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May 2010



This migrating *Great Egret* takes flight from the shore of a farm pond west of Peru, Nebraska.

Voices from your Valley

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Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

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Writers this month

Devon Adams
Merri Johnson
Shirley Neddenriep
Vicki O’Neal
Karen Ott
Marvin Thomas
Josh Whisler
Marilyn Woerth

Thank You

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Your Country Neighbor

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Editor’s note:

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this publication are online at:*

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Where Life is Good

by Marilyn Woerth

I am a very simple woman. I have never understood this thing about shoes and purses. All I need is one black leather shoulder bag, and several pairs of shoes; white tennis shoes, black loafers, tan sandals, and black heels and I am good to go, which my husband loves about me (taking a breath). I also am not into bling, a few good pieces of jewelry will do me. But when it comes to my garden, my pocketbook gets turned upside down. I love to accessorize my gardens. I have hardly ever met a plant I didn't like (is that a double negative?). I love to play with color and I love to push the envelope as to what I can plant where. In other words, I am a bit eccentric when it comes to my gardens and I thank the garden angels that I have three acres to play in or else it might look a bit gaudy. In 1993 I created my first garden room which is how I handle my overly enthusiastic gardening style. This garden room is called a "moon garden" (all white flowered plants). The color white shimmers in the moonlight especially during a full moon and white blossomed plants are also the most fragrant at night. Other rooms we (meaning my husband and I) have created are a children's garden, shade garden, star patio (for his telescope), woodland retreat, kitchen portage, a daisy garden, a Zen garden with a tea house and every ones favorite area the water garden (with an island in the middle of it). See what a simple woman I am! And of course, I love to accessorize my rooms (it takes me two to three days to stage my rooms in the spring). I also love to tell a story with my accessories, for instance the bird stature on the bird bath with creeping cat nearby, the scarecrow with a fat, old crow sitting on a wire behind him and a tea set sitting on a wee table with a fairy and piglet, the whiskey barrel filled with castle ruins, a wizard, dragon and a knight. And then there's my wind chimes, I do love my wind chimes (good things the neighbors aren't too close)! But the most creative and unique room in the whole yard is the woodland retreat. And my husband created it (sigh). Down in the woodland he cleaned out a spot where a very old tree had fallen, cut it down to this really cool log where two limbs go into the main trunk. Then he put a tractor seat on a stand in front of the log with woodland plantings all around. For our anniversary I gave him an antique stain glass window, which he hung between two trees adjacent to his retreat. (I call it his hiding from Marilyn place.) In this room you just don't observe nature, you meld with nature. Once again I am reminded that simplicity triumphs over bling where life is good.

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Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

I was pondering my topic for this month's column yesterday, the day before the deadline. My muse always gives me some inspiration just when I think I'm going to have to notify my publisher that I won't be submitting anything.

This month was no exception. And, once again, my husband was the conduit for that inspiration.

I've written about losing keys several times in the past year. No groans, please; this is not about lost keys. This time it's all about losing one's sense of direction; specifically, about my *husband's* lost sense of direction. That's right. He committed perhaps the ultimate "man-sin" of getting lost only a few miles from home.

We were motoring the back roads of Nemaha county last evening. My husband was doing the driving while I scanned the countryside, looking for the quintessential 1960's-era farmstead to serve as a model for a story I'm working on. We started out going straight west of town, then turned south and followed a curve or two, ultimately heading back north and crossing Highway 136 on our way to lilac hill, a pretty site just a couple of miles east of Coryell Park.

So far, so good. Hubby knew where we were and what direction we were going. I had photographed a couple of farm places, but neither had the full combination of long curving drive leading to a stately home atop a hill, with traditional barns and other outbuildings, that I envision as the site for my fictional characters' drama. I suggested we go north again.

As we headed north, we passed a farm that we had once visited several years ago while researching interesting rural places in the county. (Yes, there are interesting rural places in Nemaha county.) I was impressed that my husband recognized the place, as we had been there only once. But one particular landmark confirmed his memory.

That's pretty much where his awareness of his location and direction ended, however.

We soon reached a T-intersection. We were about to turn east when my husband noticed a "Bridge Out" sign mounted in the grassy lane, obviously the former county road, now abandoned due to the missing bridge up ahead. He found the sign amusing, suggesting it might more appropriately read "Road Out." We were curious, so we drove up the lane to the barricade at the edge of the stream. Yup, the bridge was out. End of road. Time to turn around.

We returned to the actual road and continued meandering back through the hamlet of Glenrock. After a couple miles my husband asked me if I knew where we were. His tone implied that I might be confused. He informed me that we were going north, away from home. I reminded him that we had been going north when we investigated the bridge, and then turned around and went back south. He modified his stance, then, pronouncing that we were going either north or east.

I told him we could narrow our choices by half just by reading the next road sign, as Avenues go north and south, and Roads go east and west, in Nemaha county. Sure enough, we were on an Avenue. In my husband's mind, that confirmed that we were going north. I pointed out that even through the clouds and gathering dusk, the sky was a little brighter to our right, meaning we must be going south. He finally gave up his argument when the north side of Auburn came into view and there was no disputing that we were headed south.

He grinned sheepishly and admitted, "This isn't good." I just had to smile. I had something to write about, and my husband had another dose of ribbing to look forward to.

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THE RIVER

by Marvin Thomas

Beginning as runnels from the snowmelts of Montana, the Missouri River has meandered through the plains and carved its course through loessial bluffs to its eventual discharge into the massive Mississippi. Throughout the eons of time it has pursued a course of least resistance, urged by the vagrancies of snowmelt and rain that have sponsored the frequent floods. Winters have often fostered ice-dams, causing massive flowage when released by the spring warming. These surges in volume and current flow has allowed the river to claim its rite-of-passage and create wetlands spreading well beyond its normal channel.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition, beginning in 1804, gave America its introduction to the "Mighty Mo" with its river valley often extending from bluff to bluff, and with its channel forming a part of the boundaries for the future states of Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri and Kansas. The bordering wetlands formed sanctuaries for the native fishes, fowls and animals, and a welcome respite for migrating waterfowls. At one odd location along the western edge of the channel, a horizontal outcropping of rocks protruded, forming a natural all-weather wharf that would be used by later immigrants as a landing for their watercraft. In 1854 that location would be called "Brownville", and would become an entry into the newly opened Nebraska Territory.

As the new town flourished, several of the newcomers found the fishing of the river and its wetlands could be profitable. There were catfish, carp, perch, eel, buffalo and sturgeon in abundance, and a rapidly increasing population that needed the river fish in its menu. When many of the early residents moved on, after the railroad failure of the 1870s, fishermen, such as John Daugherty, began carting their weekly catches to the larger market in Auburn.

At Brownville, the navigable channel of this unpredictable river normally flowed along the bluff and the foot of Main Street, but after an annual "June Raise" it could be located a short distance farther east and the marginal area filled with the deposits of its sediments. By the early 1930s the Corps of Engineers had begun a program to tame this vagrant river by contracting for construction of wing dikes along each side of the river. This established a channel of more uniform width, between the dikes, and by dredging the shallows it formed a deeper and more manageable river, promoting navigation and allowing the wetlands to be converted to productive farmlands: a process that would still require many more years for the river basin to become reasonably dependable.

These wing dikes were constructed of closely spaced wooden piling, driven to imbedment through a sunken mat of broken stone. The bankside currents were slowed by these pilings, allowing the heavy sediment to fill in around these structures to eventually form a piling-reinforced shoreline.

Meanwhile, the Wheeldons, Broadys, and other landowners had built earthen dikes along their properties to thwart the annual floods, but the waters often topped these barriers and flooded their adjacent farmlands. It had become impossible for agriculturists to depend on a successful crop every year.

Residents had long depended on the river ice for keeping their perishables cool during the long summer season. After the community ice house closed, in the early 1930s, Frank Thomas built an ice storage house and began harvesting the ice that formed in the slower waters of the river's sidestreams during the frigid days of each January, when the thickness of the ice would range from 8" to 12". His crew frequently included Jim Roberts, Kinley Kelly, Bill and Wallace Bridgewater, Jesse Sierks, John Thomas, and others, for the cutting and storing of this necessity in the days before refrigeration was affordable.

The Great Depression of the 1930s became an anomaly for Brownville.

>>>>>>>>>> *Continued in the next issue.*

Poetry by Devon Adams

SIGN LANGUAGE

There are words scattered on the ground.
Sentences cross over each other as
they follow paths from here to there.
Many languages compete for recognition,
as their foreign fonts march through the dirt
in purposeful progressions, leaving
indentations from the feet that made them.

Tracking is simply reading on a larger page,
and hunters and outdoorsmen follow
signs that tell them stories from the wild
that never really have an end.

CANDY WRAPPERS

They were sitting on the window sill,
the bright blue one and the green,
visible from the encroaching sky
that reached down and touched
the earth around the house.
A shadow fell over them suddenly,
like a cold breath from a grave,
and they shuddered and froze,
realizing the futility of flight.
Silently, death slipped past
on the dark wings of a hawk,
who was flying low passes
on his daily search for lunch.
Only the glass between them
prevented him from grabbing
the two pieces of parakeet that were
as colorful as candy wrappers
waiting to be opened and devoured.

INTO THE NIGHT

Soft soothing summer air
floods through the trees
and lies on the ground,
like shimmering silk scarves
thrown down from the sky.

It is dusted with scents
from new blooms full of
pollen and powerful perfume
that hang in the stillness like
memories from past lovers.

VOICES FROM THE EDGE

Echoes bounce behind the trees
and follow the wind long the creek.
They rise and fall with easy notes
from tiny throats that speak in tongues
that only frogs can understand.

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Anita Robertson

For Joe Smith's Readers

Joe has been diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrigs Disease). He is in a wheelchair now, can only walk a few steps, isn't able to swallow well, so is on a feeding tube, and can't speak clearly. He hasn't lost his crazy sense of humor, and says at least he still has the use of his right hand. He says he must be really lucky, because only one of every 100,000 people gets ALS and he is that one.

Joe would appreciate cards. His address is 62638 730 RD, Johnson, NE 68378



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THE GARDENER

by Shirley Neddenriep

Once when the five sons were pre-teens and each had a bicycle, they got into the habit of racing each other around our house. They had fun, but this mother frowned on the practice.

Their game raised whirls of dust which followed them into the house; their 'race track' became a hard, barren path where no green plant dared to raise its head; visitors had to be wary upon approaching our door. They might be run down by the next cyclist.

There was no beginning and no end, but a continuous flow of bikers. At least, I knew where they were. And calling them in for dinner was easy as long as the timing was right. Can't you envision a biker halfway through an opened screen door?

After a few months of this I dug a hole in the packed earth and planted a red barberry shrub. I knew it to be loaded with thorny stems. Actually, two red barberry shrubs, strategically located to intercept the bike path. The threat of landing in thorns stemmed the flow of circling cyclists. Or it could be that racing in a circle grew tiresome.

Of course, as with all methods of revenge, the plan back-fired. Eventually the shrubs had to be re-located because we needed the space for a new back porch. So I dug them up. Now I was the one scratched. A victim of my own deviousness.

One of the barberry shrubs still grows at the northeast corner of the tall unused windmill tower. After a few years of watering a flower bed near the shrub, I noticed that the barberry thrived with the frequent runoff water. It had appeared to be a desert plant, with all those thorns.

That characteristic may be the reason the other one died. I had placed it far away where it couldn't scratch anyone. No one watered that area and pfitzers crowded it out.

This spring I asked the farmer to help with pruning and carrying off the dead branches of the red barberry shrub. He brought his pickup. He contentedly got rid of the sticky branches, then began grabbing up other limbs and dried stalks of Lantana. Earlier I had pulled those from their bed along with dried Gazania, but I left the sorry looking remnants of Silver Mound. It was beginning to green up around its roots. I planned to leave it alone for the time and trim it back later.

You got it! The Farmer grabbed that limp silver rag and pulled it part way from its anchor in the soil before I called a halt. Just in time. "Now, step on it," I advised. Hopefully, this saved it. He relished the chance to step on a growing plant and pushed it back into the ground with such force that maybe all the roots will re-establish. He is not a plant lover and proved it when we trimmed die-back from the one rose we have. Using the loping shears, he cut way below where I pointed; he does more damage than a rabbit. More thorny branches to load and haul to the burn pile where the old wash house was dumped. Remind me to tell you about demolition of the old wash house.

But for this time, the Farmer/Gardener was a good helper with the 'landscape' here at his farm.



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Medicare Supplement Changes

Medicare supplement insurance plans will undergo changes effective June 1, 2020.

If you have questions about Medicare, contact Mary Ann Holland, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Educator located in Cass County at 402-267-2205, or the Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP) at the Department of Insurance at 1-800-234-7119 or website: www.doi.ne.gov/shiip.

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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler
(Photo provided by Author)

Fishing:

The Missouri River flood of 2010 has receded but the bottom ground is still well saturated. The smell of rotting vegetation and dead trapped fish is abundant. Access to the river is just being made available as roads and paths are drying out enough to travel. Although the river has been well inside its banks for going on three weeks it seems like the flood lasted forever. Water still seems to be sitting every where. With the flood waters come the changes in the lay of the land. Most every route to the river locally is drifted with dunes of sand, some as deep as 4 foot and some hundreds of feet long at that depth. You wonder where it all comes from – out of the Platte? It is amazing that thousands of cubic foot of sand can flow like it does during a flood. And what makes it stop and settle where it does. It almost magic – huh – Missouri River Magic. With the river settling out so will be the fishing. I'll let you know what's biting and on what bait soon. Right now the pond and lake fishing is the main focus while the river decides what it wants to do. Crappie and Bluegill are hitting most anything that hits the water – from night crawlers and livers to spinners and power dough baits. And you don't have to work at getting sun burn to go with that stringer of panfish so take the sunscreen.

Hunting:

Spring Turkey Seasons are open right now and the birds are splitting up into small groups making it a lot easier for call a Tom or a Jake away from the hens. Spring Turkey Permits are still available & permits are no longer drawn they are available to buy and are a statewide permit. This year each hunter may not have more that three (3) spring turkeys. Permits are for One (1) Male Bird or bearded hen.

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Shotgun———April 17th – May 31st


Spring Fishing and Turkey hunting is upon us and ripe for the taking. Soon the morel mushrooms will also get things moving this spring to add to the things to do after the long cold winter. You really need to get out and get a piece of these spring activities before the hot days of summer hit us. 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 of Emma and Anna Meints of Steinauer, Nebraska shown with their catch from Burchard Lake. Looks like Emma (left) is proud of her catch while Anna is scared of hers.

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The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



Tonight, before supper, I took a walk along the low hills which overlook our farm. The men were still in the fields and the little boys at a birthday party, so except for our dog Boxer, who decided at the last moment to tag along in hopes of scaring up a rabbit or two, it was a solitary stroll.

From my vantage point I could see Dale's tractor and manure spreader scurrying up and down a river-bottom field, making up for the afternoon hours he spent at a bull sale. After a wet fall and winter the cattle corrals are thick with a stinky, composted mixture of sticky manure and the straw we put down as bedding.

In some quarters the odor is considered a litigious 'public nuisance', but to the cattleman it smells like money. (Farm and ranch women are more discreet in their opinions. They rarely complain about the smell, but for the duration of 'manure season' clothes normally hung outside to dry on an old-fashioned clothes-line are tossed into a modern-day dryer instead.)

While Boxer entertained himself with a cottontail which had taken refuge in a nearby pile of plastic gated pipe I combed the windswept hilltop for flint scrapers and arrowheads, picking up bits and pieces of the past and dropping them into the pocket of my paint-splattered, chore-stained sweatshirt, the one without a working zipper. A prairie dog sentinel, the sheriff of his little band, chirped out a 'hide-hide-hide' warning, while a pair of Killdeer tried to lure me away with screeching protests, and phony broken-wing antics; the scrawny

birds build their nests on the ground and are devoted and protective parents.

A meadowlark trilled from a weathered fence post and a cow in the bottom pasture called to her baby: a low moo answered by a short bla-a-a-a. If a dozen calves had answered she'd have known her own...like a mother who sits on uncomfortable bleachers at a school concert and sees only her child in a sea of faces.

There were Canadian geese, paired up in anticipation of downy goslings, waddling along the edge of the pasture wetlands, and high overhead a noisy band of cranes, heading south towards Texas and their own breeding grounds. I shielded my eyes from the sun and watched them until they disappeared from sight, their good-byes fading away

in the evening air like the last haunting notes of Taps: "God is near; do not fear; friend good night."

When the sun slid behind a cloud, and a cool wind tugged at my sweatshirt I knew it was time to start home. Home to the responsibilities....or perhaps more correctly the luxuries....of chores, supper and family, those ordinary things which give life meaning and purpose.

Despite the ups and downs, the uncertainties of weather and the here today-gone tomorrow grain markets, Dale and I are privileged to live and work on the land, honored to be associated with such a noble profession.

We're 'Dirt Farmers'...and proud of it.

Karen

Melinda D. Clarke, CPA

Tammy Westhart, Accountant

Combined: 18+ years experience

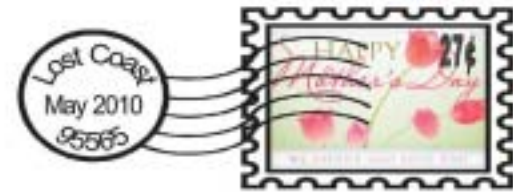
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You've heard it before.... everyone claims to have the meanest, most embarrassing, old-fashioned Momma...but truly, folks—mine was the worst.

While everyone else got away with murder, Momma made us toe the mark. She didn't let us eat a lot of junk food. We ate our veggies...and we liked them, too. That was the weird part.

She didn't use a belt on our rear-ends, but she did use a fly-swatter. I was fairly old before I knew the real purpose of a fly-swatter. I thought it had been invented to swat rebellious bottoms. Oh, the sting of a swatter against our bare legs!

While others kids rough-housed, we had to sit and listen to Momma read books to us. Not just short stories—but loooooong books. Adventures! Mysteries! Books by the dozens. Bible stories. Inspirational books. She read Pilgrim's Progress to us when I was only 8 years old. Totally unheard of! I mean.... Whose Mom does things like that?

She was horribly old-fashioned and staunch in her ways...but oh, how she could pray! She spent many hours praying for her kids. How well I remember getting off the school bus to hear Momma's prayers ricocheting out of the house. It echoed around the neighborhood and made me cringe!

Nobody else had to put up with stuff like that.

It's ironic. My kids think that I'm the meanest, most embarrassing Momma...but they have no idea. I am a kitty-cat compared to my mom.

Once, when I was a rebellious adolescent, Mother chased me down the street with her infamous fly-swatter. "Oh yes—you will wear deodorant!" she hollered for all the world to hear. "If you don't wear it, you will STINK!" (I do wear deodorant today. And I don't stink....thanks to Momma and her fly-swatter.)

Ah yes—the trials of having a mean Momma! Some of you folks had mean, old-fashioned mothers, too, but look how well you turned out!

This generation, today, needs a bit of "meanness," I'm afraid. Look what's happened since parents went soft on their kids. The crime. The school-shootings. The rampant drugs and sex and outrageous behavior. Vandalism. In the old days, folks could leave their doors unlocked. Nobody broke into houses. A handshake was a guarantee.

If only we could slip back into yesteryear and sit down on the old
May 2010 **Your Country Neighbor**

porch. Can't you hear it now...? The creak of porch-swings. A stirring in the lilac bushes...a purple fragrance wafts on the breeze.

An old dog whimpers as he dreams in the sunshine. Down the street, a '54 Chevy rounds the corner, kicking up dust. A dreamy haze envelopes the neighborhood. Kids play kick-the-can in the alley. A screen door bangs. Flies buzz, droning in the warmth of a spring day. There's the smell of chocolate-chip cookies baking in the oven.

The sound of a radio drifts to us from the neighbor's house. Walter Cronkite and the morning news.

But wait! Suddenly, we're pulled from our happy daze. The voice on the radio has changed...It sharpens. "Three students were killed today as another school-shooting took place. It's the second shooting in a week. Meantime, a mob of angry students take to the streets in downtown—"

No, folks. In the old days, we never heard that kind of news. We don't realize how bad it's become until we view our modern world from afar.

What we need, today, is a bunch of mean Moms to stand up and say: "Enough is enough! Our kids aren't going to turn out like that. We're going to take back our kids...our families....our neighborhoods...!"

Ah well.

Truth to tell, it's probably too late for that. We can't turn back the clock, but we can give honor to our Mothers. Those old-fashioned Mommas who wouldn't let us grow up to be hoodlums. Patriotic Mommas who taught us to love America and to cherish our godly heritage.

May God bless their souls.

Be sure to tell your Mom how much she means to you this Mother's Day. Go to her home and bring her flowers and poems and wonderful little gifts. Meaningful things. Homemade chocolate-chip cookies. Photos and mementos from the past—things that stir up her fondest memories. Let her sit on the porch swing and sip tea as the butterflies flit in the sunshine and the flies buzz.

Folks—give your old-fashioned Momma the best old-fashioned Mother's Day ever!

Just look out for her fly-swatter!

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