



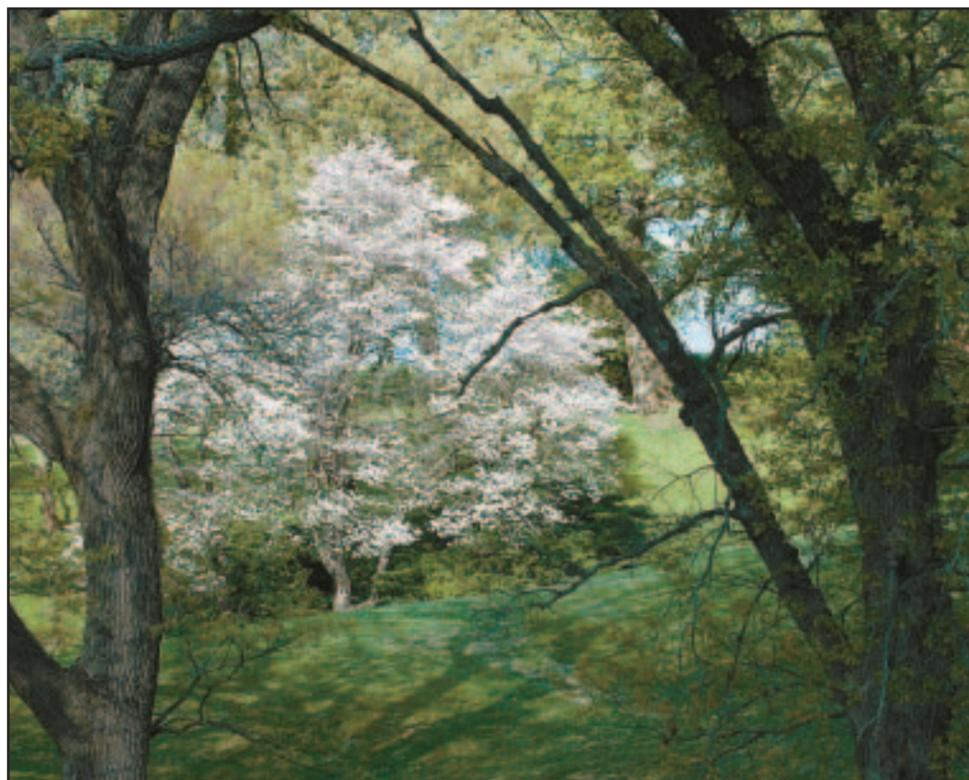
To see the cover photo of a Spring hillside with flowering trees, including Dogwood, visit Flower Country & Gifts in Auburn, Nebraska where a framed 20 x 24 enlargement is displayed.

Or you can pick up a 'hard copy' of this paper within its distribution area.

Spring! Coming soon to a hillside near you!

The cover photo (above) was taken of Neal Park in Peru, Nebraska, in the Spring of 2006. The original is in a 20 x 24 frame and on display at *Flower Country and Gifts* in Auburn.

The picture reminds me of Spring and the flowering trees which will take on the pastel pinks of apple and plum; the Dogwood (below) is my favorite.



Flowering Dogwood

Voices from the Valley

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Earth's shadow on the full moon in February, 2008. Miss it? Watch for the next one in December 2010.

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Your

COUNTRY NEIGHBOR

Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

Published by Stephen Hassler

Writers this month, Thank You

Devon Adams
Frieda Burston
Sheri Mayhew Dowding
Shirley Gilfert
Vicki Harger
Merri Johnson
Karen Ott
Joe Smith
Josh Whisler

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VISIT

Dramatic Expressions Photography

on the 'web'

by Your Country Neighbor Photographer,
Stephen Hassler

www.yourcountryneighbor.com/photoblog.htm

How To Trap A Car Thief (or an Unwary Husband)

by Shirley Gilfert

Getting a new car can be thrilling, especially if your old one is showing its age as much as you are. Nothing can make you feel as young as a shiny new automobile for your (ahem-mumble-mumble)th birthday.

I'd been admiring this particular beauty for weeks, had even tried it out, but being the budget-conscious person I am, I hesitated to spend the money. My old car was perfectly good. So what if it looked more like a yacht than an automobile? Maybe the paint had faded from a brilliant blue to a washed-out gray, but I couldn't justify a new car while Guinevere was still running. So imagine my joy when my husband made the decision for me and came bouncing into the house carrying the manual for my 2007 dream vehicle.

"Happy birthday, honey!" he beamed as he handed it to me. "Here's everything you need to know about your new car." He laid the manual on the counter, saying, "Come on, we're driving it into Omaha to celebrate your birthday."

He immediately bounced back out the door and got inside that dream machine. I glanced out the window and saw him sitting in the car, waiting.

Now when men say "Come on," they mean right this minute, not in half an hour, and patience is definitely not one of my husband's virtues. So I hurried around, combing my hair and putting on fresh make-up, changing my jeans for a more respectable birthday outfit. Did I mention patience was not one of his virtues?

The horn honked, not once, not twice, but continually. I couldn't leave my house without checking that all doors are locked and windows closed, that the dog has been put in her kennel and the cat was outside. Finally I went outside while the horn still honked incessantly.

Marching up to the car door, I said rather crankily, "Gil, I can't hurry any faster whether the horn honks or not. Will you please stop it?"

"What? I can't hear you!" was his reply.

"Then stop the racket and roll down the window."

"Can't! I've pushed every button I can find and the horn won't stop and the window won't roll down."

"Well, then for gosh sakes, get out of the car and see what's wrong!"

"Can't! Doors won't open either."

Now this man is highly claustrophobic and I feared he was about to break the window to make his escape, but I couldn't help but laugh at his predicament.

"Start the motor. Maybe that will help."

"Can't! Already tried that. It won't start."

"Well, look in the manual and see what it says," I suggested between giggles.

"Can't! It's in the house on the kitchen counter. Go get it and read it to me."

His voice was getting hoarse from shouting above the honking horn, and his face was getting red, I assumed from his rising blood pressure. I hurried to get the manual.

When I entered the house, our phone was ringing so I grabbed it up. It was our nearest neighbor, wanting to know if we were in some kind of trouble. I didn't think Gil would appreciate me taking the time to explain his dilemma, so I just told her the horn was stuck, but Gil had gone out to see about it. I hung up before she had a chance to say more, and hurried back outside, manual in hand.

When you're unfamiliar with any kind of manual, you know how long it takes to find the information you need. Besides, I was laughing so hard my eyes were watering, and I had difficulty reading the fine print. I scanned the pages, trying to find out how to turn off the horn, how to open the door, how to.....well, you get the picture.

Meanwhile, my husband failed to see the humor of the situation and shouted, "For gosh sakes, get me out of here!"

Finally I found the solution. "Have you got the remote in your pocket?"

He reached in and held it up for me to see.

"Okay, just push the unlock button."

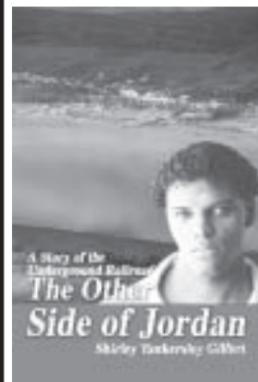
He didn't question the wisdom of this. He pushed "unlock," and the horn quit honking, the door unlocked, and when he turned the key, the motor immediately leapt into action and purred like a kitten.

I began to read about the Anti-theft devices built into the car.

"So you see," I explained, "if someone tries to steal my car, all I have to do is push the remote button and he'll be locked inside, unable to start the car or to get out until the police get there. Isn't that wonderful? You must have accidentally hit the remote button after you got into the car."

He didn't share my enthusiasm. He glared at me, got out, stretched his legs, took a deep breath, and walked around to the passenger side, saying, "You drive."

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THE TRIP

by Joe Smith

The last couple of weeks in February, 08 I went down to New Mexico with a fellow from Illinois. He has a mining claim down near Lordsburg, New Mexico. Some how he came across some information that told him of an old Spanish gold mine. That was 200 years ago. He has made several trips down to the area and has it fairly well pinpointed. There is supposed to be a bunch of gold bars buried there. From all the material I read, it sounded true, and there has been enough stuff found to make it believable. There was one gold bar found in the area. These gold bars were 50 lbs apiece. The Spanish mined the gold right on site and poured the bars right there.

Then they would send the gold back to Mexico via burro train. They had the trail marked on the top of small mountains, that is the way they sent the mule trains up from Mexico. Then the Indians decided to run them all out. There were a lot of people killed on both sides. The area where the mine and camp were real easy to protect for a while but the Spanish decided to leave. They had to travel at night for protection. The Indians didn't like to fight at night. They feared their spirits would get lost if they were killed at night. This is how the Spanish got back to Mexico. They could not take the gold with them because of the weight, so they buried it in a cave or in the mine, but we never found any sign of it. Later the Spanish sent a crew up to the area to find the mine after the Indian scare was over, but they found nothing.

There were signs of a lot of quartz being removed from the area. We did find a lot of quartz veins running in the area on one side of his claim. I don't know enough about gold mining to tell if the quartz had any gold in it or not. The story talks of different landmarks, which we found all of them. It seemed logical to me. This was a very rough area, overlooking the creek. Several men with rifles could keep off a lot of Indians. The Indians had no rifles or guns at that time and were very afraid of the thunder sticks as they called them.

Part of the story involved a rancher that had an Indian working for him and the old fellow showed the rancher where the gold bars were. The rancher got several of the bars and then was hurt bad in a horse accident. He had time to tell his son where the gold was buried. The son never found it either, because he was killed in a plane accident. So there could be a curse about this whole thing. Who knows?

There were some guns and other things dating to that time found in the area, and several graves a short distance up the stream from this spot. There was a marked tree and a cross cut way up on a massive rock at the top of the canyon, about a quarter mile apart. The treasure was buried somewhere between those two marks.

We found signs that maybe someone else was looking for the treasure also. Maybe more than one set of instructions are out there. The road going in there at best is an hour and a half from Lordsburg. I doubt I could even find it. The last 0.6 mile takes about 30 minutes to navigate with a four-wheel-drive pickup. With any rain it would be impossible to get in there, or near impossible. I went down at his request to help him find the mine entrance, by dowsing, which I never found. This area is massive rock slabs, some standing on edge. I have a hard time believing there ever was a mine shaft dug by the Spanish with no tools other than hand tools. A void area between the rocks, maybe. Before we went down I told him that he had two chances of finding the gold, slim and none. Is the gold still there? Dowsing says yes it is still there. Maybe with good metal detectors someone might find it, but there is a lot of iron in some of the rock which might rule that out. Sonar was tried and found nothing. Maybe they weren't in the right place. He hired me to go with him on a per day basis, not a share of the gold if we found it.

The trip was fun and hard. We traveled 1200 miles down and the same back and each day we had to drive from Lordsburg to the claim which took three hours plus, each day, probably about 40 miles one way. You would have to see this area to believe it. I thought to myself that there was no way this was gold country until we got up there and saw all the veins of quartz. That was the only area anywhere that there was any sign of quartz. The gold must have been sticking out of the ground for any body to even look in this rough area.

We ended up taking pictures at night with a special camera that shows a halo of some sort over treasures. My boss took them home to have them developed. There is also a psychic working on it. So it will be interesting to say the least. This is not an overnight job as there has been a lot of ground work done on the project. Oh well, you can't win them all.

Joe Smith

Editor's note: You can read previous articles by Joe Smith online in Your Country Neighbor archives; just click on "publications" at:

www.yourcountryneighbor.com

March 2008

Country Scenes

In color at: www.yourcountryneighbor.com



Farm pond west of Peru...frozen over in February.



Once a place of an old fashioned barn dance...hear the music?
(This barn is on a property for sale at
American Dream Real Estate Company in Auburn.)



Red-tailed Hawk "gettin' through" Winter like the rest of us.

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SING SPRING

(Reprinted from March 2002)
by Devon Adams

There is a time in mid-February when birds start talking about spring. Bare trees stand knee-deep in frigid drifts and the air has sharp edges at sunrise, but now the light is longer. The cold white sun of December becomes mellow. By afternoon of some days, edges of the snow are soft and slushy, frost loosens in the brick-hard earth and the air is velvet soft. Trees throw echoes into space of single notes and songs sung whole by weary winter birds. They sing as though they've had amnesia and tunes come back to memory slowly. Soon the sun-warmed air is hung with overlapping tones, a living assembly of wind chimes. Like juicy gossip, the rumor of spring envelops the old hills. Cottontails pause and dream of succulent green leaves, mice plan new nesting sites, squirrels pass on the rumor to their cousins. Whitetail does feel babies move inside their bellies. Coyotes will send the message via night air mail.

In the infinite space of the high blue winter noon, two red-tailed hawks cut the sky into circles as they conduct reconnaissance. They see the whole of the land and the slant of the sun and know their prey will soon be on the move. Delicate graffiti decorates the snow below and is proof of life. Tiny mouse feet have stitched winding seams through a patch of foxtail. Rabbit tracks zigzag across a field, followed by the widely spaced tracks of a running coyote. The end of the chase is marked by a red stain on the glistening snow and a few bunny hairs caught on weed stalks. A little white tail hangs on a milkweed pod, waving in the wind. A haunting cry rides down the valley on the cold blue wind, as the hawks scream a hunting prayer. One of the hawks dives like a knife through water, crash-landing in an explosion of snow on its unwary target. The air is shattered by a rabbit's scream. Birds suspend their songs for an instant—they ponder death. Then they sing again; there's only time to live and sing, not enough to die in dreams. Spring comes on with subtle symphonies, and life goes on or not.

The sun-shot shadows dance on the snow, and they are blue lace woven from light. Soon shadows will dance in the grass, when snow is melt and roots drink deep. The old hills will be covered by a tapestry of woven grass and sculptured trees, of feathers flashing iridescent, wildflowers mixing pots of paint, and perfect tiny beetles wearing patterned coats. Then snow is gone, the trees have leaves, the grass has green and the sun is burning high. This fragile composition is life in motion, dancing to an ancient tune sung by the winds of time.

SUNDAY SUNDOWN

by Devon Adams

The sun is falling through the clouds,
leaving bright streaks and skid marks that glow
until the night shakes out her velvet robe.
But the clock is speeding toward Monday morning.
The easy weekend hours are gone,
and in their place is another week
of time clocks ticking like a bomb.
Life is hazardous to our health,
and the strain of paying our way
can cause anxiety that builds like storms,
with boiling thunderheads of apprehension.
Reality is lost among the lightning bolts
and pelting hail of panic-stricken thoughts.
There is a trick to finding shelter
from runaway worries, and it is
simply to do one thing at a time,
one day at a time, because
we can't live in the future or the past.
Now is sweet because it's here, and
the alternative is to be gone forever,
watching from a distant star,
lonesome for the breath of life.

Editor's note:

You can find poetry previously published by *Your Country Neighbor* online. Just click on "publications" at:

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WHERE IS SPRING

by Sheri Mayhew Dowding

Spindly branches break through the ground
Tiny leaf bud of green
Is spring around the corner
Unborn flowers yet to be seen

Birds still hide in the trees
We long to hear their song
No robins have appeared
Have we done something wrong

The air is cold and damp
The sky still has winter's gloom
Warm air would delight us
How we long for summer's bloom

We check the flowerbed daily
Looking for a sign of spring
A crocus or blade of grass
Any growing thing

For now we sit and wait
Spring will come soon
For those that know how to watch
We can see it in the moon

Diary of an Unemployed Housewife

Merri Johnson

It's tempting to devote this article to the unusually nasty weather we've had this winter. We're all completely fed up with day after day of below normal temperatures and snowstorm after snowstorm. Considering the fact that we've had snow on the ground since the first week of December – and winter didn't begin officially until December 21 – it has truly been a looong winter. But as I write this, the sun is shining and the temperature is 43 degrees. I actually drove around town today with my car window open!

But since we're all sick of the weather, I thought I'd focus on something else we can all agree to complain about: filing our income tax returns.

I've been preparing our returns for a number of years now, and until three years ago, I always had an occupation to list alongside my name on page two. I was an administrative assistant, secretary, department supervisor, office manager; whatever title you choose to attach to the role of girl Friday in a professional office.

Then I "retired" at the end of 2004 and suddenly had an identity crisis. I listed "homemaker" as my occupation because I couldn't quite bring myself to use the word retired. Can you really call yourself retired at 52?! "Unemployed" made it sound like I was just down on my luck. "Between jobs" would have been more accurate, since I didn't stay retired for very long.

By spring of 2005 I was itching to earn a little money of my own, so I took up weeding for dollars for two summers. It was a perfect match for my desire for flexibility in my work hours and the opportunity to indulge my penchant for outdoor puttering. Then I did a little freelance project administration, resulting in the requirement that I pay self-employment tax. Bummer. But I still called myself a homemaker on our tax return.

This year, I'm debating again about what to put in the occupation box. Is a part-time, temporary job technically an "occupation"? It sounds a tad presumptuous for a job that is really just a way to earn a little money for new home furnishings. Do you need to earn a certain amount, or be committed to continuing in the job as long as they'll have you, to call it an occupation? Maybe I should just stick with homemaker and call it good. After all, I didn't start this job until almost Thanksgiving. Maybe it's like determining your legal residence: you have to live there more than half the year in order for it to count.

It's possible that I'm over-thinking this thing. The IRS probably didn't convene a round-table to hash out all the nuances of the word when they settled on occupation. Or maybe they did. They could have chosen "livelihood" or "profession" or "job title." My computer thesaurus lists several alternatives for occupation, depending on whether you're using the word to denote a job or an activity. I rather like the last one: "something to do."

So I guess I'll go ahead and put "sewing machine operator" in the box. It's only a temporary occupation, but it's consuming the majority of my retirement right now. Next year, who knows?

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"My Life & Times as Harve Bodine"

by Joe Smith

If you like the stories I write, you would love this story. Harve Bodine was in the Confederate Army, riding for the Quantrell Raiders. He didn't like anything that guy was doing so he and another fellow left before the end of the war and went out West. It seems he turned lawman.

The story has a lot of human feeling in it, honest emotions, true love (sorry, no hot sex scenes). The story takes place in an area I am somewhat familiar with. Other parts came from Harve himself. I had no idea where it was going. I just wrote it down like Harve told me to. Whether it actually happened or not is for you to decide. Joe Smith.



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This daffodil photo from last Spring is an image many of us are looking forward to seeing soon.



Here's a Spring 2007 scene from Brownville of the Village Theatre.
Your Country Neighbor

Time

by Frieda Burston

My cardiologist was pretty upset when they connected my pacemaker to the machine and it reported back that my heart had already stopped three times since May, twice briefly and once “dangerously”.

She said she was going to quadruple my meds. I said nothing except that I didn't want that. I was busy thinking. Since Lulu died, I have often thought that while nobody could say when I was going to die, I ought to be able to choose how I was going to die, and this might do it.

See, my family dies of either cancer or heart. After suffering through cancer with a husband and a daughter, I feel I've done enough time with that, I don't need more. Dying of heart is much neater and quicker. So why should I make myself sick with side effects of meds, in order to die of cancer? Strange thinking, and even if it leads to a stroke, at my age that's easier to take than metastasis.

So I cheered up and it improved my disposition no end. Finally, after all these last years when D-D tried to get me to see the glass half full, I can admire the sparkle shimmering above it and the light scent of spice floating around it.

I started to live a little, now that I have some kind of handle on dying. I opened up the manual that came with my sewing machine, and tried to figure out how to work it. Didn't get very far— it may be like my computer: I may be able to make it work on plain stuff but I'll never be able to make it do what it's really capable of. I may never figure out how to make this machine thread itself.

It would have been cheering if I could have gone out and worked in the Rose Garden, but those days are over. The ruling came down from the top that we Residents can't work in the yard because we might break a leg or something and then sue the establishment. The Administration has to protect itself, so we have to be Sacred Cows. Residents ask me why are the roses so ratty looking? All I can do is to look mournfully at them and Moooooo.....

So that's why, now that I have the heart thing laid out as my exit of choice, I'm trying to hold off on the other exits. I want to learn how to thread my new sewing machine—

Gimme time, gimme a little time, I'll get there—.....best wishes, Frieda



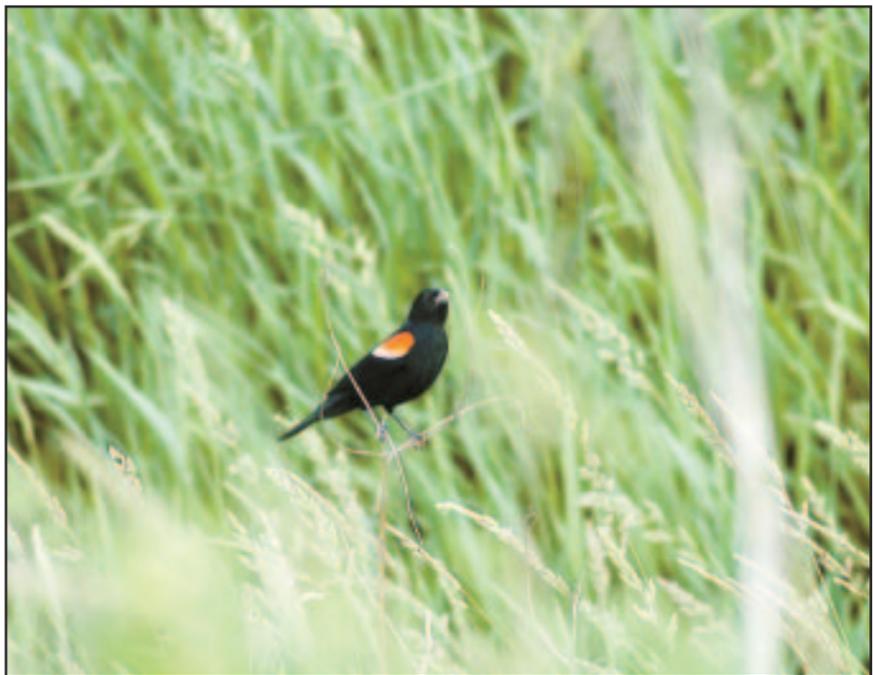
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An early sign of Spring is the Red-winged Blackbird, often seen and heard along our country roads where tall grasses grow in ditches that are likely to be somewhat marshy. Listen for his call wherever you see cattails along the road.

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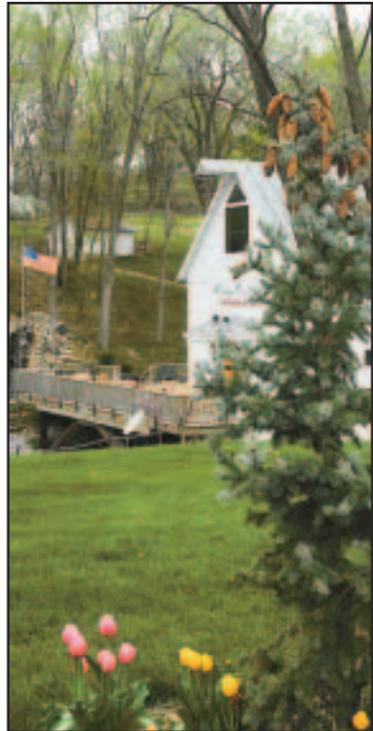
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Whisler's Hunting



by Josh Whisler
(Photo(s) provided by Author)

& Fishing Report

Hunting seasons are pretty much closed down for the 2007-2008 seasons but the 2008 Spring Turkey Season is right around the corner and it's time to get your permit and to be watching the birds. They are in big groups now and not hard to find. Check them out – they will be splitting up soon and then comes the Spring season. Checking them out now gives you a good idea where they will be when the season opens. 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."

Fishing:

The Missouri River is still low and cold with ice flowing pretty regular now that the temperatures have dipped below zero. It's amazing to still see ducks around. But that might also explain the reason that the Bald Eagles are so plentiful. At the Peru Boat Ramp where we go to check the river, we see eagles every time we go out. The road accessing the river is lined with the bluff on one side and river bottom ground on the other. When you approach the river's edge it's lined with towering cottonwood trees. So you're bound to see them circling the bottom ground, perched in a high view point on top of the bluff, or parked in the cottonwoods near the water's edge. You may not notice them right away but when the sun catches the bright white of their head plumage or their tail feathers, then you know you're looking at the master of all predatory birds.

Area lakes and ponds are ideal for ice fishing right now. Many of them with over nine inches of ice. Now if a weekend could support pan fishing, that would be quite another story. The weekends seem to be when the storms blow though as of late. I'm still planning on getting out and giving it a try, WEATHER PERMITTING. I'll let you know how it turns out.

Hunting:

2008 Spring Turkey Season has been set with a few new regulation changes for the 2008 Spring Season. NEW for 2008 is that the hunter can obtain three Spring permits of any type (Bow & arrow or Shotgun) this year. Permits can be bought starting January 14th. All permits are available online at www.outdoornebraska.org, by mail through the Lincoln office, or over the counter at any Commission Permitting office.

2008 Spring Turkey Season Dates are:

Shotgun: April 12 – May 18th.

Archery: March 25th - May 18th.



This month's picture is of the Cold-Cold Missouri River.

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Knowing the Real Deal with Long-Term Care

“Long-term care” is the catch-all phrase for a variety of care methods provided to those who need assistance to maintain activities of daily living. Activities of daily living are things healthy, active people take for granted such as walking, bathing, meal preparation, housekeeping, medication management, toileting and others.

Long-term care is generally associated with elderly citizens, age 65 and older, but can also apply to younger adults who are disabled or have chronic illnesses.

Care services are provided in a number of settings, such as skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, community-based adult day cares, or in the home.

Those who provide care may be members of the medical community, most likely employed in an institutional setting, but may work for an agency making in-home health care visits such as “visiting nurses,” or “physical or occupational therapists.” Many care recipients receive assistance in their home from non-medical providers; services include housekeeping, transportation, meal preparation, or assistance in managing one’s financial affairs.

Costs of long-term care vary depending upon where care is provided, type of assistance, skills required to provide care, and amount of time needed to provide care. Unless long-term care becomes necessary as a result of an injury or illness. Medicare and private Medicare supplement insurance, do not cover costs of long-term care.

Medicare pays for some in-home health care services following a hospitalization, but there are limits to coverage, scope, and duration of care. Medicare supplement insurance picks up deductibles and differences between what Medicare pays for and cost of services, reducing the insured’s out-of-pocket expenses.

Medicare does not pay for custodial care in skilled nursing facilities, nor do they pay any costs for assisted living. Custodial care is defined as services provided to help the client live as they are now; it is not designed to improve health status, nor correct medical problems.

Long-term care insurance is an option in paying for long-term care. These private insurance policies must be purchased in advance of needing care; costs vary with the purchaser’s age and health condition at the time policies are written. Long-term care insurance policies have pre-selected conditions such as benefits’ cap, exclusions to coverage, elimination periods, and designated daily coverage amounts. Premiums may not be refunded if care is never used.

Price tags for long-term care have risen dramatically during the last 20 years and are projected to climb even higher given the surge of Baby Boomers who may need care services.

A significant amount of the costs for long-term care are paid for by the family and individuals who receive care, using personal savings and investments, current income or home equity to pay for care. When an individual’s resources are depleted, they may qualify for Medicaid, a government subsidy administered by states, generally intended for those whose income is well below federal poverty guidelines.

This year an estimated 9 million adults will receive long-term care assistance. 70% will be cared for by unpaid caregivers—usually friends or family members. Most will be cared for at home. According to a study done by the U.S. Department of Health and Human services, only 40% of those over the age of 65 will require nursing home care at least once during their lifetime; many of which will require a one-year or less stay.

As we plan for our future, or make decisions for members of the older generation, we may want to identify options to pay for long-term care in the event it is needed. If care is not needed, accumulated wealth will be available to finance retirement living or become part of our estate which can be passed down to the next generation.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Educator, Mary Ann Holland, focuses educational programming in the areas of financial resource management and aging issues. She can be reached at the Cass County Extension office near Weeping Water at 402-267-2205. Mary Ann will be presenting a Long-Term Care lesson (based on the above information) at three area senior centers during the month of April. She will be at the Syracuse Senior Center on Thursday, April 10th, Pawnee City Action Center on April 17th, and Plattsmouth Community Center April 24th.



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The Face of Drought

A Farm Report from Western Nebraska

by Karen Ott

For months now our temperatures have been skating around the twenties and thirties, now, all of a sudden, were basking in the warmth of the high forties; this coming Sunday temperature is expected to hit sixty-four degrees! When you go from wearing insulated underwear to shirt-sleeve weather in less than a week you know you're living Nebraska's good life.

It's far too early to call it the 'Big Thaw'....we've a bucketful of cold weather yet to come.....but we're enjoying our foray into spring, however brief.

Our only complaint is the mud. Around mid-day the top few inches of the fields soften and turn to mush causing Dale's pickup to grunt and groan as he checks the cows for calving difficulties; by midnight ruts made during the day have frozen solid, which makes for a bone jarring ride if he mistakenly drives across them in the dark. The auto industry can talk all it wants to about 'Ford Tough' and 'Built like a Rock', but farm pickups age in dog years...and for good reason.

The warm weather has farmers stirring in their dens like restless bears. Most are still rubbing the winter-sleep from their eyes, but a few are already out and about foraging for used equipment, or pricing new tractor tires. The calendar doesn't rouse them, it's an instinctive response to the smell of mud.....I've never met a farmer who could resist it.

Leaving their mates behind they'll gather in the usual places.....farm auctions or small-town cafes...and spend a few harmless hours farming words instead of fields. Some men will tell you this pre-reality period is the best part of farming; rains fall when their supposed to, every corn field yields 200 bushel per acre, and crops are sold at market high. It's the time of year when optimism and hope spring eternal.

Unfortunately a few grey clouds smudge this Spring's rose-colored horizon; Western Sugar Cooperative is experiencing some near-crippling growing pains. The major dispute between the Co-op and its shareholders revolves around the value of grower contracts, and the policy of fining shareholders for unplanted acres. (One share equals one acre of beets)

Six years ago Tate and Lyle Sugar (a British corporation) sold the company to a four-state grower cooperative. Shares in the coop were sold for \$185.00 each, requiring shareholders to raise one acre of sugar beets for each share owned. Shareholder/investors with no ground of their own rented their shares to willing growers who had, for various reasons, decided not to purchase shares (like us). For a time it seemed like a perfect system.

A year and a half ago the co-op management chose to open up the closed cooperative, (apparently without shareholder approval) issuing 6,500 more shares at \$350.00 apiece.

No one complained about the rise in share price.....or asked where the additional 6,500 sugar-beet acres would come from....until the combination of drought, rising commodity prices (corn, wheat, dry edible beans), and the four year beet rotation cycle dried up the number of acres available. During the 2007 growing season the co-op levied fines of \$380.00 per unplanted acre. This year shareholders who can't find land to rent or plant face fines up to \$400.00 per acre.

During the past few weeks the local newspaper has printed numerous ads placed by desperate shareholders willing to give their shares away, and yesterday a tire-shop patron told me that he'd seen a poster tacked to wall at a local John Deere dealer offering 3000 free shares.....part or parcel....to anyone interested in taking them.

The dilemma has made for interesting times. A few days ago a shareholder phoned Dale and offered to pay cash rent of \$200.00 an acre if we would raise 100 acres of beets for him...plus a custom farming fee. It was sweet revenge to be in the driver's seat and say 'not interested' to the same guy who just three years ago turned us down when we approached him about leasing his farm.

But since it's always bad business to let feelings get in the way of common sense we left the door open...."Call us if you can't find anyone else." Dale said...."We might consider it if the price per acre goes up."

Since Dale and I stand outside the blaze of discontent we can see both sides: the coop needs some sort of acre guarantee to continue in the sugar business, the shareholders/growers need a workable contingency plan, other than bankruptcy, for times when their acres go unplanted.

I don't have the answer. The problem is neither does anyone else...at least not at the moment.

The cold and flu season has hit the valley with a vengeance, and true to form I've succumbed to another bout of congestion and 'up-all-night' coughing.

Dale says, "Go to the Doctor" while my mother insists all will be well if I get some rest. But what I really need is a vacation.....one which begins with a long plane ride, and includes a beach, trade winds and swaying palms.

But since I'm pretty darn sure that's not going to happen I'm making myself content with a jar of Vicks and streaming live video from a web cam aimed at Waikiki Beach.

I guess that's what they mean—cough, cough, cough, snuffle, snuffle—by the phrase 'bloom where you're planted.'

Editor's note:

You can read previous articles by Karen Ott online in Your Country Neighbor archives; just click on "publications" at:

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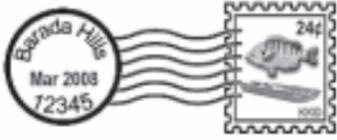
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OF BOATS AND BLUEGILLS

by Vicki Harger

She swims in the aquarium boldly now...this nondescript little Bluegill who came to me in an unexpected way. Darting amongst the larger fish, she swims unafraid—as undaunted as the name that I gave her....I call her—

But wait! I'm getting ahead of my story, folks. We have to start back at the beginning...Back to the Spring of '07—a rather trying time for me, I must say.

I went on vacation in the Spring, leaving the farm for a couple of weeks. When I returned, I was distraught. During my absence, my beloved Jon boat had filled up with water from the Spring rains, and had disappeared into the murky depths of the pond. I was nearly beside myself!

How I loved that boat! How many summers had I spent drifting in idle abandon in that Jon boat? Ah—the memories of sunshine and carefree bliss while the waters sparkled and the fish splish-splashed about me....The disappearance of my Jon boat marked a new low in my life.

Every day, I stood on the banks of the pond and stared into the depths, as though doing so would somehow resurrect my beloved boat. "Lord," I said. "You know exactly where that boat is and you can bring it back to me, if You just would!"

But the Lord didn't do a thing. Not a thing.

I couldn't understand it. "Now, look Lord," I said, with as much firmness as person can use when addressing the Almighty. "You raised the dead and turned water to wine and You even walked on water in a storm. You can surely do a miracle and raise a Jon boat from this pond. I have faith, Lord!"

But nothing happened.

I finally stopped trying to reason with Him. I'd just have to do something myself. The-Lord-helps-those-who-help-themselves, right? I organized a boat-finding party and all the church kids came to help out. A very spiritual time of fellowship, it was. We swam and banged about with a search-rod in the depths of the pond. In the middle, on the sides... All to no avail.

The Jon boat was not to be found.

But I didn't give up. I called

upon our helpful neighbor, Dan, to rectify matters. If anyone could find a boat, it would be Skipper Dan.

The Skipper arrived in his pickup truck, pulling up to the banks of the pond. He got out his boat-finding gear: his canoe, his long pole, his hooks and tackle. He worked and sweated and finagled the day away. But alas! Although the Skipper could navigate the tricky currents of the Mighty MO...he could cast hoop nets and wrangle with huge catfish and jumping Russian carp...Yet, not even Skipper Dan could find that Jon boat.

Eventually, I dithered into despair.

The summer had arrived and it would be a bleak summer indeed. My first summer without my beloved boat. It just wasn't right. Not when I have such a big powerful God who fills the entire universe. How hard was it for Someone like that to return my beloved Jonny boat?

I questioned Him often about the matter. I sighed. I bargained. I explained that I had bulldog faith that could move mountains. Well, that could move Jon boats, at least. But nothing worked.

The days drifted into weeks and the weeks into months. The dog days of summer came and went. By now, I'd nearly given up on ever finding my Jon boat. No doubt Jonny was ruined by now, anyway. Buried beneath the mud at the bottom—full of debris and caked with slime.

Slowly, Summer faded into Autumn. My birthday was approaching, and the thought of it did little to cheer my spirits. At my age, it's best to forget about birthdays....

And apparently, that's exactly what everyone did.

The day of my 46th birthday arrived. It was a day like any other. There wasn't a sign that anyone in my entire family had remembered my special day. No cake. No wrapped presents. No confetti or sparkle or balloons. Nada. Zip. Oh well. I would just forget my birthday, too. I'd be jiggered if I was going to tell anyone what day it was.

I sighed and went outside.

My feet automatically turned

towards the pond. In times of distress, I always wander to the banks of the pond. There I stood staring out at the waters...lost in thought. I wasn't thinking of anything in particular, that day. I don't remember praying....but I felt a distinct impression come over me as I stood staring into the water.

Not knowing where I was going, I called to the dogs and set off toward the back of the property....toward that far end of the pond that ends up in a deep ravine. My stride was purposeful. I had no idea where I was headed, but I knew I had to walk and walk and walk.

I ended up at the very top side of the pond's watery ravine....a swamp-like place where brush and logs littered the waters. A gloomy spot that's almost impossible to reach by foot or by boat. I stood staring out across the swamp, wondering why I'd come.

What a place to go on your birthday, I thought gloomily. A skummy spot full of brush, rotting logs and decay. My eyes scanned the waters idly...my thoughts empty—yet I felt a strange sense of something else too. What was it that I was feeling? And why in the world was I here?

With a sigh, I started to turn away. Then my gaze snagged on something half-buried beneath a foot of water. I looked at it for a moment, feeling mildly curious—my mind still blank and fuzzy.

Suddenly, the shadowy form in the water became distinct.

Like the sun popping over the horizon, it dawned on me... My Jonny Boat?

I could've cried. My thoughts whirled...questions swirled round and round in my brain.... spinning. How...? Why...? Could it really be....?

I stumbled down the embankment toward the water. Yes—it really was the Jon Boat. The Lord had given me back my Jonny, and He had done it on my Birthday! The day I'd felt so forsaken and dreary and forgotten! I laughed. I cried. I called to the dogs and we all rejoiced together...even though the canine sector had no idea what we

were rejoicing about.

Amid the commotion, my teenage daughter came to the top of the ravine. She peered down on my situation in a lordly manner, then volunteered to help with the boat-recovery mission....

And help she did!

She found me an old bucket to use as a water-dipper. She bossed me effectively from the bank. She harpooned me in the gut with a long pole. "Mom!" she said. "You were in the way!" She also explained to me that no one had forgotten my birthday. They'd been planning a surprise for me later in the day. Sheeesh, Mom!

But that hardly mattered now. I'd found my Jonny boat. God's in His Heaven and all is right with the world.

I began dipping the water out of the boat. I managed to get most of the water out and was inspecting the hull for damage when I spied something splish-splashing in the bottom of the boat.

It was a little Bluegill, flashing in the sunlight. I scooped her up with the bucket and carefully carried the little fish back to the house. Here was the proof that I needed...Proof that my Jon boat had, indeed, been totally submerged in water...And yet it had risen back to daylight. I'd found my Jonny on the very day that I needed it most.

Carrying the bucket back to the house, I carefully deposited the little Bluegill into the fish tank. She was my birthday gift from the Lord...she and my Jonny boat.

She makes me happy each time I look at her. And any time I begin to doubt that God answers prayers, I look over at that bit of quicksilver darting about the aquarium. Boldly, she swims amongst the larger fish, as brave and undaunted as her name implies.

I call the little Bluegill, Faith.... Of course.

Vicki Harger

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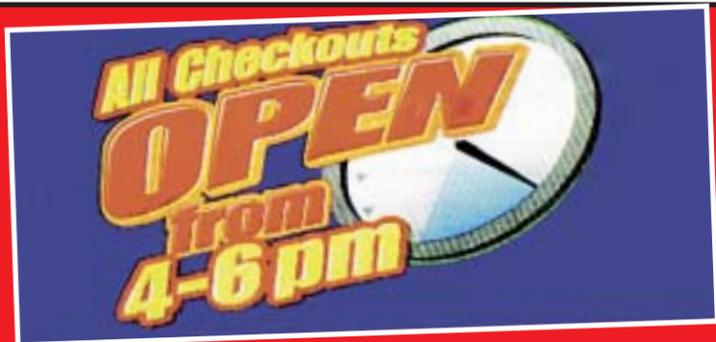
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