

Your

Country

Neighbor

FREE!

May 2011



What are you lookin' at?

Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

Writers this month

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

Thank You

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Your Country Neighbor

P.O. Box 126
 Peru, Nebraska 68421

countryneighbor@windstream.net

Editor's note:

*More than five years of
 this publication are online at:*

www.yourcountryneighbor.com

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THE INTERLOPER

Shirley Neddenriep

Deep blue sky stretched into infinity above the nest. That place topped out in the upper branches of a Pfitzer Juniper and was guarded carefully by parents of the nestling.

Clear and still weather for early April encouraged the youngster to explore the place on his own. Nor did he particularly pay attention to his circling progenitors who were concerned for his safety. They alone were aware of the interloper that sat his lair. He not only was unaware, but welcomed the trespasser as an aid in his adventure.

"I want to stay up here forever," he mused from the upper branches where he perched. I looked up, then, and a little stab of fear ran through. He was, after all, a boy of six and clambered roughly 10 feet above the ground.

We took turns with the small saw so that when it stuck in the kerf for him, I could manage to take a turn and get through the 2" branch. Then he could manfully pull the branch free. We pruned dead branches to clean the tree. Before sawing a living branch, we held a discussion. Some living branches made excellent climbing rungs; we spared those.

We continued thus as his predators circled, first the matriarch, then his patriarch, eyeing me with painful looks of consternation. Once or twice they swooped near, to retrieve a branch or offer a design to end the fearful situation. They even "borrowed" our saw!

The lad and I kept a continual conversation going as he focused when he had to on footing. Sharks, fish and people; how they eat each other; and the color of the blood of a fish. What is it? "Well," I asked him, "Does your dad catch a fish?" I knew he did. The child thought a moment. "And does he clean the fish?" "Oh! I remember, its red!" he answered. Noting the sawed off end of a branch, he fingered it carefully. "What is that?" pointing to the reddish color of its interior. We ranged nearly three-quarters of a century apart in years, but found a common ground that day in the tree.

Where to find *Your Country Neighbor*

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Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

Pets. All six of my siblings have an indoor pet (or have had at some point). Ironic, since we were all raised by the same mother who has never approved of animals in the house, let alone on the kitchen table, where our cat is allowed when I'm eating alone. I can see some of you turning up your nose at the thought of such an unsanitary practice. Perhaps growing up on a farm explains my lack of queasiness about animals and germs in general. But rest assured, if you come to my house for a meal, the table will be clean and the cat will be banned.

King isn't really interested in human food anyway; he just wants to be close.

I typically read when I'm eating alone, so there's a book or magazine propped up in front of my plate. If you know anything about cats, you are familiar with their habit of sitting on whatever piece of paper you are attempting to concentrate on. It makes no difference if it's a letter, a newspaper, a magazine, or a big fat novel. A cat will stealthily insert itself into your personal space and nonchalantly stretch out on your reading material, expecting to have its chin and ears scratched.

I find the only solution is to pet King with my left hand and alternate wielding my fork and turning pages with my right. Admittedly, my willingness to indulge my cat at mealtime is largely due to the fact that I pretty much ignore him the rest of the day. I suspect King intuits my guilt and shamelessly manipulates me in this fashion. So be it.

My husband is not quite as big a pushover when King is inconveniencing him. In the middle of the night, he will not hesitate to grab King by the scruff of his neck and toss him overboard if King is in the way or if he refuses to STOP LICKING HIMSELF! I, on the other hand, will rearrange myself into whatever position is necessary to accommodate King's desire to cuddle, and I've learned to block out that slurping sound. (Truth be told, King is not the only inhabitant of our bed who sometimes exhibits annoying nocturnal habits, if you know what I mean.)

Despite the fact that I am the one who cleans the litter box and is more patient with King, it's my husband who is more emotionally attached to our feline fuzz ball. This presents a dilemma: King has begun exhibiting symptoms of liver or kidney problems, which is not terribly unusual for a 12-year-old cat. The question is what to do about it. Between King's spring grooming, flea and tick medicine, and trying to figure out for sure what's wrong with him, we've spent over \$300 at the vet in the last two weeks. What is the monetary limit of emotional attachment when you're dealing with a 12-year-old cat? We haven't quite plumbed the depths of that question yet.

It was yours truly who had to preside over the euthanasia of our 15-year-old dog four years ago. I really don't want to have to do that again, so say a little cat prayer that it won't be necessary any time soon, will you? I thank you, and so does King.

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Poetry by Devon Adams

MOTHER'S DAISIES

She could whistle like a flute,
as her hands made flowers grow.
The winter days were always full
of potted geraniums, laughing
in the sunny windows, and before
the frosts and snow were gone,
she'd throw together a greenhouse
hut, leaning on the shoulder of the house.
Inside were rows and rows of little pots,
planted full of seeds snuggling in the
warmth of the artificial spring air.
She would talk to them like children,
telling stories of beautiful flowers
who had started life as tiny sprouts.
But her favorites were the daisies, and
now she smiles when we place armfuls
of them beside her, as she sleeps
forever under the sun in spring.

DARK SECRETS

The black half of the moon is hiding
behind the shadow of the blue earth.
Soon the fires of the universe will
heat the dark into molten pewter,
and it will burn with cold light, as
the circle of the orb is completed
and the truth is no longer obscured.

PRAIRIE PRISM

The diamond dusts of winter
have melted into the rivers
of scent that flow from the
fragrant bushes and trees
that are spread across the
prairie. Purple mists and
pink clouds lay upon the land
like dreams, eclipsed in intensity
by the gaudy canary yellows
that the wise old forsythia bushes
put on display for competition.
Red bombs explode out of the soil,
as tulips make appearances, and
then the iris take the stage, dancing
in their frilly dresses, careful not to
touch the sharp swords of their leaves.
Quietly, in their small way, dutchman's
breeches are hanging out to dry
deep inside the shadow of the timber.
They are waiting for the mushrooms,
soon to be a featured attraction next
to wild phlox and the exquisite violets
that are the enduring soul of spring.

PELICANS

They are a fleet,
afloat in a sea of blue,
sailing on the wind,
as they ride the tides
of the changing seasons.

TIME TRAVEL

In the pages of the dog-eared album
are old photographs of family faces.
All were taken day by day, of toothless infants,
toothy teens wrapped in metal brackets.
Then came a marriage, with a couple
standing stranded, high up on a cake,
arms entwined and dressed for battle.
Fast forward in the pictures of the past,
and, standing next to Mom and Dad are
kids from one to four, with number five hiding
under a tent-like smock. Further on, the
married pair are looking tired, standing
next to the last of the babies, as she wears
her graduation robe, and holds the keys to
the new car she wrangled out of dear dad.
The road got longer, and the kids had kids,
and Grandma and Granddad look more rested,
because they can send the grandkids back home,
after they've had too many of Grandma's cookies.
Time travels, and so do we, for awhile.

Medicare Mysteries No More: Explaining Medicare

Not ready for Social Security? want to know more about Medicare? Get information on when and how to sign-up, costs, deadlines, etc. by attending one of the following Extension workshops for pre-retirees, family members and caregivers conducted by Mary Ann Holland, UNL Extension Educator and SHIIP volunteer

Thurs, May 19, 10 am	Oxbow Assisted Living, 1617 Bills Dr, Ashland
Sat, May 21, 10:30 am	Prichard Auditorium, 17 th & Barada St, Falls City
Thurs, June 2, 10 am	Plattsmouth Library, 400 Ave A, Plattsmouth
Tues, June 14, 2 pm	First National Bank, 320 5 th St, Syracuse
Wed, July 13, 2 pm	Auburn Library, 1810 Courthouse Ave, Auburn
Mon, July 18, 2 pm	Cass County Extension, 144 th & Hwy 1, Weeping Water
Tues, Aug 23, 10 am	Sump Memorial Library, 222 N Jefferson, Papillion
Wed, Sept 21, 2 pm	American National Bank, 310 Broadway, Tecumseh
Fri, Oct 7, 10 am	Morton-James Public Library, 923 1 st Corso, Nebraska City
Mon, Dec 12, 2 pm	Cass County Extension, 144 th & Hwy 1, Weeping Water



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Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

Sometimes life can be —painful. It is during these times that I find great solace in my gardens. Our humble gardens have given many others that same kind of comfort, through the years. We love to share the garden with those in need whether it be quietly, sitting by the pond with a friend mourning the loss of her husband, or the fond memory of a lost friend, gazing intently into the very soul of a rose looking for answers to her life, or a spiritual advisor announcing he had found the perfect place for a day retreat. One year, two busses from Omaha came down and one person found the perfect place of solitude to place her prayer rug and bow her head. Come, we share. We know.

There are many places to sit, ponder, pray, contemplate or just let go in our garden. I visit them often. Each garden gives its own unique perspective of one's own journey, if you have the time, to sit, to think and gather it all in, silently, honestly.

There is great joy in sharing ones garden. The happy, joyful times; parents 60th wedding anniversary, Thanksgiving, Easter, Christmas with family, a son's wedding, senior pictures, a glass of wine with friends, department picnics, garden club potlucks. The garden is the happiest when children are coursing through its veins. The laughter of twenty Head Start students running along the path, it was misty that day and Steve found hats for everyone.

Then there are those special times a forty year old enjoying her first s'more by the fire pit, along the tree line. Boy Scouts searching the skies through a telescope on the star patio. Late night family sing-a-longs by the smoky bonfire, following an active afternoon of playing pirates with the wee ones searching for hidden treasures. The gardens are humbled by talented friends; the painter with her sharp eye for precious minute scenes, the photographer looking for the next perfect or unusual shot, the step-father strumming his guitar while fireflies dance to his song.

One fun evening in May, a few years back, there were 17 male and female students from Bahrain and Jordan, studying English at UNO, they were sent to check out life in the countryside. They spilled out of the bus full of boundless energy and enthusiasm. Each shaking our hands, and announcing their foreign sounding names. They soon covered our three acres and gardens, taking a gazillion pictures as they went. Who would've ever guessed that soon we would have eight fun spirited young men dancing around our fire pit singing in Arabic, the history of their homelands. What a wonderful experience and lasting friendships we made that night.

Memories held long past fleeting moments, all because there was a garden and it was shared. If you live where life is good, it is meant to be shared, not hoarded. Remember this and you will be blest with many magical memories to last a lifetime.



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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler
Photo Submitted by Author

Fishing:

The River has been bank full again as the reservoirs west and north are filled to capacity and are letting water loose in anticipation of a large snow run off from the mountains from spring melting. All the rock formations in the river are now covered and all it would take is a good thunderstorm to roll though. The local run off will take it well out of its banks. At the present time a boat can be put in and loaded out with relative ease. How long that is going to last is anybody's guess. Fishermen have still reported slow action from the fish. They reported catching mostly small Channel cats and some fair sized Blue cats. Not catching a lot of fish but catching enough to keep them coming back. What are they biting on you say? They seem to be hitting night crawlers mostly but pretty good action on dough baits and chicken livers. The Blues have been hitting live bait – chubs and minnows. So restrung your poles and get out there. Fishing time is here. May be able to get some pretty good fishing in before the bugs move in.

Mushroom Hunting:

It's that time of year again to look for Morel Mushrooms. Folks have been finding a few around recently (like just in the last week) – enough to brag about finding some but not any bragging rights that they found a ton or a truck load or anything like that. So there is still time to get out and find some. Most of the reports are the river bottom mushrooms. Soon that will move to "The Hills" as we say – meaning the Missouri River Bluff. That is usually where the bounty of mushrooms are found around here.

Hunting:

The Spring Turkey Seasons are here and permits are available. The spring season dates are as follows:

Season Dates - Spring

Archery — March 25-May 31

Youth Archery — March 25-May 31

Youth Shotgun — April 9-May 31

Shotgun — April 16-May 31

Permit Limit: Three per hunter

Bag Limit: One male or bearded female turkey per permit

Permits are \$24 this year, \$6 for a youth permit.

**New for this year that has everyone talking is the option to use a crossbow during turkey bow seasons. It's got more people out hunting while at the same time it has religious bow hunters scratching their heads. Is this what is going to happen to Deer Bow Hunting too? We will just have to wait and see. Note: A crossbow has been, for some time, legal to use during rifle deer seasons but not during deer bow season.



We have had a little winter set back recently and the wind is unreal. When it's cold and windy where the turkeys won't even gobble in the morning – it's too cold for you to be out there. Sounds like things are going to warm up and that will help the hunting and fishing both. Keep your fingers crossed that winter is over and let's move on to spring and summer. A reminder that Spring Turkey Permits can still be purchased. So get your permits and get out there, you won't be sorry you did. 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 picture is of a proud Ema Lee Meints from Steinauer, Nebraska showing a couple of fresh mushrooms found on the Missouri River Bottom near Peru.

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The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



Children—Farm Raised:

During our forty years of marriage the best crop Dale and I ever raised was our three sons; inputs were outrageously expensive, but the return.....four grandchildren thus far....has been phenomenal.

Insightful, inquisitive and delightfully spontaneous these little ones are the fourth generation to climb our home's one-hundred year-old stairs... throw stones into Horse Creek, and walk fields which were once open prairie. They are the latest in a long line of stolid, Volga-German farm kids, a living legacy of the boys and girls who fled, with their parents, Mother Russia's brutal winters, her Bolshevik Revolution, and the madness that was WWI.

I like to think there's a little of those long-ago farm children in these kids, that if they chanced to meet they'd recognize something of themselves in the other, perhaps a shared love of spring mud and newborn calves, or a passion for home-made noodles, garlic sausage and rye bread.

Agricultural technology, along with the consolidation of individual farms into single, larger units, have placed modern farm kids on their own endangered species list.....and that's a crying shame.

Because where else could you hear declarations like this: (Devon-8) "In olden days kids didn't have toys, they played with chicken feet." (Luke-6) "The Mama cat laid some kittens!" (Katelyn-7) "Eggs are baby chickens.....before they grow feathers."

And of course three year old Allison's precocious response to receiving a small bucket of corn (to scatter to the chickens) instead of the promised red wheat. "This not wheat....this corn."

Growing up a farm kid means a child learns early their place in God's great circle of life, and their importance as a contributing member of the family. Forget to pick up your toys and you've got a messy room.... forget to gather the eggs and you've changed the breakfast menu for not only yourself, but also your mother, your father, and siblings as well.

And entertainment?

A tire suspended from a front yard cottonwood, along with a large pile of back-yard straw bales, are what substitutes for fancy playground equipment at our place, and a

horse tank and irrigation ditch are stand-ins for a municipal swimming pool. Old tractors and retired equipment can quickly morph into pirate ships, race cars, or dragons... and a simple walk to the river a treasure hunt for Indian artifacts; imagination is the only limitation.

There's open space for running, dark corners for hiding, and creek banks for dreaming....

And it's all theirs....

As Always,

Karen

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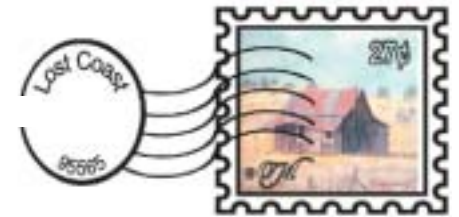
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Old Home Place
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Lost Coast

May Madness

By Vicki O'Neal



When I awoke this morning, I found my wrist-watch on the wrong arm—my right arm—which is the wrong arm, except when I'm trying to remind myself of something important....

But I'd forgotten what I'm supposed to be remembering...Of course.

I yawned and looked at our digital clock. It said "OIL"...which was sure to be a good omen for that day. My husband wasn't so certain.

Raising his head from the pillow, Michael squinted through the dimness. "Why is our clock upside down?"

"I couldn't sleep!" I said, "So I flipped the clock. It's fun to make 3 letter words all night long—just ask any writer—"

The ringing of our telephone interrupted my words. "There!" I said. "That's our \$10,000 phone call. Today's going to be a good day for our business. You need to take that call, Mr. O!"

Michael sighed. "It's too early! It's hardly 7 o'clock...!"

"You mean 'OIL o'clock!' Answer that phone, sir...!"

He did. A moment later, his voice turned happy. "Great to hear from you, Sam! We'll be glad to help. We'll scratch your back, and you'll scratch ours. That's how it works. Thanks so much for calling!"

Hanging up the phone, Michael dialed his brother. "We just got a million dollar call," he said. "Be ready to go to work!"

I smiled. "Told you so," I said. "Am I a good employee or what?"

It's not easy, folks. Being the secretary for my husband's business is tough work. Unfortunately, the boss hinders me on most days. Michael insists on doing his own typing—finger by finger. It takes him hours to do what would take me minutes.

"I have to keep in practice...!" he says, pecking

away at the keyboard.

"Well. What am I here for?"

Mike sighs, squinting at the computer screen. "You're my personal secretary, Mrs. O! You know that!"

Actually, I have many more tasks than just being a personal secretary. I must accompany the boss on trips, which can be quite trying, at times.

"Look!" I say, peering at his speedometer. "You're speeding, aren't you?"

"Am not. The speed limit says 65...!"

"But you're towing a trailer! That sign says your towing limit is 55 mph."

"They never enforce that law!" he says. "Tell me of one person who was pulled over because of it! Don't worry, Honey. We won't get a ticket."

Right.

Last night we were traveling along in the darkness. We were heading downhill at a good clip. Suddenly, flashing red lights appeared behind us. Michael pulled over.

The officer was young, but experienced. Glancing at Mike's driver's license, he said: "Mr. O'Neal...You're a professional driver. You know better than to go 69 mph while towing a trailer."

He pointed at a sign just ahead of us. "That sign says 55 mph for towing!" The officer looked at Mike hard. "Besides that, you have a broken tail-light!"

Michael smiled his Aw-Shucks grin. He explained that he had a brand new tail-light replacement behind the seat. He had a harder time explaining why he was going 69 in a 55 mph zone.

Meanwhile, I took the new tail-light out of the box and showed it to the officer. It helped considerably, and it's a good thing! If the officer hadn't been won over by the secretary's charm, he would've given my boss a hefty ticket. I'm

sure of it.

"A ticket..." the officer said, "is bad for your commercial record! Higher insurance rates, too!" He paused, and then made my husband promise to never again break that speed limit law. Michael shook the officer's hand and we drove down the road in silence.

"I told you so," I said.

My boss was humbled. Briefly.

Men learn things the hard way. In fact, my husband always does things the hardest way possible. He says it builds stamina, both physically and mentally.

However—the other day, I found my boss breaking his own rule. He was trying to do something the easiest way possible.

I found him aiming at the top of our Redwood trees with his rifle. "What in the world?" I said. "Why are you shooting our trees?"

"Their branches are obstructing our internet dish," Mike said. "These Redwoods grow way too fast!"

"So...you're going to shoot off their branches?"

He looked at me. "Can you think of an easier way?"

No. I had to admit that I couldn't. I retreated in silence.

My husband is brilliant, really—and so is my boss. Come to think of it, his secretary is rather ingenuous, as well.

Now—if I can only remember why my wrist-watch is on the right arm. Or on the wrong arm, as the case might be....

I'll remember sometime. I really will.

Probably this evening....at OIL o'clock.

Vicki O'Neal
www.VickiO'Neal.com

We saw tilling in April; there will be planting in May.



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