Mike's dad, designed and hand cut by Mike of limestone rock, caught the eye of the community and a business was born.

In 2000, the Fisher's built a 30,000 square foot building on the east edge of Home and moved the flourishing business to its current location.

The Hartner's purchased the business from the Fisher's in June of 2004 and changed the name to Fisher Rock, Inc. "I started by working for Mike as his shop foreman, learning the business by trial and error," said Hartner.

Currently, Fisher Rock, Inc. is licensed for 80 college designs across the country, works with many area high schools on fundraisers, creating designs of high school mascots, and has distributors located in Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, Nebraska and Kansas.

"All of our rocks are cut from cottonwood limestone, found right here in Kansas," explained Hartner. "It is a hard stone, and people like the white color."

"Most of the stone comes in already cut to size and then we hand-shape the rock with hammer and chisel to create the unique designs of each rock – no two come out exactly the same. The designs are created on a computer and then a rubber stencil is placed on the rock, the design then cut and painted into the rock by hand."

Hartner continued that they can use almost any design anyone gives them and construct a lot of family name rocks and have even started doing cemetery monuments.

"Most importantly, commented Hartner, "we stand behind our work and want our customers to be satisfied."

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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report

by Josh Whisler
Photos provided by Author

Fishing:

The Missouri River has been slowly coming back up for some reason (their hasn't been any rain to speak of) which has got the local fishermen looking it over and even giving it a try now and then, and with some success. Mostly sturgeon and small channel cats but they're fish! It has got to be the earliest I have seen river fishing with this much success. Believe it or not, the night crawlers were up in February! Yep, the frost is out of the ground and the worms are up for a breath of Spring air. Although they have been pushed down a couple of times with the bite of Winter we receive off and on. It's not over by a long shot. But every day that goes by without bitter cold or snow the closer we get to Spring. If you get a chance you might give the river a try to see what you come up with, but you will still have to remember not to completely trust the banks. When the frost comes out or the sun melts the top layer of mud that tends to be slicker than all get out, you really need to watch it.

Hunting:

The Nebraska Game & Parks has set the 2006-2007 seasons. And it's time to obtain your Spring turkey permit. You can obtain you Spring turkey permit now through the end of the turkey season. And you can bag two turkeys (one per permit). That's crazy isn't it? It used to be hard to get a permit and now they are practically giving them away! The seasons are as follows:

Archery Season ————— March 25th thru May 21st
Shotgun Season ————— April 15th thru May 21st
Youth Shotgun Season ——— April 8th thru May 21st

There are a few changes this year that you need to keep in mind. All of the seasons above are statewide. There is no DRAW anymore so that means that there is no limit of permits that can be sold. That means you don't have to worry about NOT getting a Spring permit. Just go buy one. There is also a change this year where there is only ONE shotgun season – NOT an early and a late season. This year the Youth Shotgun Season allows for youth archers to bag their turkey also. All permits are still one bird per permit, but you are allowed two permits for the 2006 Spring season. There has been a lot of confusion on this topic, whether you can keep shooting birds or some reduction in permit fees to include harvesting more birds because of the large numbers in Nebraska now. The Game & Parks has estimated that in the last five years the Nebraska Wild Turkey population has risen 300 percent. It's no wonder you see them everywhere, and a lot of them.

The good news is the season is just around the corner and you can get your blood pumping again. I think I'll start with a new turkey call and get to practicing.

We still have some Winter yet but it's time to take advantage of the breaks in the weather to get a headstart on this years hunting and fishing. It sure is nice to get out and shake off the cabin fever. You can either do a little scouting or drop in a line. Either way I don't think you can complain with the weather we've been getting lately. So get out if you get chance, 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."



This month's river picture shows the river flow over the top of the rock dikes.



This month's hunting picture is turkeys foraging for food near the edge of the timber.

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Green Noodles, Sweet 'n' Sour Cabbage and Corned Beef

by Ann Yates of Honey Creek Vineyards Bakery

May the Luck O' the Irish be with you.

Start by cooking a good corned beef in the crock pot about 8 hours, or 'til tender. If you prefer to use the oven, I have gotten hooked on those new oven bags. They hold in the juices and make cleanup a snap. Just follow the instructions on the oven bags and the corn beef package.

In the November, 2005 issue of **Your Country Neighbor** I gave instructions on making egg noodles. If you add ¼ to ½ cup finely ground, dried greens (instructions in the April, 2005 issue), you will end up with green noodles of the same texture as regular egg noodles. The taste difference is nearly undetectable (but delicious). Cook the noodles in boiling water till tender. Drain and stir in butter or oil (olive oil is best) to coat.

Now for the cabbage. Sweet and Sour cabbage to be exact. It goes great with corned beef. Slice one half a head of cabbage into one inch slices. Chop in half so the strands are not too long. Place into preheated skillet with enough oil to cover bottom of skillet. Add a teaspoon of caraway seed if desired. Cover and cook over medium-low heat about 20 minutes, stirring occasionally, until cabbage is tender. Place ½ to ¾ cup of the corned beef cooking juices into one quart saucepan and mix in ¼ cup of sugar and ¼ cup of good wine vinegar. Stir in 3 tablespoons cornstarch and cook over medium heat until thick and bubbly. Pour over warm cabbage and mix gently.

Now for the fun part, serving. On a large platter place the noodles around the outside edge. Now spoon the cabbage over the noodles. Place the corn beef, sliced into desired thickness, across the center of the platter inside the noodle and cabbage arrangement. Sprinkle with chopped fresh parsley. Now doesn't that sound pretty, and oh so Irish. Serve with a robust rye bread, a yellow vegetable and a zesty citrus salad and you'll be famous.

If your family won't eat green noodles, use white noodles and mix chopped parsley in with the oil. If they won't eat cabbage use sweet and sour mixed vegetables. They are made the same but you use cooked carrots, broccoli and green peppers instead of cabbage. If they won't eat corned beef, use roast beef. If they don't like that, you really need the luck o' the Irish.

Irish Toasts

May you be in heaven two days before the devil knows your dead.

May the road rise up to meet you.

May the Good Lord take a liken to you.

Happy St. Patty's Day

If you drink, do so responsibly. Use a designated driver.

"Honey Creek Vineyards Bakery, in Peru, is back in Business. Full service catering is now available. We are baking to order on Tuesdays and Fridays. A few of our specialties are Kolaches, Sprouted Wheat Bread, Rye, and Ethnic Breads. Pies are made from scratch. Call at least a day ahead for bakery or two weeks ahead for catering at 274-9057 or 872-4865. Pick up locations are available in Peru or Auburn."



Canada Geese on the lake just south of Hiawatha.

Diary of an Unemployed Housewife

By Merri Johnson

Spring cleaning time has arrived, or at least that phase of it that doesn't involve dragging area rugs outside or hanging curtains to air on the line. I refer to the preliminaries: tasks like cleaning closets and cabinets, which actually require a strategy, not just a bucket, a bottle of Mr. Clean and muscle.

The prospect of sorting, throwing out, giving away and re-arranging the contents of my closets and cabinets is almost as unsavory as the thought of preparing my income tax return. I tend to procrastinate on both, but the IRS won't let me dawdle past April 15. What I need is a spring cleaning enforcer to crack the whip and keep me focused between now and Easter. Because once gardening starts, the list of indoor projects takes a serious back seat in the hierarchy of my schedule. We're talking back seat of a Greyhound bus here.

I know just the person to be the enforcer, but I'm afraid she'd enjoy it a *little* too much. My storage spaces would be spic and span all right, but I wouldn't be able to appreciate them much from my padded cell.

You'd think that a woman who subscribes to *Martha Stewart Living* and who actually spent twelve dollars on a "Storage Solutions for Your Whole House" book would actually have storage solutions. But, you'd be just as wrong as my husband.

You know how some people display beautiful coffee table art books, while their houses are decorated with tin-can mobiles and paintings of Elvis on velvet? I can relate to that. I adore thumbing through those magazines and how-to books. The ideas always seem so logical. (Why didn't I think of that?) And the photographs. Well, the photographs are positively spell-binding. Who wouldn't like to open up her kitchen cabinet doors to shelves of perfectly matched and aligned dinnerware and food storage containers?

The interiors of my cabinets, on the other hand, are perfect models for the "before" examples. And as an added bonus, they offer compelling justification for cabinet *doors*. Can you imagine kitchen shelving without doors? Aside from the unsightly conglomeration of items, there's the kitchen grime that would be all over everything. Clearly, the advocates of open kitchen shelving don't actually cook in their kitchens.

I think this year I might buy some of those closet and drawer dividers. My house is 90 years old and all the floors, (and, therefore, built-in shelving), slope a bit, creating a mud-slide effect, particularly where linens are concerned. I've put fabric scraps, unused pillow forms, and old jacket shoulder pads (you never know when you're going to need those again) in zippered plastic bags, but they still won't stay put on the shelf. It's anybody's guess what will slide out when the door is opened. And the condition of my sock drawer would send you-know-who into orbit. (I'm positive there are two matching black trouser stockings in there somewhere.) Those egg-crate design partitions filled with precisely balled up pairs of socks are the stuff of dreams, aren't they?

With all the proper organizational aids to motivate me, I might conquer the clutter this year. I can hardly wait to get started! Next week. Maybe.

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MY TEDDY BEAR

by Devon Adams

My bear, my bear, my teddy bear.
My friend. My buddy through each day.
He's always there to listen and to cuddle
when I'm happy, or I'm sad, or if I'm mad.
He laughs at all my jokes
and likes to play with me
when everyone else is busy.
He used to be so bright and new
but now he's sort of smudgy,
with little spots of jelly
next to chocolate drips
from melted ice cream cones.
Mom will wash him soon and
I'll wait almost until he dries
before I hug him tight again.
He listens to my heart
and never tells me I'm too young,
too small, too loud, too quiet,
too dirty, or that I'm in the way.
He doesn't say I'm being stubborn
or that I'm late. He never says to
wait 'til I grow up,
or tells me when to go to bed.
He protects me in the dark
and holds me when it storms.
He doesn't sing or dance,
and when he talks,
only I can hear his words.
When I go to some new place
to meet with people I don't know,
my teddy bear is there with me
to hold my hand
and whisper not to be afraid.
When we go home,
and I am sleeping in my bed,
he'll cuddle close.

In dreams we'll walk together,
eating cookies, while we talk
with toys on shelves who'll
come down to play with us.
We'll be having parties while
the house is dark and quiet
and no one sees our dreams.
When I wake up
in the silent sunshine
of my morning room,
the dreams will vanish
like the dark of night.
But my teddy bear
will be with me forever.



Pawnee City Student Creates Winning Design

by Deb Kubik

High School Junior, Tyler Derby of Pawnee City Public Schools, designed this award medal which will be used for the new *Nebraska State Visual Arts Competition* (replaces *Scholastic Art Competition*). Approximately 100 designs were submitted from the following High Schools; Pawnee City, Omaha Benson, Omaha Creighton Prep, Omaha Central, and Milford. Tyler's design was selected to be used as the award medal for the Nebraska State Visual Arts Competition, as well as for advertising and future publications.

One hundred forty-six schools from across the state of Nebraska submitted 1400 pieces of art work; approximately 600 pieces were juried in, and received gold, silver, and bronze medals of Tyler's design for their work. The event was held on February 18, 2006 in Omaha, at the TAC Building of the Omaha Public Schools.

Poetry, etc.

THE BORDER PATROL

by Devon Adams

Flying in formation across a winter sky, the small military unit abruptly changes direction and catches the sun on their shining wings. Another turn and a precipitous drop in altitude brings them in for a landing in the bare branches of a mulberry tree. Now that their speed is zero, an observer can see the smart stripes on the sides of their hats and the clean-cut lines of their uniforms. With olive drab coats over vests of a faded mustard color, their alert feather crests match the blunt tilt of their tails. These are cedar waxwings, the official advance notice that spring will actually be here soon, despite any evidence to the contrary, such as below zero wind chills or icy roads and trees covered by snow. They KNOW about important things, whereas humans are given to wild speculations about global warming and sudden cataclysmic geologic upheavals. They have patience and faith, and they demonstrate that belief in the company of robins and snow geese and other migratory species that seem utterly confident that they are in the right place even though it is temporarily having a winter tantrum. The waxwings patrol the border between winter and spring and fearlessly fly in the face of arctic sneezes to establish a forward position in the alien winter territories. If you see them flashing through a cedar break, or streaking through a morning sky, relax and enjoy your dreams of spring grass and warm sunshine. Rest assured that our planet will turn and tilt on its wobbly axis for another few thousand years, producing seasons in the correct order, more or less.

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Poetry, etc.

TRUE FICTION

by Devon Adams

I came upon today
as though it were a foreign planet.
How changed it seems from yesterday.
Can this be the same location
with the same sun shining?
The light has changed and
all the fingers of the wind play
different songs among the trees.
Minutes fly without regard for speed,
breaking limits marked around the clock.
Everything is beautiful and fleeting,
but time can't pause for perfect pictures.
Good days only last as long as bad days.
Hours are memories
before we realize they're gone,
and details lose sharp definition
as we dream away the night.
What is real and what is true?
Our lives are painted by perception,
with a civil disregard for facts,
and we all write fiction, in the end.

Storing Up Spring

by Vicki Harger

Impatiently, I wait, scanning the skyline for the first hint of spring. A faint blush of color in the redbuds. A timid crocus. The first swoop of a barn swallow's wing. Spring is elusive. Fleeting. Like a mirage, spring-time will soon disappear on the horizon of a long, hot summer. Nothing but a vanishing memory.

At our house, good memories aren't just cherished...they're hoarded. Old vacations are boxed, bagged, and bottled. Dried cactus. The cremated ashes of Mount St. Helens. Shells and pebbles from far-flung beaches. The Pacific Ocean, itself, is stored in my cassette recorder. It comes to life at the push of a button.

But springtime. How do you store up spring? It can't be dried, canned or boxed. Spring has few mementoes and no cremated ashes. It is life in full motion.

Singing katydids. Restless geese. Baby goats frolicking in the new grass, dancing sideways in the sunshine. Children splashing in Beddow Creek, searching out petrified relics and arrowheads. Souvenirs of what used to be. Many springtimes have come and gone, quickly fading to Indian summer. A thousand sunrises have melted into sunsets. How do you hold on to such things and make them last?

If only the essence of this season could be bottled—like icy spring water—to be sipped and savored during the blazing days of August. A sweet elixir—filled with fragrance, sights, and sounds....

Around me, the Barada Hills pulsate with life. Badgers and bugs and bumblebees. In yonder field, a farmer inspects his fences and terraces, contemplating the season just ahead. The familiar throb of a John Deere drifts to me on the breeze and I'm swiftly transported to childhood days....

My Grandpa...he's astraddle the Johnny Popper, lurching through the barnyard—heading for a newly plowed cornfield. Each huff of the tractor is accompanied by a puff from Grandpa's pipe. Sweet tobacco smoke and tractor fumes ride the spring breezes.

Inside the farmhouse, my Granny kneads her dough fiercely, pursuing vagrant air-pockets. And me? Where am I? Out in the garden, digging my naked toes into the dirt, awaiting a call from the kitchen to sample Granny's bread.

The barnyard is full of commotion. Fresh kittens wander about, awaiting the evening milking. Beyond the cool, mysterious milk house are the cows...tails flicking, tongues licking—caressing their salt block. Eyes half-closed, they laze in the sun, soaking springtime into their ratty, winter fur.

Spring sunshine. It transforms everything. Soon, the drabness of winter will fall away as springtime combs out the dross. It happens year after year, generation after generation. Mysterious, yet sure, it holds me spellbound.

I wait expectantly, now—determined to embrace every memory of spring, every glint of sun on a hummingbird's wing. The scent of Juneberry blossoms. The earthy smell of Morels. Maybe I can't store up spring in a bottle, nor hoard its cremated remains...But I can add more pages to my memory. I can savor every breeze, every glimpse, every sound—enfolding them into my mind. There they remain—beloved passages hidden away in the yellowing pages of my life.

When this spring has passed, my memory book will be filled with fresh entries. Bike rides at dawn. Twilight meanderings. Evenings spent on the Missouri, watching a milky moon pour itself into the river. Spring-time will fill my senses and permeate my pores. Because I have prepared.

Springtime hoarding...? It has only begun.

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The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott

I never spoke more than few words to Charlie. He was old, I was young, and though our homes were little more than mile apart, we lived in different worlds.

On the streets of America's cities he would have been just one of the uncounted homeless; a faceless, nameless wanderer of concrete canyons and public shelters. But here, in the country, he was known as a character, a man whose reputation, while not unsullied, was good enough to earn him a friendly wave and a pleasant nod of recognition from acquaintances. One spring afternoon my father found him, along with his wagon, a matched pair of velvet-nosed grey horses, and a few cardboard boxes of belongings, camped on the small triangle of land between the Mitchell irrigation ditch and the dead-end intersection a mile west of our farm. "Just here for the night," said Charlie, as he busied himself with the task of heating an open can of pork and beans over a fire built from stray kindling and a few broken pieces of weathered windbreak wood he had picked up on his travels. Two weeks later he was still there.

No one asked him to stay...but neither did anyone tell him to go. The weedy piece of land wasn't worth much, not to the people who owned it, nor to the Mitchell irrigation district whose road ran alongside it, so he squatted, day after day, month after month, like a claim-jumper guarding a played-out mine.

To everyone's surprise...for never before had he exhibited even an ounce of ambition...a ramshackle homestead began to take shape. He dug a well, drove down a sand point, and attached a pitcher-pump for water. He built an outhouse and hung the door by heavy leather straps cut from worn out harness. Over a period of several months, rough corrals, and an open shed for the horses, went up: a few posts one week, one wall the next, a wooden gate a few days after that. All fashioned from scrounged materials, all built with borrowed tools.

When summer heat gave way to autumn chill Charlie added a lean-to on the far side of the horse shed and moved in; winter living quarters for himself, and the stray black and white dog which had taken temporary shelter in the shed one night during a summer storm, and who, like Charlie himself, never summoned the ambition to leave. It was a match made in heaven; the dog needed a home as much as Charlie needed a friend.

Over time the old man closed in the horse shed, turning it into a small barn with a dutch door and a single window. He built himself a house, just a tar paper shack really, hauled in a wood burning cook stove and a few stray sticks of furniture, after which he strung a clothes line out back, though I seldom saw clean wash hanging from it. His lack of interest in personal hygiene gave my mother pause, and she often remarked that Old Charlie wore his clothes until they were able to stand up on their own.

He lived without electricity for a year or so, but eventually the Roosevelt Public Power District strung a line from one of their roadside poles to the shack, and from that time on watery yellow light spilled from the windows into the night. It was his single concession to the twentieth century. A man with one foot in the past and one in the present, he had the knack of getting along without the things we felt were absolute necessities.

He didn't have much, but I doubt he wanted much more than he had, at least not enough to look for a paying job. There was speculation he lived off disability, or welfare, but no one really knew, or cared for that matter, how he supported himself. He spent his days puttering around the place, hoeing a few weeds, brushing his horses, nailing down a weather-sprung board when called for, and each week, summer or winter, he harnessed up his horses, hitched them to the wagon and drove to town for a sack of groceries, and a bag of horse feed. The harnesses were hung with tiny bells and the horses clip-clopped their way towards Morrill to a tinkling tune, a pleasant jingle-jangle melody which announced his arrival long before he made an appearance. When my boys grew old enough they eagerly ran to the side of the road as soon as they heard the bells, hoping to beg a ride.

It was these occasions which prompted our few conversations: "How you been?", "Hasn't the weather been nice?", "Can the kids ride?", "I'll help them up." Just undemanding small talk between two people who had little in common but the ground beneath their feet, and the sky over their heads.

Years passed, our neighborhood changed. New names appeared on old mailboxes, different families worked familiar fields...and instead of a mother of toddlers I found myself the mother of teens. But except for the increasing grey in his beard, and a growing mountain of empty tin cans behind his house, things at Charlie's place stayed pretty much the same. He had few visitors, but as he grew older his younger sister dropped by every week or so to check in on him, her shiny blue car looking as out of place parked in his front yard as a computer in a sod house.

She never stayed long. A mite embarrassed by his living conditions, and apparent shiftless nature, she would hastily discharge her sisterly duties, hurry back to her neat home in Lyman, take a bath, and wonder at the life her brother had chosen for himself. I once saw a photograph of their family, the stern looking mother and father surrounded by unsmiling children, and wondered...If they had known, on that long ago day, what the future held for the fresh-faced boy with the slicked down hair, would they have raised him differently?

But as with all things, time eventually caught him up. His health faltered and his sister moved him into an old-folks home. Roosevelt PPD disconnected the power to the homestead, and the household goods, poor as they were, were distributed or burned. The wagon and horses were sold, and the bales of hay, which Charlie had painstakingly stacked alongside the barn, grayed and grew black, ultimately slumping in on themselves like a melting bowl of ice-cream. The yard pump was moved to my roadside flower garden. Weeds grew in the corral.

He didn't last long cooped up in the home. Some men aren't meant for the indignities of clean sheets, daily baths and regular meals, and after Charlie's solitary life the constant hustle and bustle was like living in the center of a busy city intersection. That, as much as age, killed him.

The tumble-down house and barn stood for a few years, but Nebraska's weather wasn't kind to the empty, unloved buildings, and with each passing season they became increasingly dilapidated. One September afternoon, as my father set out to burn the weeds which had invaded the small piece of land, an unwelcome wind came up. A wind-driven spark touched off a flapping piece of dry tar-paper. He let it burn.

By that night everything was gone.

If you drive past our farm, past the King place and the old William's house, up the railroad overpass, past the spots where the Koeteman's, Gonzales' and the Kautz's raised their children, you'll come to the small spit of land where Charlie lived. To the casual observer there's nothing left to show he ever existed, and most people drive right by without ever guessing someone once carved out a life there. But those who take the time to get out of their car and walk into the weeds will find traces of him, a legacy of memories in a pile of rusty cans, a handful of bent nails, some bits of broken glass and a dented bucket or two. Once, while irrigating, I found a small bell, a tiny, tinkling memento of the horses, and rides, my young sons enjoyed.

Some believed his was a small life, hardly worth mentioning or remembering. But they were the sort who measured success by bank balances, job titles, and the purchase price of automobiles. The rest of us knew better. Charlie flavored our lives like salt does a good meal. That was his real worth.

In the grand scheme of things who could ask for a better epitaph?

Karen

**Farm Pictures at
www.yourcountryneighbor.com.**

The archives include pictures taken from the early years of this publication, as well as pictures that show more recent seasonal changes. All pictures on the site are in color, and some are free to download.

Links are available to permit subscribing to
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Writing Stories

by Joe Smith

Sometimes you get writer's block, then something trips your trigger and you have another story in the making.

The 'Country Neighbor' is really blessed with good writers, people that write from their heart and are not afraid of telling it like it is. Some write about things that are really hard for them, painful for them to tell the story. Those stories come straight from the heart. Some use this as a way to lessen the pain of their problems. I think it helps the writer to be able to share their problems with "Our Family", that being the people that read the 'Country Neighbor'.

The writers that write the poems, write very good poems. Are these people professional writers? I doubt that very much, just people doing what they like. The photos that our editor puts in here, very good job of finding the right place and the right time to take these landscapes. There is a story behind each photo. You can make up your own if you want.

I write about things that bug me part of the time. The articles about alterative medicines, I'm serious about, same with property taxes. People need to be aware of what is going on and take control of their own life. That is why I like to write. Thanks to Steve for the chance to blow off steam. The writers of the stories do this on their own. The time they put into the stories is just a love of writing, They don't get a big salary for any of their stories, as of right now it is all free gratis, which makes no difference to me. I don't do it for the money, just like the rest of the writers, we do it for different reasons, but money is not one of them.

I think the quality of the stories are very good for that reason. Once you have to write every week or every month, it becomes a job. Something you have to do, not because you just want too. Writers for the 'Country Neighbor' come from all over the area or the state. As circulation grows the stories will change and we will see somebody else's view on subjects. There is no way you are going to agree with all the stories, that is what is nice about writers, We write about things that are close to us. So if you want to write a story about something close to you , here is your chance. That is what makes this such an interesting place to "Blow your top" or just write a nice story or a poem. Joe Smith

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Feelings

by Joe Smith

Feelings can run the gamut of fear, happiness, sorrow, determination, elations, guilt, disappointment, and many more. My wife and I have had to deal with this many times and it does not get any easier. As you mature it seems it should be easier to control your emotions but it isn't. I turn 74 tomorrow, the 26 of February 2006 and I still have lots of feeling one way or the other. This past year has been hard on this old coot. Any time you lose a child, even though he was almost 51, you do run the gamut of feelings as I mentioned.

My wife has been an anchor in all our problems, more so than me. The only thing that keeps me sane is being able to write for the papers, sharing our problems with the readers. Why do I do this? I think because there are people out there with the same problems or even worse. I know when I read a story from the heart like the one about the mother dying or the mother whose son got a divorce, it helps me work through my problems. Life is full of problems and we need help some times to make it through.

All the things people have done, all the hugs, all the cards, the kind words we received, the very special funeral, performed by our wonderful young preacher. So thankful that so many friends came to see our son off to his home in heaven. He had a chance to find 'God' last summer while in Missouri helping his brother. It was good for both of my sons to have a chance to work together. Sooner or later we all have to turn loose of our pain and feelings and just remember the good times. Maybe I will mature out before long, in a year or two.

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