



Northern Cardinal, Male, February 23, 2013



<<<<<< Left; 'First' Robin, February 17

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Cover Photos

The ground was covered enough and the air was cold enough in February that I had ample opportunity to photograph Cardinals in my yard... attracted by my feeder's contents of black oil sunflower seeds.

I've heard his song a few times. Keep singing Spring, red bird!

Earlier in the month, I spotted my first Robin of the season. I have been informed that there are more around, but I have not noticed any recently, probably due to the snow and cold. Your sighting may have been earlier than mine on Sunday, February, 17th.

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Voices from the Valleys of the Nemaha

Writers This Month

Devon Adams
Carol Carpenter
Mary Ann Holland
Merri Johnson
Shirley Neddenriep
Vicki O'Neal
Karen Ott
Marilyn Woerth

Thank You

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Sunday, February 17, 2013

Poetry by Devon Adams

GULLY WASHER

Dark clouds, angry with thunder,
swept away the light of the sun
and covered the blue sky with
dirty, swirling water that fell
with vengeful fury on the hills.
Canyons in the rugged bluffs
couldn't hold the rapid run-off,
and water climbed the steep banks
and ripped out trees by their roots.
It blasted away the soil and sand
and clay that were packed in layers
over huge stone slabs of limestone,
and thrust it out of deep ravines in an
explosion of branches and mud and foam.
It even dislodged rocks that rolled along
underneath the seething mass of debris.
Evidence of violence was clear after the
storm had beat itself to death. Sand flats
spread out from the cracks in the hills.
They were covered with shards of trees
and littered with rainbow rocks that caught
the sun and threw it back at the morning sky.
Sparks of quartz and sparkles of granite
gleamed among the red and rose and
gray and blue of the stones that had been
washed out of the past and into the present.

RAIN SHADOWS

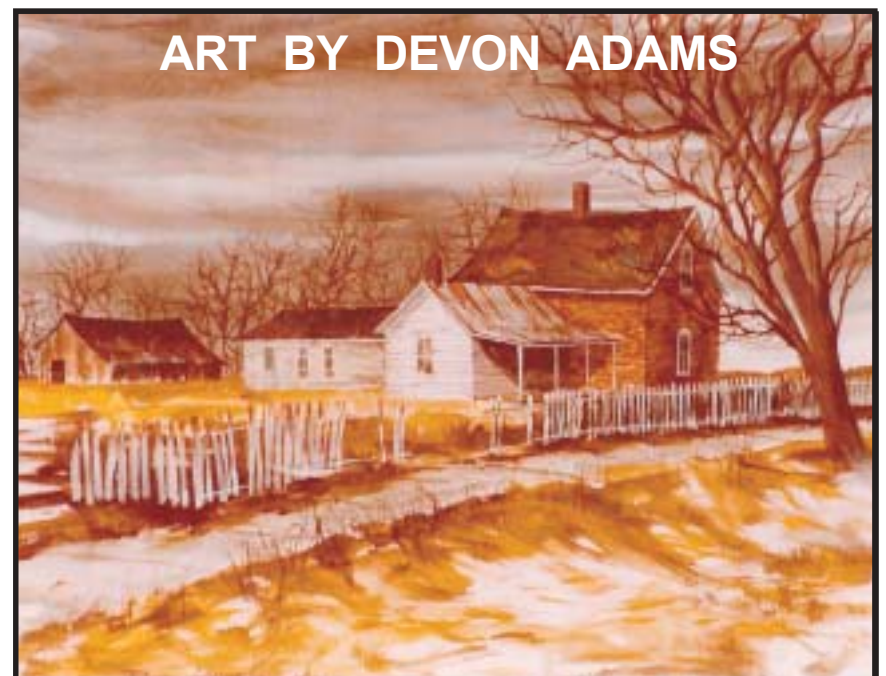
Following their parent clouds,
gray shadows of rain fall across
the fields. They are filmy curtains,
dragging their wet hems through
beans and corn and the undulating
waves of fragrant brome grass.

SO BRIGHT

Washed with cold light
from a full pewter moon,
shapes are cut sharp
in the still night air.
It is an alien scene,
painted with no colors,
defined by shadows
and metal edges.
I fall off the edge
of a dream, and gaze
out the window at a
place I don't recognize.
Morning is miles away,
and I am lost between
the moon and reality.

IF I KNEW

An ordinary day
like all the rest
might be my last,
but if I knew
when I would go,
I'd walk in long grass,
and watch hawks
sweep the sky.



ART BY DEVON ADAMS

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SOFT FUDGE

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STARS ON THE GROUND

City lights were on the blink, and dark lay heavy on the ground. Until the fragile stars on the ground came back to life, the sky was full of distant candles.

BEAR WITH ME

She had always wanted to live in an isolated cabin in the mountains, surrounded by nature and privacy. Finally, after years of dreams and savings, both of them retired to such a place. They are awed by the sweep of the mountain view, majestic clouds, and the critters who come to drink in the little pond by the tall pine. Graceful mule deer browse in their garden, and birds are always busy at the feeder by their rustic porch. Of course they are careful not to turn their back on the bears.

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WISH I MIGHT'VE BEEN THERE . . .

Shirley Neddenreip

I am impressed: Andreu Rieu, renowned Dutch violinist, plays Frank Sinatra's *My Way* at Radio City Music Hall in New York City. Rieu prefaces the concert by telling of Sinatra's family coming to America 100 years ago and Frank becoming well known singing on that very stage. Maestro Rieu says that the audience is a strong part of the music. In his recorded concert, which came to me by the magic of e-mail, the camera moves easily between scenes of the orchestra and a panorama of the audience. Audience members show signs of emotion upon hearing the music, the first few bars and there are tears, goose-bumps and faces that show disbelief at hearing a sound so beautiful.

The fifty-member orchestra includes percussion, brass, in addition to the strong string section, and there is a grand piano. Seven women at the back of the orchestra sing the song; all wearing pastel off-the-shoulder full length gowns with very full skirts. For the men it's a white-tie affair.

Maestro Rieu claims the first stanza for himself and his Stradivarius, with very little accompaniment, maybe the piano, for rhythm, but softly. He indicates with a very slight nod at the second stanza and the singers stand to perform along with only the stringed instruments.

Next a FULL ORCHESTRA that knocks you out of your seat, cymbals clash, **ffff** at the piano, all a 'full court press!!' so beautiful and the audience responds with applause, but holds it back not to miss a single note. The Strad has a wonderful tone and can be singled out from all the other (violinists).

A fourth stanza with the Strad and strings, plucked, with soft voices to background an early motion picture film of emigrants leaving the ship and passing by the Statue of Liberty, disembark with their precious selves and luggage, boxed, packaged carefully for the trip. They stand, backs to camera, to watch their ship leave, severing the last tie to homeland; then a view of their new land, skyscrapers, the Hudson and finally a young boy who could pass for a young Frank, pleasant, then a full smile, heartening to see.

This is followed by an expectant Rieu who turns ever so slightly for his clarinet player to begin the tune, with Mr. Rieu following in a charming duet/round for a few bars and bell tone drops of notes to carry the tune for the next soloist, a flutist. Then the violin joins the flute in a melody indescribable beautiful. The clarinet player lowers his instrument and rolls his eyes skyward as if to Thank his God for helping him play perfectly under stress, but not to pause, the FULL ORCHESTRA has it again, cymbals clang, brass trumpets, trombones, a baritone, the drums, piano and with the Strad leading to a final, loud and impressive conclusion with that gentleman from Holland **attacking** his music where he separates his bow entirely from his violin in a dramatic pause and then crashes right back for the closure.

They do it so well, the orchestra of Andre Rieu, with the help of the audience to appreciate the beauty, for what would be the purpose of such a splendid performance without someone to hear and eyes to see the magnificence of it all?

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Spring Workshops

If you, or your spouse, are turning 65 in 2013, you have lots of company. Ten thousand Baby Boomers age into Medicare every day and will continue to do so for the next decade. Plan to continue working, and not draw Social Security benefits? If so, you are still entitled to enroll in Medicare at age 65. If you are 65 and uninsured, enrolling in Medicare will give you access to health insurance coverage widely accepted across the country.

If you are currently employed, will your group health plan continue after you turn 65? Do you have a younger spouse needing health coverage? How do VA benefits affect Medicare? What are the costs of Medicare and how do I find the right plan? Want answers?

Plan to participate in *You're Turning 65: Welcome to Medicare!* workshop, presented by Mary Ann Holland, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Educator and Trained SHIIP Professional (Senior Health Insurance Information Program). No registration is necessary and the workshop is free. Workshop dates and locations are listed below. Select the date and location that works best for you; content is repeated at each workshop.

- Tues., March 12, 6:00-8:00 p.m. Morton-James Public Library, 923 1st Corso, Nebraska City
- Wed., March 13, 1:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m. Cass County Extension, 8400 144th Street, Weeping Water
- Thurs., March 28, 10:30 a.m.-12:30p.m. Auburn Public Library, 1810 Courthouse Avenue, Auburn
- Tues., April 16, 5:30-7:30 p.m. Plattsmouth Library, 400 Avenue A, Plattsmouth
- Wed., April 17, 2:00-4:00 p.m. Morton-James Public Library, 923 1st Corso, Nebraska City
- Thurs., April 18, 10:00 a.m.-Noon Cass County Extension, 8400 144th Street, Weeping Water
- Tues., April 23, 6:00-8:00 p.m. Auburn Public Library, 1810 Courthouse Avenue, Auburn
- Thurs., April 25, 1:30-3:30 p.m. Sump Memorial Library, 222 N. Jefferson, Papillion

The workshops cover the basics of Medicare, Medicare Supplement Insurance, Medicare Advantage Plans, Medicare Preventive Services, and the prescription drug benefit, including information for applying for extra help for individuals with limited income and resources. Pre-retirees, new-to-Medicare beneficiaries, family members and caregivers are welcome to attend.

Visit the Cass County Extension website at: www.cass.unl.edu for a complete list of Medicare workshops planned for 2013. Questions can be directed to Mary Ann Holland at the Cass County Extension office at 402-267-2205, or contact by e-mail at: mholland1@unl.edu



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Nuthatch and House Finch



Karen's Letter Before the Storm

We've been waiting all day; there's a blizzard coming, or so says our esteemed weather service.

There's been little help from the media; bulletins issued by various local radio stations have been as vague and ambiguous as a senate filibuster. We don't know whether to look for ten inches of snow, 50 mph winds, and seven foot drifts, or 2-4 inches and gusts to 30.

To be on the safe side we've prepared for the worst: cows which could be brought into corrals are snuggled down behind windbreaks....hay bales (large rounds) have been hauled to those herds which, by necessity, must remain in the open. The feedlot cattle have been generously fed.

Tractors are plugged in, feed trucks are loaded and parked under cover, water tanks, and their heaters, have been checked and double checked.....as have the hen's accommodations.

My snow shovel is leaning against the porch railing like long-legged cowboy....just in case.

The sky was as clear as a church bell this morning, but now, just a bit before 5:00 PM, it's clouded over into a vast expanse of nothingness.... a uniformly grey poker face as indistinct as a blank wall. The clouds were carried in and deposited by a cold breeze from the north-east...a bad sign in itself as some of our worst blizzards came riding a biting north-east wind.

By tomorrow morning we'll know for certain what sort of storm we're dealing with.....at present we've trimmed our sails and battened down the hatches the best we can.

Let her rip.

As always, Karen

Karen's Letter After the Storm

I scooped one and one-half inches of 'major winter storm' from my front sidewalk this morning. It's the first real work our snow shovel has done all winter.

If blizzards were packaged and sold in boxes the brand shipped to this desiccated section of the high plains would be stocked next to selections of powdered milk and instant potatoes. Like those tasteless, dried-out, dehydrated products our 2013 storms have been pitiable imitations of the real thing.

Even the blizzard two weeks ago was a bust...dropping a scant inch before it skedaddled east, leaving meteorologists red-faced, but unapologetic, about their forecast for 'significant' snowfall....or the ensuing run on bread and milk at local grocery stores. (It was a reenactment of a 1930's bank run at Morrill's DL Foods....with shopping carts.)

But as desperately as we need moisture, the lack of snow has certainly been beneficial for those of us in the thick of calving season with its sleepless nights, endless trips to the fields, and uncooperative mamas who take umbrage at guys 'messing' with their newborns.

Just yesterday Dale walked into the house carrying his Levis. "Got a new calf or go for a swim?" I asked as he tossed his wet jeans over a chair and headed for the bedroom in his bare feet.

"Both." he replied curtly. "She had him around midnight, and he was doing OK when I checked him at three. But when I went out at five she was standing on one side of the creek trying to coax him through the water....he was on the other side shivering. So, I carried him across."

It took all day to dry the inside of Dale's boots; the freezing water had been thigh-deep....his boggers only knee high.

That's what happens when you take a Polar-Plunge...farm style.

Wishing you gentle mamas, healthy babies, and an endless supply of colostrum.

It's calving season....enjoy the ride.

As always, Karen

TWO MEN...TWO FUNERALS

By Vicki O'Neal



They both lived in Southeastern Nebraska, but they didn't know one another. Their lives were as opposite as can be! It was ironic that the two men died about the same time and shared the same date for a funeral.

Walkin' Willy was a simple-minded man who wandered aimlessly through life. The other fellow was a man of affluence...A gentleman who had lived his life fully. He was considered successful in every way.

My parents knew both of them, so when the two men died, Mom and Dad had to choose which funeral to attend—the Gentleman's or the man-of-the-streets. I myself didn't know the Gentleman well... But I did know "Walkin' Willy." He came to our church in Nebraska City. Willy Perkins showed up Sunday after Sunday. His clothes were a bit run-down, but they were always clean. He came carrying his box of day-old donuts to share with one and all. We tolerated Walkin' Willy as best we could—ignoring his uncouth ways... Trying not to notice the crumbs that spewed from his mouth when he talked and munched donuts, as was his custom. He interrupted the church service countless times, inserting his opinion whenever he deemed it necessary. He carried a large Bible and shouted "AMEN!" louder than anyone else.

"I believe that Bible!" he'd say, thumping the big book with his hand.

Willy always requested prayer for his friends. He always paid his tithes, counting out the coins one by one. He always sold more fund-raising tickets than any other church member.

Willy pestered folks continually. He could be a real nuisance at times. He was the wandering waif of Nebraska City... An old relic of sorts who was all too visible. He attended every shindig in the City. To tell you the truth, Willy really wasn't homeless... he just seemed that way. He had a room where he stayed, and he kept it very clean, but he was seldom there.

He spent his days wandering the earth and talking to people. In his lifetime, Walkin' Willy covered 100's maybe even 1000's of miles. He walked from Nebraska City to Hamburg, Iowa, more times than we could count. When someone stopped and asked the old man if he wanted a ride, Willy said: "Oh Lord no! I don't want no ride. I'm in a hurry!" Good ol' Willy. Hunch-backed Willy. About 80 years old, as far as anyone knew.

One day last fall, Walkin' Willy got hit by a car. His life came to an

end while he was doing the very thing that he loved best.... Walking. And that brings me to the point that I mentioned a moment ago. Walkin' Willy died and his funeral was at the same time as the influential Gentleman's funeral—albeit in different towns. I didn't get to go to either funeral, but my parents had to choose which one to attend. I had no idea which funeral they chose. Later, when we were discussing the men's funerals, I became befuddled. "So, the funeral you went to was a big one...?" I said to my mother.

"Oh yes!" Mom said. "It was a huge! There were people from the City Council. Dignitaries. Doctors. The Mayor of the City. A lot of well-to-do folks. Some of them were honorary pall bearers. And when the funeral was over, there were hundreds of people who lined up to see the hearse go by. Maybe even a thousand or more!"

"Wow!" I said. "I didn't know that your friend was as well known as that! He must have been more influential than I realized! What was he... a millionaire or something?" My mom just looked at me.

"No..." she said. "You don't understand, I'm not talking about the rich guy's funeral. I'm talking about the other funeral... Walkin' Willy's!" "What!?" She nodded. "People lined up on the streets by the hundreds to pay their respects as the hearse went by. They did it in two towns at least... In Nebraska City and in Hamburg, Iowa, too." Oh. I see.

I felt stunned. I swallowed hard and thought about it a minute.

When I die, I'm sure there won't be mayors and dignitaries at my funeral. There won't be hundreds of people lining the streets to see my hearse go by like they did for Walkin' Willy. Maybe money and affluence don't matter as much as folks think. In order to be a "Successful and Influential person," maybe you need to be a good friend—not have a lot of money.

Good ol' Willy. Hunch-backed Willy. He had more going for him than anyone knew.... Even himself!

Walkin' Willy would've been surprised to see all those people lining the streets as the hearse carried his old body away.

I know if he could have, Willy would've sat straight up. He would've climbed out of that hearse and started walking toward his eternal destination.

"Lord no!" he'd say. "I don't want no ride. I'm in a hurry!"

Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

Nothing says lovin' like welding gloves, as a Valentine gift. Size small, black with red flames and a mustang head on them! Thanks sweetie! Hubby also wants you to know there also was a romantic, gourmet meal enjoyed in the evening, at Lauritzen Gardens in Omaha. He loves me.

Now my sweetie has a history of getting me unusual gifts. My mother still can't get over the fact that I was ecstatic to have him build me, a double-compost bin for my birthday, two decades ago. And yes, I was excited about the welding gloves. I am taking a welding class (see last month's article), and my small hands swim inside those huge gloves we were given from the high school shop class.

Now you may ask "How is that class going?" Well there have been some ups and some downs. Thank goodness for our instructor, Mr. Miller, who has been very patient with me. He was overly patient, when I welded two over-lapped pieces of metal to the welding table. He did praise my weld.

I now know (but not well) how to arc and oxy-acetylene weld. My oldest son (a welder) has also been teaching me how to mig weld. He donated a welder's helmet to my cause so I wouldn't have to keep resizing the shop class ones (small head).

And now with my birthday looming, hubby is pricing welding and torch kits. Whoa sweetie, let's take a step back. Maybe I should have him reread my September 2010 article (<http://www.yourcountryneighbor.com/YCN/Sep2010.pdf>).

The article describes why he has banned me from using the electrical miter saw and chain saw, as well as, the riding lawn mower. But being a true sweetie-pie, he wants to see my wish of creating my own garden art come true.

But with our garage under the bedroom I love, I do believe he needs to build a separate cinder blocked welding shop, FIRST!

With my helmet in place and my cool welding gloves on, let's hope I can weld something without incident (or banning) where life is good, and still not totally fused together (or burnt down). Wish me (us) luck, as we go forth in this new adventure! (More fodder for my writings? Gads, I hope not.)



Friday, March 15!

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Photo Submitted by Marilyn Woerth

Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

March is one of those months that can easily go either way – or both ways – delivering a blizzard of snow or a blizzard of tulip, daffodil, crocus and forsythia blooms. It occurs to me that the contrary nature of March makes it the most feminine of months. Now, ladies, don't take offense at that. We all know it is a woman's prerogative to change her mind. And don't we all play that card once in a while? Embrace it!

“In like a lion, out like a lamb,” may be a fairly safe March weather bet, but I'm not aware of actual statistics to back it up, and I choose not to go looking for them. I'd rather think of that expression as more of a mood indicator than a hard scientific rule. Again I say: March is a woman.


Just look at the astrological signs for March. The first 20 days fall in Pisces, described by whats-your-sign.com with these words: “fluctuation, depth, imagination, reactive, indecisive.” What woman (or her husband, for that matter) can't see the “female” side in that?

Theastrologyroom.com explains Pisces' symbol, “two fishes, joined together, but swimming in opposite directions. Another *dual* sign, like Gemini, the two fishes of Pisces represent the lifelong battle of the Piscean nature. One fish swims towards the soulful, mystical oceans, intent upon sacrificing itself for the good of others, or for some spiritual or political belief. The other swims towards self-fulfillment, and achieving personal goals.” Then comes the first day of spring, also known as the vernal equinox, on March 20. The very next day the astrological sign changes to Aries, described by the terms “active, demanding, determined, effective, ambitious.” Aries sounds decidedly more masculine, although plenty of women embody those characteristics. Talk about a dichotomy in personality from one day to the next. Sounds like a woman to me!

Even if you give not one ounce of credence to astrology, you have to admit it's fun to contemplate. And there just may be more to it than some of us are willing to see, given our modern penchant for demanding proof of everything.

But beyond astrology, March is the month of spring's arrival. Back in my full-time working life, one of my former (and favorite) bosses always vowed that his snow shovel was put away on March 1. Any snow that fell in March, he said, would melt on its own within a day or two. Considering the forecast of a major winter storm that's getting so much attention as I write this on Feb. 20, my boss' sentiment is one that I think most of us share: let winter be done!

Regardless of what March brings meteorologically or astrologically, this year it gives us several special days to commemorate important people and events. St. Patrick's Day, Good Friday and Easter all fall in March this year. It's no surprise that the tone of those events ranges from whimsical to somber to celebratory, all within a two-week period. So like a woman.



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Poetry and Photography



Blue

Dark circled eyes

snared in the glare of
the midnight moon,
my naked feet pace
cold and cracked cerulean tile

Icicle traitor eyes

and the way I felt
that day you said goodbye

my heart
shattered
on the floor
when you wiped
your indifference
on the indigo dishtowel.



Orange

Mango flesh
muskmelon sky
dragon's breath
of sunset before storm
scent of ripe citrus
heart of fire
pumpkin light
afterglow

by Carol Carpenter



Cranes in spring

Above glittering mists,
behind the shawl of spring
sharp clatter from a million throats
stark dance on smoky wing

Great coliseum of marriages
couples join along the Platte
sandhill brides and grooms alight
'fore turning ever back.



Peace

Home at last,
beneath this skin
and long curled tresses,
where peace flows
like the cool ribbon
of a mountain stream
salted with stars,
Indian flutes murmur
among the branches, and
the warm breath of dawn
blooms behind hazel eyes
where hawk and crow
rest together
on the gentle edge
of a freckled
shoulder.



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