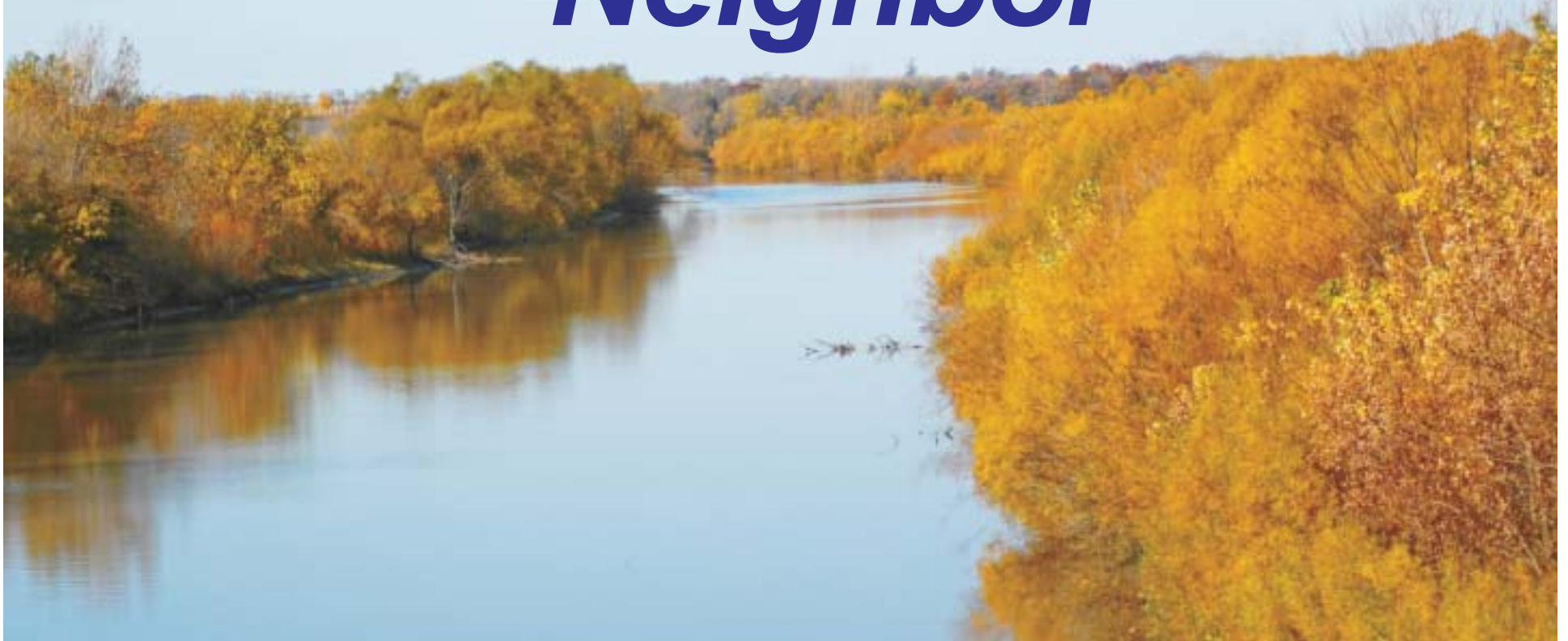


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Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

Writers this month

Devon Adams
Larry Christy
Merri Johnson
Shirley Neddenriep
Vicki O'Neal
Karen Ott
Joe Smith
Josh Whisler

Thank You

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Your Country Neighbor

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Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

It's that time of year again: bazaar season. Or, depending on the particular event, *bizarre* season. For my purposes, we'll assume the run-of-the-mill church bazaar; that predictable, perennial fundraiser for worthy causes ranging from paying for a new roof on the parsonage to supporting local charities to meeting the demand of non-bakers to acquire home-made baked goods to give to other non-bakers.

It's interesting to me that the Pastor of the congregation in which I grew up would never allow a fundraiser on church property, regardless of the worthiness of the cause. No Christmas bazaar, no soup supper, no ice cream social. It always seemed to me that he applied the example of Jesus tossing out the wicked temple moneychangers a tad too broadly.

There was another angle to his position, however. He believed that the congregation should be able to support itself and whatever mission projects it adopted with cash donations from its own members. That seems like a defensible position on the surface, but knowing how much of a purist he was, I suspect he also considered the money of people who belonged to a different denomination, or were perhaps total unbelievers, was *just a little bit* tainted. Lest you think I am being disrespectful, let me assure you that, although I disagreed with his position, I respected his devotion to doing what he believed was right, even if it was unpopular.

The congregation I belong to now is a member of the same denomination as that of my childhood, but we have no such qualms about making use of the money of "outsiders." We will happily take anyone's money in exchange for a plate of cookies, or a handcraft, or even a bizarre recycled ornament made of those plastic six-pack ring-things.


Which brings me to the real point of this month's article. As a member of the women's organization in charge of the bazaar, I have to contribute something to sell. I generally supply two or three types of cookies to add to the assorted cookie plates, our most popular baked item.

But, every so often I get the itch to try a craft. Over the years I have contributed bird feeders made of pine-cones spread with peanut butter and rolled in seeds, home-made note cards, laminated placemats made of collages of old Christmas cards, garland made of old Christmas cards strung on twine, other ornaments made of old Christmas cards. The list could go on, my supply of old Christmas cards being virtually inexhaustible.

The sad truth is that most of those donated craft items came back home with me after the bazaar. Despite my efforts and intentions, I had failed to actually contribute to the profits! (Deep sigh.)

I guess I'll just stick to the cookies this year. If they were packaged on a plate all by themselves, I fear they might suffer the same fate as the old Christmas card crafts. But since they get mingled with cookies and candies made by half a dozen other, more talented, bakers, I know they'll sell. Would that I could create a craft to rival the appeal of those cookie plates. But my talents just don't run in that direction.

Here's to bazaar season: may your church bazaar be successful and may your personal donations not be left over at the end of the day.



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GREAT BLUE

Yesterday, there was icy lace
on the edge of the pond.
Golden leaves are browning
on the ground, turning into dust.
Sun time is shorter, and shadows
are colder, as autumn blazes out.
In the frost of the day,
outlined against white light,
the great blue heron climbs
across the morning.

Poetry by Devon Adams

BLANK PAPER

Like the endless gravity
of a black hole that sucks
everything into itself,
a bare sheet of white paper
pulls words and images
out of the minds and hearts
of writers and artists.
In a spooky kind of groove,
we are helpless to stop the
progress of a thought or
the process of a painting
once the pen or brush connects
with the alluring surface
of a blank field waiting for
design and definition.
The end product comes as
a surprise, a revelation from
the boondocks of our unconscious
perimeters, leaving us to wonder
who we really think we are.

FROSTED

There was fresh white frosting
on the ground this morning.
It was thick and cold, and calmly
killed the green that lay below.

I THINK SHE KNEW

I think she knew me,
when I held her hand,
because she smiled.
Or, maybe it was
because I held her hand
that she smiled.

EMPTY NEST

After the storm, I walked
along the cedar break.
Long grass was flattened
from the whip of the wind,
tangled with leaves and sticks,
exhausted from the battle.
But, lying in the sun was
a woven horsehair nest,
perfect in its symmetry,
preserved from damage,
forever empty.

MAYBE TOMORROW

Sometimes, making a list
is the last thing you should do
before you go to bed,
or when you get up.
Perhaps your tired mind
would appreciate a break
from the unrelenting pressure
that follows you around like
a little blue ghost, a constant
companion who checks the
clock and checks the list and
gives you dirty looks
when you fail to finish.
Sometimes when you run
too hard to keep up, you
leave the things you love behind.

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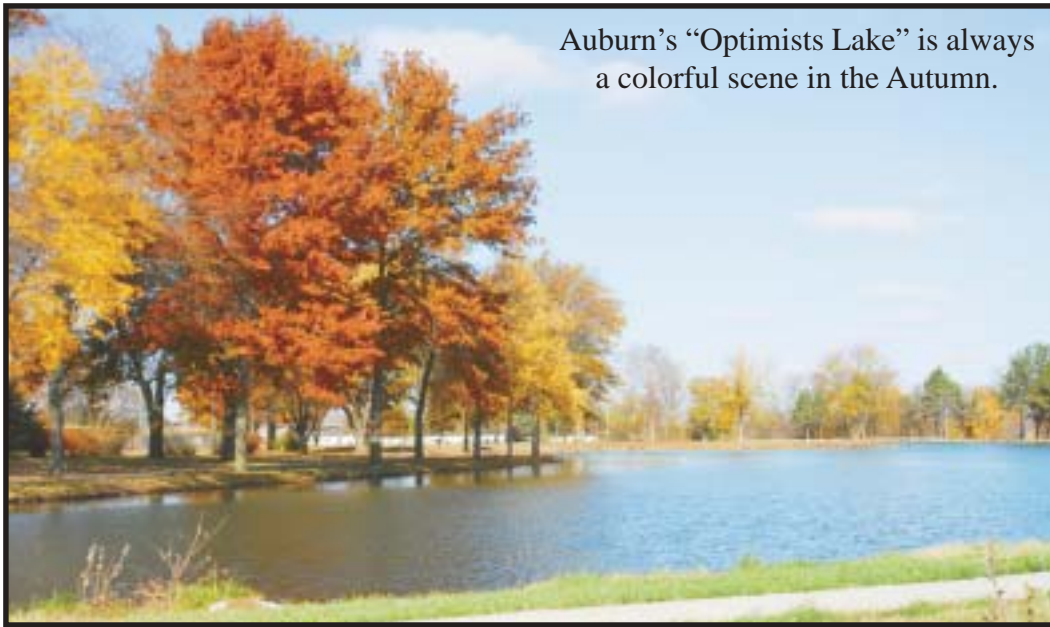
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A LOVE STORY

by Shirley Neddenriep

He stood at the end of the driveway, waiting. She had promised she would be coming. Nervously he paced and kicked clods in his youthful impatience to see her again. He wondered about her car. She had said she had trouble with it. Maybe she wasn't coming. Maybe she had trouble somewhere along the road. He squinted into the distance, watching. There, he saw a dust cloud, and there came her car, just as she had promised.

She stepped out, all smiles and radiance just as he remembered. She swept him in a hug as big as all outdoors and he held on to her.

"Did you miss me?" she asked, breathlessly. Unable to speak, he simple clung to her. "Are you glad I am here?" but he could only tell her with his eyes. "Don't ever leave again," he pleaded. She tousled his hair playfully and ran away from him.

"Come on! let's run together," and she returned to gaily grab his hand. They ran skipping up the path to the familiar little house.

But she felt tired from the road and begged a nap. He sat beside her cot and watched her every breath. He outlined the contours of her face, her mouth, her neck with his eyes, and waited as long as he could. Finally, he touched her arm softly to awaken her gently.

"Will you go with me?" he asked. "I will go wherever you want me to," she replied. She rose up then and washed her face. She pulled on a fresh shirt while he gathered his ball, bat, and catcher's mitt. He hit the ball hard and straight, then he played catcher, then third baseman. She told him he was her hero. After that they played ball alone, and he sent the ball twirling hard into the windbreak trees. Finally they had no more balls, they were all in the trees.

"Want to play football?" he asked eagerly. "Of course!" came her quick reply, and they played pass and catch with the football for an hour or so. Under his tee-shirt she noticed how his muscles had firmed up and grown strong while she had been away. Exhausted by all the activity they flopped on the grass and lay still. Breathing hard, they studied the puffy cloud formations in the blue sky. He turned to her.

"I love you," and he said her name with tenderness, "I don't want you to go back there." "And I love you, too!" and she sat up and placed her hands on his shoulders and held him captive to plant a kiss on his forehead. Then she scampered up and ran away, "but I have to go back. It is part of my plan." "Where is the basketball?" she teased, "I can make more baskets than you can!"

So then he knew she would leave again for sure, but they had the summer. They tried impossible overhead shots, dribbled behind their backs, pretended to be "Harlem Globe-Trotters," and laughed uproariously at each others blocked shots, illegal plays.

That night as their mother listened at prayers the girl gave thanks for him, her 9-year old brother; and he said a prayer of thankfulness for her; his 19-year old sister, home from college in April 1998.

What is 2009 H1N1 (swine flu)?

2009 H1N1 (referred to as “swine flu” early on) is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. This virus is spreading from person-to-person worldwide, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread. On June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) signaled that a pandemic of 2009 H1N1 flu was underway.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

A 2009 H1N1 vaccine is currently in production and should be ready for the public in the Fall. As always, a vaccine will be available to protect against seasonal influenza.

There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza.

Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.*
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) Keep away from others as much as possible to keep from making others sick.

Other important actions that you can take are:

- Follow public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds and other social distancing measures.
- Be prepared in case you get sick and need to stay home for a week or so; a supply of over-the-counter medicines, alcohol-based hand rubs*, tissues and other related items might be useful and help avoid the need to make trips out in public while you are sick and contagious.

Want to learn more about becoming a disaster responder?

In these types of situations we are reminded to prepare for epidemic response and other situations we may need to respond to. If you or someone you know are interested in learning more about becoming a disaster responder please call or email Theresa Gomez at Region V Systems, 402-441-4358 or tgomez@region5systems.net.



One of the scenic views on the campus of Peru State College

Welding Family

by Joe Smith

Over the last couple of weeks we have had a lot of family show up for different things. I got to seeing how many of my kin were welders. Almost all the grandkids are welders, making a lot more money than I ever did. I took welding in college. I already knew how from my dad's shop. My Dad was a good welder when he needed to be. So I guess it must be in our genes.

When I first started farming I did a lot of welding for neighbors, then when we moved to the Tucumcari area we needed extra income and I went to work for the Irrigation District as a welder. That lasted about a year and then I started my own shop. We had that for a couple of years and it paid a lot of bills and put food on the table. It really saved our necks more than once. Then we moved to Nebraska and started a shop in Brock. That did good as long as I was able to do it. But with my back I need to get off the concrete. We moved to the Johnson area and farmed south of town for three years before we bought the place we are on now.

No matter where we went we ended up doing welding. I made a shop out of a big old horse barn. That worked 'til lightning burned it to the ground. It didn't take long 'til I had a new shop built on the same spot. Since then we have added to both sides.

My sons and grandsons have been around the shop all their lives. They can weld circles around me now and make a good salary, much more than I ever made. The only son I have left is also a good welder, but he makes his living as an Occupational Therapist in Missouri. His son is a welder also. He works way up in the air on industrial plants. The one he is on now is in Springfield, Missouri. I hope he doesn't fall off. He does seem to push the envelope a lot. Don't know where he got that from?

Well I think my welding days have past now. We have a bunch of great-grandchildren. I just watch them and smile. I wonder if any of them will turn out to be welders. It is kinda in the blood I guess.

Joe Smith

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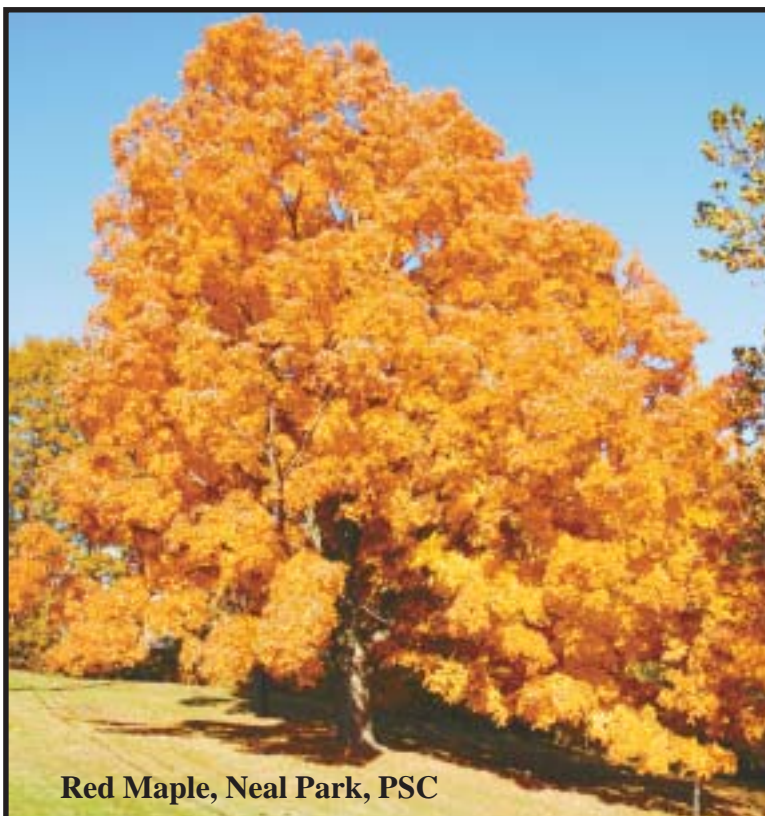
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Hunting Night Crawlers (final 'installment')

by Larry Christy

The only other phenomena in worm hunting that out-ranked simultaneously grabbing a worm in each hand while holding one of Grandpa's Little Red flashlights clenched in your teeth, was if you stumbled upon two night crawlers "Making Love" as Grandma and Grandpa called it. Whether night crawlers actually "make love" or not, I can't say, but you would sometimes find two fat worms each extended nearly to full length out of their holes, bodies entwined and covered in a sheen of silvery mucous. When you found worms in this state, they seemed to be a bit desensitized to what was going on around them, as if engrossed in the throes of passion. And it was almost always a sure thing that you'd be able to nab these two lovers with one hand. A glorious windfall of luck.

Of course there was also the possibility of upstaging this feat if one was to find two pairs of lovers going at it within arms length of each other. In theory this could reward you with 4 worms at once, grabbing a pair in each hand. But this was hard to do. If you didn't have a Little Red flashlight to hold in your mouth, which most of us kids usually didn't have, it meant that you had to lay your standard flashlight down in the grass and make two accurate simultaneous grabs in the dark. I can only recall a very few times when anyone accomplished this, but when they did it was an event to tell everyone in earshot about. And not just because of the coincidence of luck and skill, but because of that bottom line concern of filling up that coffee can, to the top, as fast as you could. It meant money. Extra money. And not just for us kids.

If you paused and looked up from the stooped over posture of your night's work you could see across the black outline of wire fences, the dim silhouettes of your neighbors stooped and creeping slowly through their backyards, studying the ground beneath the yellow orb of a flashlight beam. This was the south side of town.

The poor side of town, where most of the money in the monthly paychecks was already ear-marked for paying gas, grocery, water and light bills. So an extra 15, 20, or 30 dollars in anybody's pocket was considered a great treat and maybe even a relief from feeling so strapped. Maybe it meant a couple more sixpacks of beer, some steaks, a carton of cigarettes, a set of brake shoes for the pickup, some garage sale money..... A little boost to help make ends meet and free up a few dollars to provide a few simple pleasures.

And such a boost, coming with the new promise of Spring was enough to afford everyone a bit of hope, thinking, "Maybe this year we'll finally be able to get a little bit ahead." Able to laugh a bit now at the memory of the long hard Winter..... (that would return again, fierce and hard) but for now, not worrying about any of that..... Instead, celebrating for a brief moment in spiteful revenge at the expense of the lives of those worms who would someday claim them all.....

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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler
(Photos provided by Author)

Fishing:

The Missouri River has fallen a little this last month. It's been clear and cool with quite a bit of water fowl flying right now. The many rock formations not seen all summer due to the higher water levels are starting to appear. And now you know why that water in those areas was churning and swirling all summer as you passed well above the formation in your boat. A little scary at times to think there is such a massive formation under the water's surface that is disrupting the current so violently. But those things draw great respect for the river from boaters and fishermen alike. While it is a good place for recreation, it is also a dangerous place that requires respect. Are they catching any fish? At the first part of the month success was pretty good – with small and big fish, then came along the change in the weather. Two or three days in a row with frost which was followed up with snow west and north of us. And just like that the fishing success died off - what seems like over night. No one could have seen this coming but Fall came in like a lion and looks like river fishing may be over for the year.

Hunting:

Fall is here and the hunting seasons are wide open. The summer is over and it's time to get out and get yourself some hunting enjoyment.

TURKEY – Turkey hunting permits are still available to buy though the end of season.

Turkey season runs from Sept. 15 through Dec. 31, and hunters may use either a shotgun or bow and arrow. A permit allows a hunter to kill two turkeys. A hunter may buy no more than two permits for the season.

NEW: This year will be the first time turkey hunting is allowed during the November firearm deer hunting season. Turkey hunters hunting during deer season must wear at least 400 square inches of hunter orange on their head, chest and back.

DEER - Again deer permits are still available too. It's as easy as checking your unit or the unit you want to hunt and buy a permit. (Keep in mind some areas are bought out, but still permits are available) Just buy your permit at the Game & Parks Web page:

<http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/hunting/hunting.asp>.

As promised in my last article - I am still checking into local processing plants for fees and I will have a list of prices in my next article.

The cooler temperatures have pretty much wrapped up the fishing for this year so it's time to move to the hills for upland game and deer action. Bundle up and head on 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."

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Jerry Whisler from Auburn is shown with some nice Flatheads.

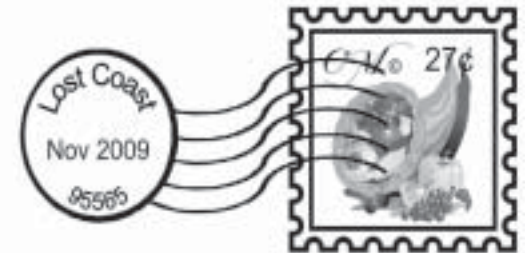


Alan Meints from Steinauer, NE shown with a 30+ pound Blue Cat caught near Peru.

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Of Thanks and Thanxgiving...

By Vicki O'Neal



The holidays will soon be here.

A time of joy and feasting... 'til we're as stuffed as turkeys... 'til we're Cranberried to the hilt. A time of family and friends and frolickin' fun! Hearing Mom's laughter and sampling Aunt Eleanor's sweet potato pie.

Oh—but the whip-cream-of-it-all comes when Granny and Granddaddy get out the old family Bible and read a passage or two from the Psalms: "Give Thanx unto the Lord, for He is good..."

Uh...what? Wait a minute! Are we talking about Thanksgiving in the Heartland, today?

Hmmm. I don't know.

We seldom have "Thanksgiving" or "Christmas," any more. But we do have Thanxgiving and X-mas. It's the "X-rating of America." The removal of old-fashioned, countrified values...replaced by an "X".

Does "Thanxgiving" in your home mean hearing the scream of children fighting over the latest computer game? The roar of Dish-TV? Reality shows? South-Park adult "cartoons"? A litany of moans and growls as another scandal breaks somewhere in America?

It seems that our good ol' USA has gone from being "Countrified" to "Country-fried!"

The burn-out of our modern American lifestyle is most obvious this time of the year... Divorces and custody battles go to the front burner during the holidays. Sizzling family feuds. Manipulations. Step-families and heated arguments...all mingling with cigarette smoke and anguished tears.

Not much peace and harmony and prayer, any more. Where are the Norman Rockwell scenes? Families sitting at a table laden with golden turkeys and sweet potato pie?

Oh, how we miss those days! The warmth of a crackling fireplace. Smoke curling from chimneys—instead of from people. The prattle of Aunt Mabel over her knitting has given way to discussions of "Sex in the City," and "Adult Showcase," and "Redneck Weddings"—complete with toilet-plunger bouquets and cow-pie decor.

"Desperate Housewives", indeed!

The closest thing we have to a Rockwell Thanksgiving, nowadays, seems to be a howling montage of America's Funniest Home Videos...or maybe the Country-Fried Version. Raucous laughter as pants fall down and old men pass gas. Absurd antics. Bungling buffoons.

Is this the America we can be proud of, today?

Don't get me wrong. I love America and I love to have fun...And I still think our country is the greatest nation on earth! But how much longer are we going to drift on this Sea of Frothy Foolishness before we sink out of sight?

Oh, I know. I know! It doesn't do any good to talk about it! But don't you yearn for the old "Country Days" depicted on the cover of the Saturday Evening Post? Those Scrabble-after-Dinner days where families laughed and played board games together?

Let's see, now...How many Scrabble points are there in the word: "Nostalgia" or maybe the word: "Memories"? At least 10 points, don't you think? And look at all the high-value letters in the word "Harmony"! If you add an "-ies" at the end, you'll have a Triple-Word-Score!

Ah yes. Those days seem so far behind us—but if we look hard enough, we can find them in the cobwebby attics of our minds...stuck way back there with the mothballed quilts and Kerr Canning Jars. And we can give Thanks to the Lord above, for all those nostalgic memories!

Remember the sound of the banging oven-door as Granny took out her steaming homemade bread...? Incredibly crusty, yet soft inside. Nobody bakes bread like Grandma did....

Remember the rhubarb and gooseberry pie?

I helped my Granny bake pies, one day, and I learned quite a lesson. While Grandma shared her luscious pie with everyone, I refused to share my own little pie with a single soul. The next morning, I awakened to find my pie drowned by melting ice from a defrosted fridge. Soggy. Inedible.

"That's what happens when you're selfish," Grandma said.

Ah—the folly of childhood misfortunes and the wisdom of dear old Granies!

To whom do we listen—now that those ancient voices have died away — sinking into silence beneath a tombstone? Our elders took their recipes and home remedies and wisdom to the grave. Now the Old Country ways are becoming extinct...Just fossilized relics on the museum-shelves of our minds.

We reach for them—longing to run our hands over the time-worn mementos and memories...Longing to hear the tinkle of the old piano keys as Auntie's fingers went rippling across the ivories:

"Home, home on the range. Where the deer and the antelope play—"
Screeeeeech!

The squeal of tires outside bring us back to reality. The teenagers are at it again. Racing their cars down the road. But we ignore them, resisting the clamor of our modern era. We drift back to the whimsical haze of yesteryear...

Remember Big Max and Uncle Paul and dear old Grandpa...?

How hard they used to work! And remember how Grandma Kate made patchwork quilts out of Grandpa's old silk ties? I still have one of Granny's blankets, somewhere. But the quilted fragrance of Grandma's house has faded, now. So many years have gone by. So many stitches have unraveled in the fabric of our modern life.

In the olden days, no one ever heard of kids sassing adults. We didn't hear of teens killing their grandparents with butcher knives and calmly wiping the blood on Granny's kitchen towel.

Why do these things happen, anyway?

Is it because parents have turned to putty in the hands of their petulant children? I don't know, but it seems that there are few boundaries, any more. No respect. No common sense.

My 16-year-old-daughter said it best the other day: "Mom..." she said. "We kids need boundaries. We really don't like them at first—but later on, we're glad! They make us feel safe."

Dear...dear! How did we get on this subject, anyway? We're supposed to be talking about a countrified Thanksgiving...and how thankful we are for the memories! But now we've gotten off-track—wandering from the old country roads and onto the Freeway! We're going to get run over by those racing teenagers, if we're not careful.

My soapbox is already squished flat...so I must go, now. I need some of that turkey and sweet potato pie!

Keep your feet dry, folks. Keep your woodstove burning brightly....And if you happen to see Norman Rockwell somewhere along the way, let me know.

Have a wonderful Thanksgiving...(not a Thanxgiving)...and I'll chat with you at Christmas...(not X-mas!)

God bless you all!

Vicki O'Neal
www.VickiO'Neal.com

The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



It's early morning; the sky is still dark and the rooster has yet to crow his daily salutation to the sun. In our house, as in so many others in farm country, the kitchen light is on, the washing machine is agitating a load of jeans, and leftover breakfast crumbs lay scattered across the kitchen table. I bought the table and matching chairs in Denver long before the mile-hi city became the frenzied place it is now, and I really should trade it in for a new one.....but I'd miss the familiar marks and scratches which read like time's road-map.....the dents and pits and splotches made by a growing family of boys, who somehow, in the blink of an eye, grew to men with children of their own.

Dale's already left the house and in a few moments I'll hear the feed truck rumble down the gravel road as he heads to the silage pits to load feed for the just-weaned calves bawling in the corrals. The almost-yearlings miss their Mamas, so they're crying like crazy....and will continue to do so until their voices grow pitifully hoarse and they sound more like trumpeting African elephants than cattle. Their mothers won't pine quite so long....when the pangs of separation subside, and they realize they are free from child-rearing responsibilities, they'll hi-tail it back to the open pasture and never look back.

As soon as the sun is up Dale will round up his sons, phone Ralph, the

hired man who's worked for us so long he's one of the family, and begin the morning's work.....sorting, then hauling, the final bunch of calves in from the pasture. Once that's accomplished Dale will do what he's been doing for the past week: making the rounds to corn fields too wet to combine...testing moisture content of corn ears he knows by look and feel are still too wet to harvest. Most corn in the valley, except for those fields devastated by Goss's wilt, are running in the mid to upper twenties moisture....very wet for this time of year.

The eastern Corn Belt is able to dry wet corn in specially equipped stor-

age facilities; panhandle bins don't have dryers....just fans. In our climate we rely on Mother Nature to finish out our corn...which works well in most years, but not this one.

I'll be off to the tire shop soon....with its ringing phones, mountain of paperwork, and never ending responsibilities. While I'm gone the calves will bawl and walk the corral fence, the rooster will guard his harem of hens, our crock-pot supper will simmer on the kitchen counter....and I'll wish I was home baking cookies.

So go my days. How about yours?

Karen

Melinda D. Clarke, CPA

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