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Country Neighbor



May 2006



Brownville Lyceum

May is about...

May Flowers! With some rain, some warm sunshine, and steady breezes, Spring burst out last month with blossoms, leaves, and flowers everywhere. Spring 2006 was almost as special as Autumn 2005. And added to that, there is no dreary Winter ahead.

Mother's Day! I have reprinted one of my favorite *Window on Fifth Street* columns, a letter to my Mom.

Peonies! I will be looking for picturesque country/small-town scenes with Peonies to photograph this month.

Voting Day is May 9th! Do it!

Your Window with a Country View.

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In Missouri: Rock Port, and Tarkio.

In Iowa: Emerson, Essex, Hamburg, Malvern, Riverton, Shenandoah, Sidney, and Tabor.

Your
**COUNTRY
 NEIGHBOR**
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The following people helped
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Thank you!

Your Country Neighbor
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Window on Fifth Street

Edited from the first printing in May, 2002.

Dear Mom,

This past winter I watched the snow blowing by my window on Fifth Street. I watched with a coffee mug in my hand and a warm blaze in the fireplace. No cows to milk anymore nor calves to feed. I live in town now and I can walk to the grocery store.

Not that I don't miss the farm! Someday I'll have a place in the country big enough for a garden with sweet corn and cantelope, plus a few acres for alfalfa. I really miss the fragrance of alfalfa blooming in June. I miss our walks through the fields on summer days.

A lot has happened since we last talked. I raised some children, like you did, and I married above myself, like Dad did. Not too long ago I returned home to Nebraska. You lived here most of your life, but I wanted to try different things. I lived in Colorado, Arizona, Texas, New Jersey, and of course, Iowa and Nebraska. But now I'm back. Can you believe that I missed Nebraska blizzards? It took me a long time to realize that I love them.

And guess what? I published a newspaper! I'm very excited about it and I know you would be proud. I am fortunate that I know so many people who are so talented and who help and support me. They make my publication possible, but they also make it special.

I wish we could talk again. Happy Mother's Day, Mom.

Love, your son.

p.s. to all my country neighbors:

When we were children, we followed our parents everywhere. When we were teenagers we tried to get away from them. As young adults we were too busy for them. As we become older we want to know them better and be closer to them. Don't be concerned as to how to go about it. Just take your parent to lunch or coffee or go fishing or camping. Let the magic happen.

Give your Mom a rose; don't wait for Mother's Day.

The Golden Rural

by Vicki Harger

It's dark and eerie in the barnyard at 4:50 a.m. The unblinking stars watch me from above, and a golden crescent of moon squints on the horizon...but it does nothing to dispel the gloom shrouding the barnyard.

There can be no more dismal start to a day, yet this is the hour when the muddy wheels of farm life begin to turn. Across the heartland, farmers pull on their boots—ignoring yesterday's aches and pains, trying hard to forget their disappointments. The lingering drought. The cow that died. The grim outlook for the small American farmer.

Just the other day a farmer's pregnant cows mired themselves to death in our bog. I remember well the bleak look on the farmer's face as he stood amid the smoky haze of the campfire, staring at the carcasses of his cattle.

"It's like the Gates of Hell, here," he said. "...Like the Gates of Hell." Then taking out his gun, he shot the last suffering cow in the head. He turned to go. "People don't know what a farmer has to go through to get a steak to their tables," he said. "They have no idea."

I think about that now as I trudge toward the darkened goat barn. The old barn looks decrepit even in the starlight—leaning hard toward the east as though longing for the resurrection. This barn's seen many generations of our family come and go, and I always suspect that the spirits of my grandparents may be lingering here, watching me do the family chores that we've done for endless decades.

I peer inside the barn cautiously, not sure what I'll find.

The dim light of the warming box shines on tiny goats lying in the straw... Triplets born just yesterday. Their bodies are motionless, and I catch my breath sharply. They're dead. Every one of them.

Oh you wretched Gates of Hell! Why, oh why—

Suddenly, I see movement. A furry, little face appears from the tangle of bodies. Then another and another. I can't help but laugh out loud. "The-Gates-of-Hell-Shall-Not-Prevail!" Sleepy eyes blink at me and I feel a rush of joy as I scoop the babies into my arms. I can sense my Grandpa grinning at me from the shadows—proud to see me sitting out here in the goat dung at 5:00 a.m.

Retrieving the milk bottles, I start to feed the babies, listening to the scuffling going on in the adjoining pen. Angel and Sissy and Buddy Boy...the restless ones, no doubt. Never content, always fussing.

"Hey you! Give it a break!"

The scuffling continues unabated. Amid the rustle of goats, I can almost hear the sound of laughter, wafting on the night breeze—drifting through the cracks of the old barn. Phantom echoes...bits of conversation wending their way past the wall-hung tools...Muddy tools, their handles worn down by the calluses of several generations.

My kinfolk worked themselves to death right here in the barnyard. Just a few feet from me is where my Great Uncle Harvey collapsed and died while feeding cattle. Died with his boots on. Grandma, too, suffered some fatal attack not far from here. The old timers half killed themselves trying to make a living on this old home place. Oh, the stories these barn walls could tell! All the sweat, the tears, the heartache.

...And the visions of stalking death angels.

I quell a shiver. My dad says he could sense the death angel near Grandma that last day she spent in the barnyard. Death angels! They must visit here quite often. I peer out the doorway, glad to see that the darkness is beginning to lift. Day is coming. The crescent moon slips beneath the covers of the western horizon. The watching eyes of the stars grow faint and sleepy. Soon, they blink out altogether and the sun bursts forth to stand guard in their place.

There's a flurry of activity at the farmhouse. A door slams and a cheery voice calls. Stiffly, I get to my feet, placing the baby goats back in their warming box. Stepping outside, I stand gazing across the rural countryside. A brilliant sun eases higher on the horizon, gilding the fences and windmill with gold...pure gold. The country roads are paved with it, too, and the leaning barn looks like a shining mansion on the hilltop.

Heaven on earth—these Barada Hills.

Some might call them the Gates of Hell, but I hardly think so. They look more like the Gates of Heaven to me. I sure love these old hills and the life I'm living here. Well...

Well, most of the time, anyway.

I look back at the goat pen. "Angel! You've already got your halo stuck in the fence?" I sigh. "Hey—you there, Sissy!" Sissy is outside the pen, as usual. And farther on, the lusty Buddy Boy is hard at work, chasing his siblings with incestuous abandon.

I stretch my stiff muscles and yawn. It's going to be a good one, all right...a good day in our corner of the heartland. 'Cause the Gates-of-Hell-Shall-Not-Prevail. Not here in God's Country.

Carefree Days

by Joe Smith

Way back in the 1950's or a year or two before that, when I was in high school my dad and I found a real nice Model A roadster. It was a clean as a pin. It belonged to the English teacher. His name was Mr. Olsen. Dad bought it for two hundred and fifty dollars. I drove it the rest of my sophomore year on the deal that I would go to my uncle's ranch and earn enough money to pay for it.

I worked my butt off down there on the Texas line. It was 108 every day in the shade. The sweat would soak clear through the saddle and gall you. This ranch was 100 sections square. We think in acres here so take 640 and add two zeros, or 64,000 acres of rattle-snake-infested ranch land. It would be like riding almost to Auburn and then to Brock and back to Johnson. We did that on horseback. When I got paid I went back to Roswell to get my Model A.

Surprise, surprise! My dad was a car dealer and he sold the 'A' for a big profit. So he gave me a '36 Plymouth 2-door. What a letdown.

Oh well, I went back out to the ranch to work 'til school started in the fall. I took off a little early so I could modernize my "new car". Dad had a dealership in Desoto and Plymouth cars, so he had a good shop. First thing I did was get run into almost head on. So I had to go to the salvage yards and find parts, fender bumper, door, and a few more things that weren't too high. The guy that ran into me had no insurance. I got it all repaired and my dad helped me paint it. It came out a pea soup green. He mixed a bunch of paint he had there at the shop and that was the color it came out. Next I found a 1949 rear bumper of a Plymouth and made a new rear bumper with a trailer hitch. Then I put big balloon tires on the back. I added some coil springs on the back to lift the rear of the car. It was beginning to be fun now. I didn't even miss the Model A. Then the motor needed a little help so Dad helped me over haul it. All new rings and pistons and we planned the head to give it more power. I think we used a later model motor. When we got through we had a weird looking rig but it would make 20 mpg pulling a horse trailer.

I had it two years in High school and then took it to college at Las Cruces. Marta and I drove all over the country in that old rig. You could run in sand with those big tires on the back.

At that time, all the girls had to put in for a permit if they wanted to be gone on a week end from their dorm. Marta and I had gone to a show and on the way back to the dorm we decided to



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go home over the weekend. It was 186 miles to Roswell over two mountain passes and it was 10:30 pm before we left Las Cruces. We hadn't gone 30 miles when the lights started going dim. The battery was going bad and we were a long ways from Roswell. It was moonlight and not much traffic so we turned out the lights till we met another car and then back off. It was spooky driving through dark Canyon. We stopped once at a bar and Marta went in and got us something to eat while I kept the old beast running. About 3 in the morning we got to Roswell and I went straight to my house. We had a den, with a pull down bed so I went in and pulled the bed down and then went to bed in my bedroom.

Mom got up the next morning and didn't even see me in bed. She went to the kitchen to make coffee. The icebox was in the back hall and she could see the bed down in the den. She went in there and there was Marta. The wheels were turning; she asked

Marta where Jody was. Marta said in his room she guessed. Marta lived about six miles north of town and I didn't want to take a chance on the car quitting on me. That was the reason we stopped at my house. I took her home later in the day as soon as I put a new battery in the car. Oh to be young again. And we wonder where these kids get these wild ideas?? I kept the old car till I got married and went on our "honeymoon". There might be some more stories about the old Plymouth out there. We have a lot of memories of those carefree days. Joe Smith

Catz in Biz



Eddie on John's shoulders; NAPA Auto Parts in Auburn.



Kitty2 hangs out at Brownville Mills.



Keeping the counter warm at the hardware/variety store in Weeping Water.

My Grandfather was an Illegal Alien

by Frieda Burston

Not that he intended to be— he left Romania in the early 1900's with a wife, eight children, and documents entitling him to 200 acres of land in Canada and immediate citizenship on taking possession.

But their ship was hit three days out of Germany by a British ship. The British ship picked up the passengers bound for Canada and deposited them at its own destination, Texas. His papers were in his good suit in the trunk, his money was in the safe— but where was that ship they were in, when they were put ashore penniless in Texas?

The immigration inspectors couldn't send him to Canada. When they heard he was a farmer, they passed the hat and put the family on a train to Missouri, where farmers farmed. No one knew what to do with them in Missouri, so they squatted on a deserted farm outside of St. Joe. The boys made bread money by picking apples off the old orchards and peddling them in town. There was a well. They lived on stale bread and water all winter. When spring came, Grandpa made a plow from pieces of junk and rusted wire. He put in a garden, using Grandma as the horse.

The years were hard. There was nothing else to do, nowhere to go but up. The golden acres in Canada had vanished forever, they were stuck in Missouri and had to make the best of it. They did with what they had or they did without, like others in the Great Depression. The boys worked as cheap labor, the girls worked in factories. They saw that to become independent, they needed to know arithmetic and English. They couldn't stop for school, but managed to send the baby girl for a diploma, and she became the family bookkeeper for the small enterprises they started.

The next generation all finished high school. A few went to college. Many served in war.

The third generation included teachers, technicians, lawyers, artists, doctors, statisticians.

Typical success story for illegal aliens of the 1900's. Today? I don't think it's possible.

The demographics are different. The difference is that in those days, the newcomer settled into an established community, and had to do all the adjusting. My mother was forever telling me not to do this or that because it might indicate disrespect to the neighbors. I must always remember that I was A Guest In The Land. I must mind my manners and never forget that and think that I was Home-Born and could do as I pleased.

That idea of adjusting to the established community in the new country went out with the dodo and the platypus. Too many strangers came in, all at the same time, and made communities of their own. They didn't have to wonder what the neighbors would think. It made no difference what the neighbors thought—they could think what they wanted, there weren't enough of them for their opinion to matter. This is the new demographics, and the vote count sets its borders.

The problem is that now no one feels like a Guest In The Land. As soon as there are enough Guests, the scale tips and they become Hosts. They make new rules and they can enforce them. They don't need to observe the norms of the new land—they bring their own norms with them. And all they need is time to become permanent. The lovely land that they have come to be a part of, will exist no more. America is becoming a patchwork quilt of little countries from all over the world, not "America".

I am not enthusiastic about going back to California. I feel that I'm getting into the same problems that I hoped I was leaving behind in Israel. The only difference is in the faces on the street.

My feelings are divided on the issue of citizens' rights for illegal aliens. I know how hard it is to be an alien, even a legal alien—not to be able to learn the language, though you try. To be judged as stupid although you learned harder things. To be fined for not paying things on time that you didn't know you owed. . . Not knowing where the signs tell you to go. Not understanding the telephone menus, or which button to push in the lobby—I hate feeling alien. I sympathize deeply with all aliens anywhere. Being a Guest In The Land is hard, especially when you're already as old as Grandpa was—and as I am here.

Makes me wonder about all these stories of Aliens From Outer Space living amongst us. Unless they've conquered Time as well as Space, they'd be pretty old too by the time they got here. My guess is that they've already gone back to Sirius or Arcturus, and are trying to explain about telephone menus.

Being a Host is just a whole lot easier— until enough Guests come to outnumber you.

At that point, Hosts have to decide: learn a new language? Or stowaway on a Space Tour? My opinion? Take off into Space— new geography is easier than a new language.

“Bea’s Flower Buzz”
“Grandmother’s Bonnet – the Columbine”



Welcome, Country Gardeners, to spring and our exploding world of sights, sounds and smells! Again, the earth is a-bloomin', according to God's plan!

The very cool columbine (Genus *Aquilegia*, Family *Ranunculaceae*) is such an easy going/growing beauty that it was an easy choice for this series.

Its name is rooted in its distinctive appearance. *Aquilegia* is from the Latin *laquila* for “eagle,” referring to the flower's spurs, which suggest an eagle's talons. Others suggest it is from the Latin for *aquarins* meaning “a water carrier,” because of the resemblance to ancient jars that held water or *agui legus* “to draw water.”

Ranunculaceae are the perennials which belong to the buttercup family.

Columbine, the familiar name, comes from the Latin *columba*, meaning dove. Held upside down, one can imagine a ring of doves bobbing about and drinking from a dish.

Others suggest the bloom looks like a court jester's cap or old-fashioned bonnet, resulting in another common name “Granny's Bonnet,” the name that spoke to me for this illustration.

The “spur” on a Columbine is one of its most distinctive parts. In the botanical world, a spur is a hollow, elongated tube extending from the petals or sepals of certain flowers. It is usually a reservoir for nectar, which is secreted by special glands inside the tube and collects in a knobby bulge at the base.

The nectar is stored in those small knobs at the ends of the spurs.

One state, Colorado, has chosen the Columbine for its state flower, which is appropriate, as it is frequently found in forests and on rather rocky/spare terrain.

Historically, Columbines are often featured in old paintings, fabrics, architecture, and art work because of the dove imagery, a symbol of peace for the Holy Spirit.

For my own part, I became even more impressed with the Columbine as I learned to draw the intricacy of its blooms and leaves - how the spurs grow between the sepals, attach to the stem, the lovely shading of colors and contrasting color combinations, and the bright feathery stamen, not to mention beautifully shaped leaves.

My own garden is enhanced with lots of the beautiful common forest variety, as well as a few of the newer varieties. They come up so early in the season, bloom a long time, propagate themselves so easily, and are so beautiful and hardy, what's not to love?

Columbines in the greenhouse are gorgeous this season – each perfect bloom, five sepals and five spurs with dark throats, bobbing on their delicate looking stems. Colors range from white on white, to white and pink, to raspberry and white, to white and blue.

God's creativity is clearly illustrated in the Columbine.

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View From the Vineyard

by Ron Heskett

As the quail whistled from the nearby cedar windbreak, I tied the grapevines in place working my way down the golden lanes (the dandelions are now in full blooming glory! This might be the year to experiment in making dandelion wine. No thanks!). The vines are all pruned and the prunings, raked, piled, and ready to burn to destroy habitat for the grapevine borer insect and plant diseases.

In order to get pruning accomplished in a timely manner, most of the tying was forgone with the anticipation of returning soon before bud break. However, with the 90+ degree days that we've had, the grapes are budding about seven days early. This necessitates greater care in tying because the slightest bump will knock off the tender buds. Now, looking across the vineyard towards the sun a lot of green is visible catching the sun's rays. This early growing is making us much more susceptible to a late freeze. Last year my vineyard recorded five days below freezing (April 24, 27, & 30 and May 2 & 3) and 34 degrees Fahrenheit on May 15. I breathed a little easier this morning when I looked at the 15-day forecast, because only one day shows a low below 40 degrees (that being 39). Hopefully it won't get any colder than that.

The dormant vines were all sprayed with lime sulfur to help destroy spores harboring plant diseases that may have overwintered. The first foliar fungicide has been applied to the vines since there is almost three inches of new growth on some of the cultivars. Herbicides have been applied to kill existing and pre-emerging weeds in the rows. Keeping the rows clean helps air flow through the vineyard, thus helping to reduce foliar diseases in the grapes.

April 18th I moved my cuttings from the basement to outside to begin the acclimation process. I removed the leaf bedding from last year's container vines as some were beginning to bud. I moved them onto racks and I started watering them in preparation for transplanting into the vineyard.

As the gulls screamed overhead, I inspected the blackberry plants. A year ago the rabbits ate off all the bark around the base of the plants during the winter, ruining the 2005 crop. But this year they did very little damage. Speaking of blackberries, the other evening I felt like having a bowl of ice cream. When I went to the freezer I discovered the half containing my blackberries and ice cream had malfunctioned. My ice cream was melting and blackberry juice was seeping towards the frozen side. So quickly we moved the frozen items (mostly red raspberries) to other freezers and the following day I took the remaining blackberries to the winery where they are fermenting nicely into wine (their original destination, only a little sooner than planned.)

Well, I'm almost finished with another row. The rooster pheasant cackles in the distance and for a change the wind is calm. Ah! The relaxing life of a vineyard operation. Yeah, right!



"...working my way down the golden lanes (the dandelions are now in full blooming glory!)"

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Country

Scenes



I wonder what those designs mean?



East of Pawnee City.



On a trail to Avoca



Kansas hilltop southwest of Morrill.

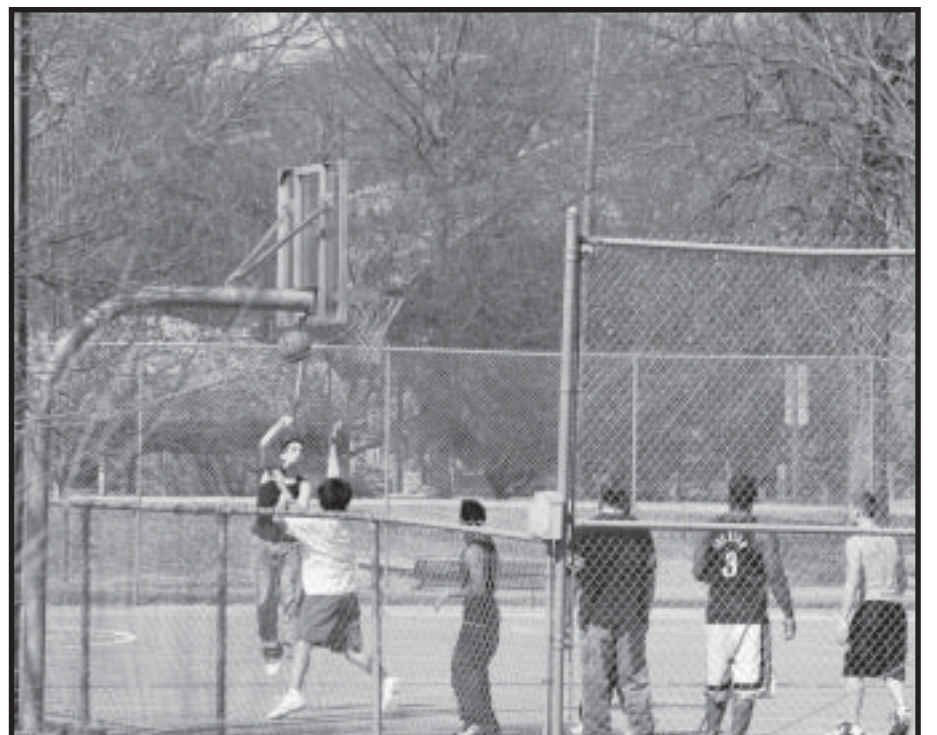


Brownville Village Theatre will begin its new season soon.

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Shooting hoops on a Saturday in Cook



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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report

by Josh Whisler
Photos provided by Author



Fishing:

The Missouri River is high and the fish are biting. Spring storms have filled it bank full several times and the Corp of Engineers has set buoys for river navigation & barge traffic. With the rise in the river comes the fishing. I've heard stories of a 40-pound cat being taken after a recent storm but I didn't get a look at it. It's a fishing story so you just about got to believe it, because fishermen don't lie. Right? But it's still a story until you break out the pictures. Speaking of stories and pictures: I journeyed to the Ozarks for some Paddlefishing on the Osage River last month and have pictures to prove it. The State of Missouri has a Paddlefish Season from March through April during the spawn. Paddlefish are plankton eaters like a whale. They have a huge mouth but that is only to bring in more microorganisms to digest not to catch and eat bait. So how do you catch a plankton eater? Well, these you snag them with a treble hook. Sounds pretty wild doesn't it? A 2-inch-wide hook pulled through 40-foot deep water that's a mile wide. You talk about luck! Once upon a time in Nebraska, we had Paddlefish snagging on the entire Missouri River until the late 80's when it was outlawed and limited to the trail waters of Gavins Point Dam.

Hunting:

The 2006 Spring Turkey Season is in full swing. Turkeys gobbling and hens out wondering around are pretty commonplace right now. You ask what's "hens out wondering around" mean? Well to a turkey hunter that means it's time to get out and call in a tom that's looking for that hen. The hens are seen wondering around because they are nesting - laying eggs. So while they are nesting the toms are looking for companions and that's where the Spring Turkey Hunter comes into play. A couple of decoys and a good hen call and you're in business. You can still obtain a permit over the counter or online. And this year you can bag two turkeys (one per permit). 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

Spring is here and all the fun things that comes with it. Spring hunting, Spring fishing and soon Morel Mushrooms will be popping. There are all kinds of outdoor opportunities presenting themselves right now so get out and take some. It's there for the taking and I guarantee you won't regret doing it either. 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 fish picture is myself with a 36 pound Paddlefish taken on the Osage River near Warsaw Missouri.



This month's hunting picture is myself with a 20 pound tom toting a 10 inch beard taken opening weekend.

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Onions

by Roger Moerer

Onions date back to 5,000 BC and were cultivated by the Egyptians about 3,000 BC. Onions can be used for food in just about every way you can think of. Sliced onion put on buttered bread with salt and pepper makes a great sandwich. Onions also appear to be at least somewhat effective against colds, heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, and other diseases and contain antioxidant components such as quercetin.

Onions are actually perennials and are of the lily family, if left in the ground they will come back year after year and get numerous bulbs from each plant and get to be a concentrated patch like lilies.

To grow large globed onions for eating and storage does take quite a lot of work. Use plants instead of sets as sets will not get as large as plants. Large operations use about 4 inch raised ridges 20 inches wide with 2 rows 12 inches apart and 36 inches between ridges for ditch irrigation as onions take at least 30 inches of water to make a good crop. They take the most water close to maturity as that is when the bulbs develop the most.

My onion patch is like a drop in the bucket in comparison, 46 45-foot rows of 1015Y sweet Texas, Candy, and Big Daddy onions a total of 7,000 plants. Rows are 12 inches apart so I can ditch between rows to fertilize 3 or 4 times during the season. Between each two rows 26 inches so the tiller could make a trench deep enough to bury a round black soaker hose with a y-attachment and quick attachment as I have only enough pressure for two hoses at a time.

My onions were planted by the 25th of March and are now looking real well. I have watered them once and fertilized them twice. Onions do need to be kept weeded as they do not shade the ground enough to discourage weed growth. Onion plants are only planted about one inch deep and later when they are well established, soil needs to be removed from the plants so they are almost sitting on top of the ground so the bulbs can expand, but be sure not to damage the roots or bulbs.

Stop watering plant 2 - 3 weeks before harvest (when the tops of the plants start to weaken and fall over). When 85-90 percent of plants have fallen over, dig and let dry several days when forecast is for dry weather as you do not want them rained on. Cut tops an inch above bulb and clip roots. Spread in well-ventilated dry area or hang in netted material in dry well-vented area. Check every week or two and throw away any with a soft spot so it will not spoil other onions.

The Texas sweet is my favorite (better than the Vidalia type), then Candy, another sweet onion, and Big Daddy is a large yellow type that will last through the winter if cured and stored right.

There should be good sized onions early-to-mid-June and they will be ready to harvest about July 1st.

Life begins the day you start gardening!

A recipe for an enjoyable country evening; a fresh, hot potato, a juicy tomato, cucumber and onions with sugar, vinegar, water and pepper to make it sweet and spicy, pan fried chicken, nibbling on an ear of "sweet rhythm" or "gotta have it" white and yellow sweet corn.

My plans are to be at the Farmers Market in Auburn this summer and also to set up in other locations. Check next month's *YOUR COUNTRY NEIGHBOR* for my updates.

See you then when I'll be "back on the road again" with tomatoes, potatoes, cucumbers, sweet corn, sweet potatoes, cantaloupe, squash and watermelon, and of course, onions!

Roger

Diary of an Unemployed Housewife

By Merri Johnson

Our kitchen project is finally nearing completion, after almost six months of down-and-dirty DIY weekends. (That's do-it-yourself, for those of you who don't.)

We had talked about updating the kitchen décor for quite awhile. O.K., it might be more accurate to say that *I* had been talking about updating the kitchen décor for quite awhile. But never mind that. The point is, we had been debating when to do it. My husband's main criterion for that being *not* during golf season. So, last November I decided we'd put it off long enough and took a hammer to the old ceiling. "We're committed now, honey," I told him. After all, you can't get a project done until you start, right?

A previous owner, hereinafter known as Mr. P.O., had lowered the kitchen ceiling for some reason we haven't figured out conclusively, and we wanted to restore it to its statelier, original nine-foot height. Besides, the bathroom directly overhead had leaked a time or two, adding practical justification to our aesthetic reasons.

As is usually – make that *always* – the case in working on old houses, one thing leads to another. It turns out the lowered ceiling was accompanied by lowered walls. Mr. P.O. had knocked out the original lathe and plaster and installed dry wall, but only to the height of the new ceiling. There was a foot of bare studs above the ceiling all around the room. Perhaps Mr. P.O. had agreed to remodel the kitchen on the condition that Mrs. P.O. accept a lower ceiling. I imagine he drew the line at patching an extra foot of drywall onto the top of the 4x8 sheets. In fact, if my husband had been aware of the challenge of that one foot of wall, he might have changed his mind about raising the ceiling.

But he had his heart set on old-fashioned tin, which doesn't look quite right at the contemporary height of only eight feet. What could I say? He was willing to provide the labor. And pay for the tin tiles. And put up with my inept assistance and constant questions, concerns and critiques. Naturally, the easy-does-it installation process was a tad trickier than we expected. But we persevered and ultimately succeeded.

Likewise, the DIY laminate tile floor. At one point, when we were struggling to level our obviously un-level floor, I reminded him that it was he who had chosen this particular kind of floor covering. *I* would have been happy to pay someone to put down vinyl. He then reminded me that *he* would have been happy not to have started the whole project in the first place. Touché.

But, like I said, the project is almost done now. The grout on the ceramic tile backsplash still needs to be sealed, the cabinets need a fresh coat of paint, and there's a little trim work to finish up.

It's a good thing I'm capable of doing those things myself.

It's golf season again.

Roger Moerer's NEMAHA GARDENS

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Look for my Garden 'Updates' in *Your Country Neighbor*.

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Poetry, etc.



WRENS

by Devon Adams

They're quite blunt
and to the point and
tend toward tantrums
if you crash their party.

But if you're lucky,
you'll hear them
singing in the bushes
by the barn.



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SNOW DARK

by Devon Adams

A five o'clock day is dark at dawn, dark at noon and dark before dusk.

Snow dark.

Wind moves in the amber dried grass and
pines sigh in resignation as the arctic breath comes close.

Then the damp from the gulf arrives, and the spin of the storm
carves its spiral across the helpless plains.

The clouds fill up with snow and soon the sky is falling.

At first the flakes are big and lazy
and they dance away their journey down.

But then the icy wind blasts in and grabs the fragile flakes
and slams them to the ground.

Soon there is no horizon line,
and whiteouts wipe out everything familiar,
like nightmare ghosts erasing time and place.

The howl in the wind sucks hearing from your ears
and voices are lost as words are torn apart and tossed away.

Down in the valley, cattle are in calving season, and
babies seek solace in the grass, but soon snow fills all space
and there is no grass. The only place to hide is beside the
cedar break, and mothers coax their babes
here and stand beside them as they disappear
in shades of white. They are sculptures made of snow.

The blizzard is an infinity of misery.

When finally snow ceases to choke the earth,
the cedar break gives up its living bodies and
keeps the little souls that froze. They haunt the sighing wind
as their mothers' grieve with swollen udders.

The survivors soon will run and play, as though the storm had never been.

In time, the little snow deaths sink into the earth and become the grass.



Stormy day in Peru

Poetry, etc.

Older Mothers, Younger Daughters

by Jan Chism Wright (c) 6/3/02

I am going through menopause
just as she is starting her menses.
A potential for collision
on hormonal roller coasters.
I am growing wrinkles and chin whiskers
while she is growing breasts and pubic hair.
My looks are fading at the same time she
grows more beautiful than I ever hoped to be.
When I was her age, I envied my mother.
Now I am my mother's age, I envy her.
Most of her life lies before her,
most of mine lies in the past.
It appears as hard to grow old
as it was just to grow up.
Looks like a wild ride
for the both of us.

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The Mouths of Mothers

by Jan Chism Wright (c) 8/19/99

Sometimes, when I speak to my daughter,
I open my mouth and hear my mother's voice,
her words, her tone, even her inflection.
And I look around in surprise, expecting
to see her standing beside or behind me.
And I wonder how often this happened to her,
and to her mother, and to her mother's mother.
I wonder how many generations of women
speak through the mouths of mothers.



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The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott

It's official; once again Glendo reservoir won't come into priority. The Mitchell Irrigation district will be skimping along on approximately forty percent of their usual supply, and we've heard some smaller districts are out of water altogether. 2007 won't be much better. Without a priority designation this year the dam has little hope of accruing enough water to fill next year's irrigation needs. It's a double blow.

All winter long we watched as a series of generous storms stubbornly bypassed the lower reaches of our Wyoming watershed. Agonizing over every missed opportunity, we saw the promise of harvest slip away before we planted our first field. This continues to be a long and difficult journey; things don't always turn out like they should.

There is talk, from other districts, of May hay-runs; of bringing water down from the Wyoming dams for an early irrigation of alfalfa. News stories and editorials expound on the much improved prospects of summer water delivery, and there are, in some circles, predictions that the drought is over, that the empty, lower-reach reservoirs are the last vestiges of a near fatal disease from which recovery is well on its way. I guess it could be true. But those of us who face another summer without adequate water find the words bitter, the rejoicing premature.

The heavy snow which fell in March was our last real moisture. The rain that fell in place of the 'April-blizzard-that-never-was' amounted to about two tenths, and the 85-degree-days and incessant wind since have sapped the moisture from the land, leaving even the weeds parched and windburned. The weather early this week was especially horrible; a cold front packing gusts up to 54 mph took two days to blow itself out. I've never seen a wind with such big teeth.

Will the drought ever really be over for those of us who live in the panhandle? I doubt it. There are too many people in Nebraska looking west for water, pointing fingers and coveting what we once believed was irrefutably ours. Ten years ago we could never have imagined the water under our feet would someday be viewed as public property, subject to laws separate from those which govern other property rights. The times they are a'changin' ...and sometimes I think I'm too old to change along with them.

The first sugar beets have sprouted and are just breaking the surface. After the fields are planted, but before the seedlings emerge, the fields must be sprayed with herbicide; a stressful job to say the least. It is Nebraska after all...finding a few consecutive hours of calm is nigh-onto impossible.

The men plan to begin planting corn on Monday, but are hoping to get rained out. Without moisture some of the newly sprouted beets won't make it. We've scarcely got the crop in the ground and are already in danger of losing it.

Sometimes I think beet farmers, and farmers in general, are the modern equivalent of the medieval knight. Wearing ball caps, blue jeans and Carhart sweatshirts instead of chain mail, riding trusty tractors instead of horses, they complete task after difficult task in the quest for that perfect crop.

And on the home front:

There's been a murder in the brooder house. Tonight during chicken-chore time I discovered the badly battered body of a field mouse lying on the floor. Gruesomely decapitated, the poor thing was still warm to the touch. (Yes, I picked it up by the tail and threw it to a waiting farm cat) There were a few suspicious looking roosters hanging about but nobody's talking. Talk about 'foul' play.

Dale and I will be getting up early tomorrow morning to take down fence on the Morrill place. Since I need to be at work at the tire shop by eight a.m. we will likely be out at daybreak. I'm tired just thinking about it.

So it's off to bed for me....tomorrow's another day.

Karen



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Stitching up Quilts and New Friendships

by Penny Zeller

Sue Dick says she is back where she belongs – the little white building trimmed in blue on the corner of 8th Street and Highway 36 in Seneca. But this time, Sue has exchanged her pots and pans for needles and threads; her grill for a sewing machine; and instead of stirring up home-style meals, she is now stitching up quilts.

“My Husband, Duane, and I came up with the idea of a quilt shop just out of the blue,” explains Sue. We opened a shop in Axtell about 15 months ago, and then moved back to our building here in Seneca this past January. Axtell was good to us, but this for business is home. I’m back where I belong.”

For many years, Sue operated ‘The Friendly Diner’ in what is now ‘The Quilt Basket.’

“I had sewn all my life but had never made a quilt. My sister, Marilyn Miller, of Centralia, is a quilter and has taught me a lot and the rest I have picked up on my own. Duane operates the long-arm quilting machine and does most of the fabric purchasing. Quilting is something we both found an interest in and can enjoy together.”

As a Quilt Basket customer, you will find a wide variety of 100 percent cotton fabrics, including a nice selection of children’s prints, quilting patterns, batting, quilting kits, and a large selection of sewing notions.

“We are also starting to carry the ‘Kansas Quarters’ and the ‘Kansas Troubles’ designed fabrics. They are a grouping of darker colored fabric and patterns custom designed in Bennington, Kansas by Lynne Hagmeier. They are becoming very popular.”

Special services offered include the long-arm quilting service and custom quilting. “We will help you choose a pattern or fabric, choose the backing you would like, and then will make the quilt for you,” said Sue.

Workshops and classes, taught by a quilting professional, are also offered for those who wish to learn to quilt. Classes, when filled, are held on Thursday evenings and some Saturdays.

Since opening the business Sue has been surprised by the number of quilters in the local area and also how widespread the interest is in quilting.

“I’ve always been a ‘people person’ and I am totally enjoying this new endeavor. Quilting is gaining in popularity and I have met so many people through the business. We even had a couple from Canada the other day. They were traveling along the highway, saw our sign and stopped in. An interest in quilting is growing in young people as well. They want to learn how to quilt like their grandparents or great-grandparents did.”

The Quilt Basket is open Monday through Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and on Saturdays from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Coming in June they will take part in the 3rd Annual Northeast Kansas Shop Hop. Nine independently-owned quilt shops located from Downs to Hiawatha and from Junction City to Seneca will offer quilters the chance to become familiar with the products offered in each of the shops; win a sewing machine, receive free sunflower quilt blocks to complete a quilt of their own, and the opportunity to get acquainted with others who share their hobby. The Shop Hop will take place on June 8-11. To learn more about the Shop Hop, or to sign up for quilting classes, stop in at The Quilt Basket or call at 785-336-2133.



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