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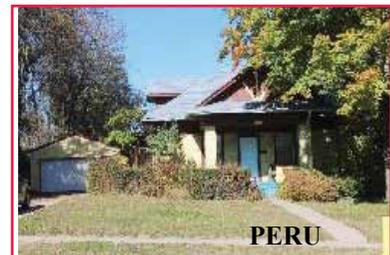
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Voices

*From the Valleys of the Nemaha
Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler*

Writers This Month

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Thank You

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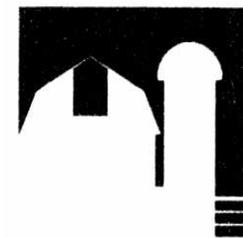
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I Can't Go Back...

But I Can Still Feel It

Stephen Hassler

Weeks before my 16th birthday, my family moved to southwest Iowa where I finished my last two years of high school. But I grew up in northeast Nebraska on a 160 acre farm.

One day after college and marriage, I made the three hour trip from Omaha and drove by the old place. I wanted to see where the house and barn once stood, where the one-room schoolhouse had been, and the road, the bridge, the creek.

I approached from the east along the country road and stopped on a rise above the narrow valley. From the northwest, the creek wound its way past the crossroads by the old school yard. It flowed under a rustic bridge about a half mile down the road, and continued southeast through what used to be the family farm.

The one-room school house wasn't there; the tree break surrounding the schoolyard appeared to be a stage for a horror movie. The trees looked like the few you see after a forest fire; barely standing, stripped of their former grandeur, victims of wind and age.

The lane from the road to the house no longer existed; the lane on which I rode my bicycle to the roadside mailbox. It no longer divided two fields of grain, one of corn, one of oats, as it curved down to the farm buildings and my childhood home. The buildings were gone; the barn with its stanchions, hay loft, and swooping barn swallows, the corncrib where my dog crawled under the floorboards to have her puppies, and the windmill where I pulled with my entire weight to engage the blades with the breeze in order to pump water to the cattle tank. No more even, the weedpatch where I searched for my baseball.

The tree break where three children played fantasy games for hours was gone, including my favorite climbing tree behind the chicken house. One of its branches was close enough that I could step onto the roof, lay at the building's 'peak' and gaze across the whole farmyard, daydreaming in the Summer sun. Gone was the downhill slope we called the "chicken house hill", where we three kids went sledding in Winter and bicycle coasting in Summer. The land had been leveled, the creek had been straightened, the stage had changed.

As I gazed over the sloping fields, I couldn't connect present day reality with my memories of growing up. I couldn't imagine where to place the house or the barn or the windmill. Only the sun, sky, and summer wind remained unchanged. There seemed to be an unkind resistance between present day reality and my memories; a barrier that was trying to deny my experience, or even deny that my past even existed. But there was no barrier that could deny the memories of my childhood. I stood on that country road and gazed over the crop stubble and the stillness, and nodded my head. It was all here. And I loved it.



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SNORM

When streets, and cars
and buildings vanish under
blankets that aren't warm,
and there is no new place
to pile the endless blizzards,
then it's time to change the
language, and add a word.

CLOSE CALLS

Only in dreams
do we receive
reprieves from
the inevitable,
except when we
are in reality awake
to hear and know
reversals have
occurred, and
we have dodged
a speeding bullet.

CURTAINS

In the smothered moonlight
of a foggy evening by the
running river, the fox barks
his strangled cough, and
an owl descends silently
on velvet wings to steal a
meal from the ruddy hunter,
who has spooked the rabbit
out of hiding into dying.

REFLECTIONS

Mirrors on the wall
reflect us all, as we
appear to be. But
what is on the other
side? Who is there
looking back at we?

UNREPENTANT

For all the days I chose
to follow the sun through
soft fields of grass, to watch
hawks cut circles in the blue
silk sky, to listen to birds
singing evening prayers, to
sit in solemn contemplation
of words written in soft dirt
or pristine snow by wild feet
wandering, to gaze at the
violet and rose of evening
until stars exploded over
black velvet, to touch the
silky hide and look into the
chocolate well of a horse's
eye, to run down the hill to
the creek with my dog racing
beside me, to read the wind
and taste the air full of rain, to
watch the shadows of the light
define the shape of things,
to stand in front of a wall of
storm as it broke into splinters
of hail and lightning, to wait
for one more day of wonder,
instead of doing something
practical and sensible, I am
wealthy beyond measure.

DO IT LATER

Before the calendar
has turned, our minds
move toward newer,
urgent tasks,
and it is easy to
assume that we
will finish lesser
chores when time
is free. So, with a
sense of purpose
and resolve, we
promise to do it later.

TIME CHANGE

It isn't true.
You can't save
daylight.
There is no
way to change
the day
or night.
Only clocks
can lie, but
not the sun,
or shadows,
or the moon.

NIPS

Beneath the dead, dried plants,
twisted from cold wind and heavy
snow, new green peeks through.
Fuzzy leaves on square stems
unfurl their pungent scent. A
proud tomcat prowls with brain
cells tuned in to love, until he sniffs
the mint. Then he nips and nibbles,
and rolls upon the ground until his
eyes are glazed. In a stupor from
contact with his drug of choice, he
floats awhile in never-never land.

Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

The Atlantic magazine used to have a regular column in which readers were asked to come up with a new word to represent some unique situation or experience. I once submitted a suggestion, although I don't recall what it was. The magazine actually printed it, giving it honorable mention. Even though my suggestion didn't receive top honors, it was still a pretty cool thing to see my name in a prestigious, national publication. So far, that's the pinnacle of professional recognition my writing career has garnered.

Which is not to dismiss the pleasure I feel when readers of this column tell me they enjoy it. In fact, I like your feedback so much that I'm asking you to submit a word or phrase that captures the feeling you get when you realize you're on the receiving end of a "gotcha" moment. Here's the situation.

A few weeks ago I was out running errands. At my last stop, I needed to get a box out of the back seat on the passenger side of the car. Our back seat doors are programmed to lock automatically unless you intentionally unlock them, which I typically forget about. However, on the day in question, I was on top of my game and hit the "unlock" button before I got out of the car. Not wanting to be burdened with the box and my purse – and because my errand was going to take 30 seconds, tops – I put my purse out of sight on the floor and absent-mindedly laid my keys on the console. I hopped out, trotted around to the passenger side and pulled on the door handle. It didn't open. Oh, no! The realization hit me immediately: I must have hit the "lock" button by mistake. I walked around the car, trying every door, twice. They stubbornly remained locked. And my keys continued to lie on the console, accusingly, instead of being miraculously transported to my coat pocket. Darn. Double darn.

Well, now what? I could call a friend or walk home, but I needed the car that afternoon; I would have to call Hubby at work. Hubby and I each have a key to both vehicles, which is convenient most of the time, except when it's not. It was about 11:30, so I figured he could buzz over on his lunch break and rescue me without disrupting his day too much.

I entered the nearest business and asked to use the phone. (You recall that my purse, with my cell phone inside, was also locked inside the car.) Fortunately, Hubby was at his desk and answered right away. He listened politely while I explained my situation. He was in the middle of something important, but rather than being annoyed, he was almost gleeful at the interruption. "Sure, I'll drive over there, IF you promise to write about this in your next column."

He had me there. How many times had his goof-ups been the subject of my column? He saw an opportunity for payback, and I was at his mercy.

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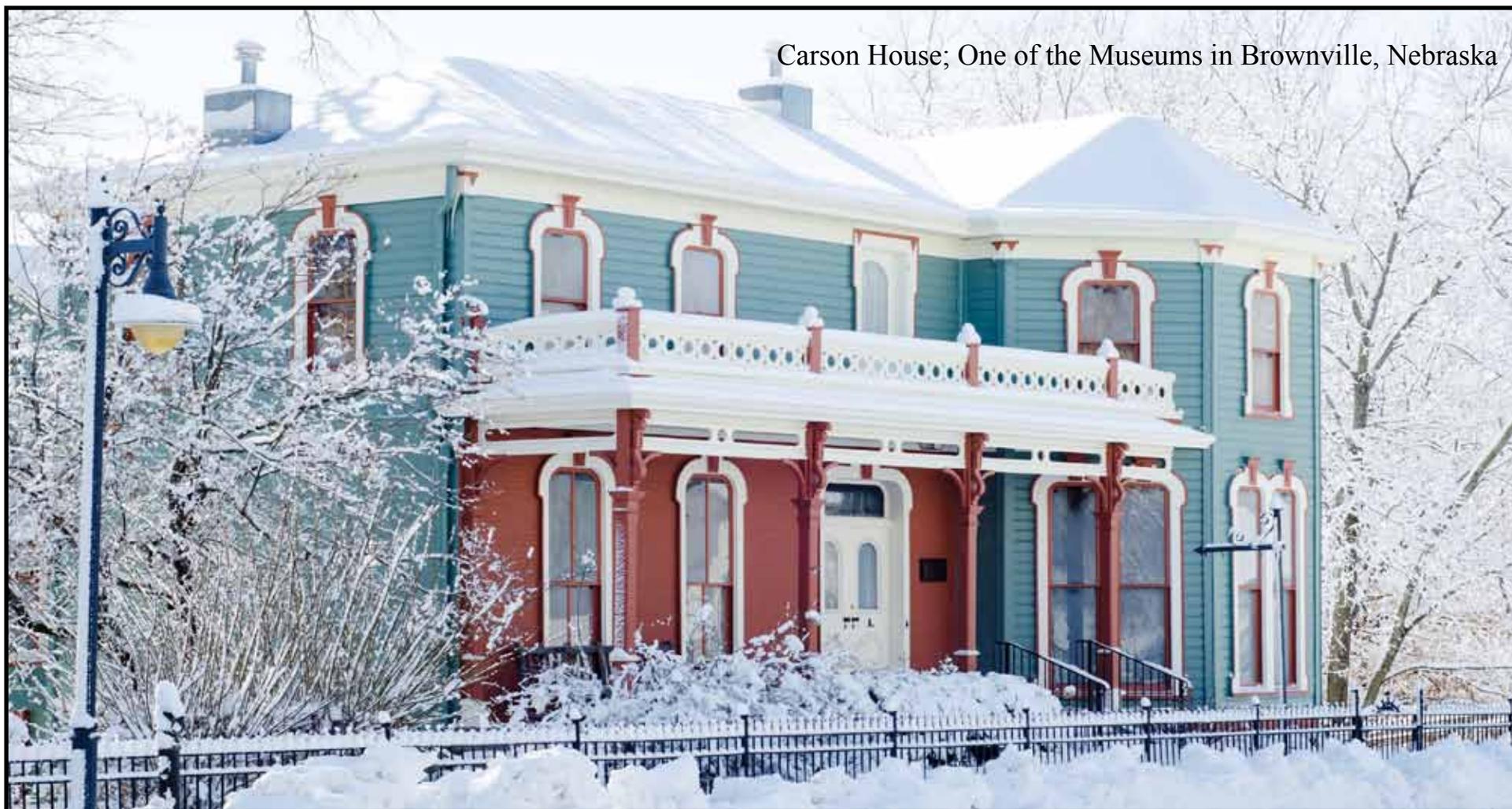
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More Brownville *Architecture in the Snow* on page 10.

Alzheimer's Affects Us All



Have an Older Adult Driver You're Concerned About?

By Lee Nyberg

Of course, driving is a tremendous part of independence, whether you are 16 or 86 years old. When the time comes for hanging up the keys, families often struggle with how to affect this big change in life of an older adult. Handling aging drivers is tricky, especially since ability varies apart from chronological age. Public safety is the bottom line.

For Self-Esteem, We Want Older Adults To Drive As Long As It Is Safe.

- Add a cushion and wider mirrors to improve visibility from inside the car
- Have annual hearing, vision, and driving assessments
- If night vision is poor, travel only in the daytime
- Plan routes like UPS—avoid left turns where possible
- A person with dementia will eventually lack the judgment and reaction time required to drive safely. It is best to plan ahead.

Before They Are Needed, Look Into Transportation Alternatives.

- Ask your local Area Agency On Aging for options
- Check out rides from your senior's church for Sunday morning, and other clubs and community centers for driver volunteers
- Home care provides transportation
- Create a schedule for family members to help drive for errands and doctor's appointments
- Local mall may have a senior's van service
- Carpool to events with younger drivers

Time To Hang Up The Keys? (Spoiler Alert: This won't be fun.)

The Signs

- Your parent's friends will not ride with him or her behind the wheel
- Consistently erratic driving, ignoring rules or failing to see traffic signals and lanes
- Driving above or below posted speed limit
- Frequent contact with curbs, accidents or tickets
- Medical condition or medication causes drowsiness when driving
- New damage to car or garage
- Getting lost or becoming disoriented while driving

The Process:

- Get her talking about the difficulties she's having with driving. Casually begin a conversation about driving and then ask questions, such as "So much has changed in Lincoln, I tend to get a little lost while driving at night. Has that ever happened to you?"
- If she/he is open to the discussion, present the options you've already uncovered for transportation and mention local safe driver programs, i.e., Nebraska's Grand Driver. Learn more at www.Transportation.Nebraska.Gov/nohs/granddriver.html.
- Resistant parents may need a doctor's letter/prescription for no driving. A doctor may prescribe Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital's Driver Rehabilitation program, which includes an assessment of ability and potential recommendation of discontinuing driving. Find out more about the program at www.madonna.org/specialized/driver-rehabilitation/.
- Enlist the help of an authority figure or trusted associate to speak to the unsafe driver about permanently stopping driving.

Last Ditch Efforts

- Report an unsafe driver to the DMV, using a Citizen's Reexamination Report. This will begin a procedure for examining the licensee's ability to drive safely and a possible revocation of the Operator's License.
- Disable the car and remove it.

Be patient and firm throughout the process of giving up driving. Many people fiercely resist this loss of independence. Once gone, others will have a grieving time. Seek help if you need it and remember the safety of your loved one and others is at the heart of matter.

Lee Nyberg seeks to help families and those living with Alzheimer's through education and her company, Home Care Assistance. www.HomeCareAssistanceOmaha.com.

Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

March. Here it is upon us once again. What should we make of it? March, the word comes from the Roman “Martius”. This was originally the first month of the year according to the Roman calendar. In 1752 the western world switched to the New Style or Gregorian calendar. I wonder if the change had happened say in 1785, would we still call it the Fourth of July?

“It was one of those March days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light, and winter in the shade.” –Charles Dickens

Some people see March as a month of frustration. I know I do as a gardener. I’ve learned to sit on my hands and use my brain through much of the month. I have been bit by spring fever way too early, too many times through the years. But March is also a month of celebration in my family. My husband’s and my birthdays are in March, he’s a Pisces and I’m an Aries, and we’ve made that work for 44 years. This year, March is also the month of my fifth anniversary writing “Where Life Is Good”.

Then there is St. Patrick’s day, which has turned from a holy day in Ireland (in early centuries the pubs closed) to honor the British born priest who as a sixteen year old, was captured by Irish pirates, sold as a slave in Ireland, years later escaped and returned to the country as a humble, courageous, and well loved Catholic bishop, into a day of over-drinking and wearing of the green. I love to celebrate this day by wearing green and eating my fill of cabbage, corned beef, and potatoes and remembering the man for whom the day is named.

“The first day of spring was once the time for taking the young virgins into the fields, there in dalliance to set an example in fertility for nature to follow. Now we just set the clocks an hour ahead and change the oil in the crankcase.” -E.B. White, “Hot Weather,” One Man’s Meat, 1944

Well perhaps that is true of those who live in large cities, but us simple folks that still live in agriculture based communities beg to differ. Granted, we don’t send our young maids to dance and flirt among the thawing mud, but we do pay attention to nature’s subtle indicators about what to plant, where, and when. But it is also a time of science; of oval containers heading down the highway with pungent smelling, lethal chemicals, and large machinery gyrating in the fields. And the world thanks this land of cornucopia, and its stalwart stewards.

Whatever you choose to think about March you can’t help feel that it is a time of transition, a time to spur us on to hope, plan, and react to this land’s hold on ourselves and in return our hold on it. Perhaps we should think of this month as a time to start a new chapter in our lives; where life is good.

ALZHEIMER’S ASSOCIATION PRESENTS DEMENTIA CARE CONFERENCE

Omaha, Nebraska– The Alzheimer’s Association Nebraska Chapter will host a two-day dementia care conference on March 26 and March 27 at the Embassy Suites Hotel and Conference Center in La Vista. Presentations will cover information ranging from dementia care to innovative research to understanding behaviors commonly associated with dementia. Over 300 participants from across the state of Nebraska are expected at this year’s conference.

On March 26, the conference presentations will focus on topics directed toward health care professionals and direct care staff, such as dementia care best practices. Presentations on March 27 are open to the general public and will include information about Alzheimer’s research, new models of care and safety measures. Dr. Anna Burke, a board-certified geriatric psychiatrist and specialist in dementia care at Banner Alzheimer’s Institute, will deliver a keynote presentation, and a virtual dementia tour will be available to help participants better understand the behaviors and needs of people living with dementia.

Conference details, including registration, sponsorship opportunities, area attractions and much more are now available at; www.alz.org/nebraska or by phone at 402.502.4301.

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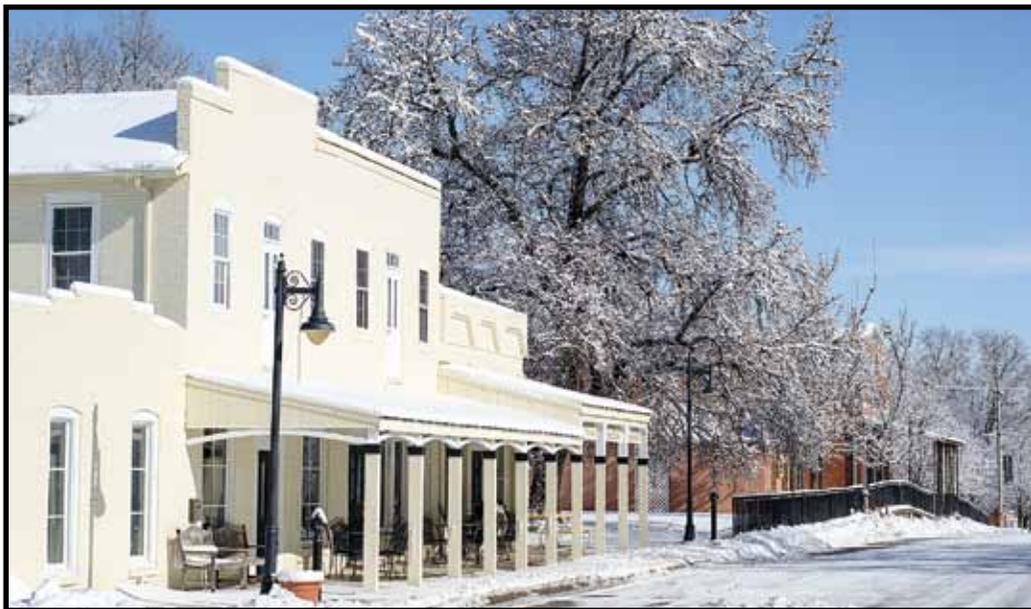
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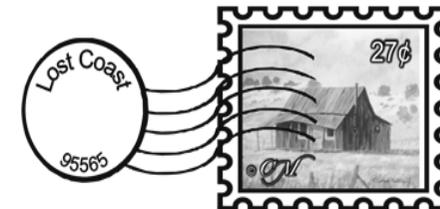


Schoolhouse Art Gallery, Brownville

Old Home Place
390 Memory Lane
Lost Coast

“Raymundo’s Gamble...”

By Vicki O’Neal



I met him just before the Super Bowl on a warm, sunny Saturday. I was returning home from a Convention, down south, and I stopped in a small town to stretch my legs.

“My name is Raymundo,” he said, coming up to me abruptly. “You can call me Ray!” He was pushing a shopping cart full of whiskey bottles and recyclables, which he brought to a halt on the sidewalk beside me. The cart was bedecked with ratty Christmas tinsel—giving it a bedraggled, yet festive look.

Raymundo had no shirt on and his body was scarred every which-way. He had a hole in his neck and it made a wheezing noise when he talked. He acted like he’d known me all his life.

Raymundo sat down beside me on the low brick wall where I sat warming myself like a lizard in the southern sun. I saw his gaze stray toward my little ice-chest sitting on the wall beside me.

“Are you hungry?” I said.

He nodded and I gave him one of my specialties—a strange little burrito full of crab meat. He made quick work of it, and I gave him another. This time he got a small bottle of hot sauce out of his shopping cart and seasoned it well before eating.

I could feel the eyes of the people across the street watching us. They sat in a big fancy truck in the McDonald’s parking lot, munching their own lunch. They were very interested in what we were doing.

We talked of many things, Raymundo and I.

He lived precariously from day to day—never knowing which would be his last. One of his cousins was attacked and stabbed by five men just the other day. Raymundo unfurled a newspaper and showed me an article just to prove it. He gave me the newspaper to keep. Then he offered me a big bottle of water which I declined diplomatically.

“I just put a bet on the Super Bowl,” he said, changing the subject. “I bet 300 dollars on the Seattle Seahawks.”

“Three-hundred dollars!?” I blinked and swallowed hard. “That’s a lot of money!”

He nodded. “But Seattle will win!” he said emphatically. “They are good...very good! They can’t lose!”

“But what if they do?” I said.

Raymundo drew himself up, ununching his scarred shoulders. “They WILL win!” he said. And that settled the matter once and for all. He changed the subject abruptly. “This tattoo on my back...” he said. “I got it while I was passed out from drinking. My nephew gave it to me.”

I looked at the large lettering across his back. It said: “AF.” He told me what it stood for, but I couldn’t understand much of what he said. He was excited now, and had to press his finger to the hole in his neck to get the words out. It made the wind stop rushing through the hole, but I still couldn’t understand him.

I just nodded and looked sympathetic.

“What time is it?” Raymundo said suddenly, interrupting himself, yet again. “I’ve got to get to the Recycling Center across town before 4:00! I got a late start today, because I was up all night collecting bottles.” He jumped to his feet, and said: “Come now, sweetheart! Give Raymundo a hug and a kiss, and I’m on my way.”

I could feel my innards shriveling, but I wouldn’t hurt the feelings of this gregarious old feller for anything. He hugged me quickly and pecked my cheek, then pushed off down the sidewalk.

I could feel the eyes of the people in the big truck still watching, but it no longer mattered.

A bit misty-eyed, I watched Raymundo hobble off. In a few brief moments, he had managed to wander his way into my heart. I would likely never see him again. I would never know Raymundo’s fate.

He’s one of millions in America. Homeless. Surviving in the best way he knows how! He had foolishly wagered \$300 on a Sports game. I couldn’t know it then, but Raymundo—for all his bravado—was destined for a great disappointment.

The next day, I paid attention to the Sports news—not because I cared which football team won or lost—but because I knew it meant so much to Raymundo.

Seattle almost won. They should have won! But somebody made a wrong call at the last minute and the game was suddenly reversed. The other team scored a touchdown—and that was the end of the game.

It was also the end of Raymundo’s money!

Even to me, \$300 is a lot of dough, but to a homeless man on the streets, it must have been a fortune!...An awful lot of scraps, whiskey bottles and Christmas tinsel!...A lot of time scrounging through weeds and back-lots, looking for recyclables. Raymundo would be up many more nights scavenging in order to make up for all he had lost in a moment’s time...But would he learn his lesson?

Probably not. Raymundo would likely do it all over again next year.

We all do the same kinds of thing in our own way, you know. We gamble foolishly on things that are a lot more important than a Super Bowl game. We take risks with our lives, our children, our marriages, and our mental well-being.

We fail to forgive when we should. We deal recklessly and make last-moment decisions on vital matters—and we end up paying for it, too. Some decisions will haunt us for life and even into eternity.

Choose wisely, folks. Make the most of each day with family and friends and your Creator. You never know which day will be your last. The Game of Life will soon be over. The last touchdown will be made and the final score tallied. There will be no Do-Overs, so get it right the first time!

In the end, will you win?...or will you lose?

Remember—you will get no second chance!



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See page 9 of this publication for more details.

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