



Where H-67 meets H-136

Voices from your Valley

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Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

Writers this month

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Vicki O'Neal
Karen Ott
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Thank You

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Your Country Neighbor

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Editor's note:

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

www.yourcountryneighbor.com

Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

A few weeks ago we suffered one of the great household calamities of the modern era: our microwave oven quit. It had been giving signs for awhile that it was running on borrowed time, repeatedly shutting itself off before the cook time had expired. My husband checked the circuit breaker and the outlet to rule out some cause other than the oven itself, but there seemed to be nothing amiss elsewhere.

I had been in the local appliance store a few days before our oven's demise and had seen that they had several on the shelf. Alas, when I visited the store to buy a replacement, they were out of stock. Not to worry. They'd order one right away. Of course, I could possibly have purchased one at another local store, but I'm leery of their electronics. How bad could it be anyway to do without a microwave oven for a few days?

We ourselves had grown up without microwave ovens, having acquired our first one – the approximate size of a steamer trunk – back in the late '70s. That oven came with an actual cook book, which I still have. I don't recall specifics, but I think I may have attempted a few of the recipes. My culinary skills being what they are, microwave techniques only made things worse. Our microwave was soon relegated to defrosting and reheating.

Prior to the microwave, defrosting required forethought, i.e., planning meals more than one hour in advance. I used to be pretty good at that. (I took it to the extreme, checking the grocery ads for specials and planning my meals around them.) If necessary, there was always the cold water thawing method. Plus, in those days, we were farming, so my husband could be relied on to get a package of meat out of the freezer if I forgot to do it before leaving home for work.

And, of course, we had one of those handy three-section pans for reheating leftovers. That would be a kitchen museum artifact now if I still had it.

Without a microwave oven, I found myself contriving various half-baked (pardon the pun) solutions for reheating and defrosting. Vegetables and meats in a sauce pan on the stove top are easy enough, although you do have to pay more attention to avoid burning (I'm already challenged in that respect), and you have to wash that pan. Drat. I tried defrosting frozen bread and muffins in the vegetable steamer with soggy results, until it dawned on me (duh!) to try the toaster oven, which worked pretty well on low temperature.

But the real challenge was reheating coffee. You know how it goes: you pour a cup and ten minutes later it's lukewarm, but still half-full. You try warming it by adding fresh coffee from the carafe, but ten minutes later, it's lukewarm and half-full again. We finally came up with placing the cup in a sauce pan of water on the stove top. It wasn't as quick, but it worked well enough, except for handling the hot cup when it came time to remove it from the pan of hot water. After several days of that routine, it was all I could do to convince my husband that he did *not* need a microwave oven badly enough to make a special trip to Nebraska City to buy one RIGHT NOW! He calmed down enough to agree that he could handle it, but only if the one on order came in on time. For all his whining, you'd have thought we had had to resort to cooking over a fire made by rubbing two sticks together.

The only thing that would have tipped him over the edge sooner would have been to have no coffee at all. In fact, in my husband's world, even having no *gourmet* coffee would have justified a special trip to his favorite coffee purveyor in Omaha. How easily we become addicted to our favorite foods, and dependent on modern conveniences!

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Poetry by Devon Adams

FACES IN THE MOON

After the summer,
the moon is floating
in a dark sea,
like a gold ingot
rising from a sunken ship.
Sometimes it is blood red,
remembering dead pirates.
Other times it is full of juice
and puckered like an orange,
recalling southern climes,
where life is easy and
winter is just a passing thought.
More often than not, though,
that desolate orb resembles a pumpkin,
carved with a face that watches us,
as we hang on to our spinning planet,
staggering from one season to the next.

THE FAMILY DINNER

Grandma and Grandpa had a long table,
and lots of extra chairs for holiday dinners.
Cold rain or snow was far away behind
the steamy windows, as the kitchen belched
humid aromas of roast duck, pheasant cooked
in cream, dripping, greasy gravy boats, and
pies to die for, like mince and pumpkin and
cinnamon apple from the backyard orchard.
Canned green beans and pickles pulled
from the fruit cellar crocks crossed paths
with fresh hot rolls, covered with homemade
butter from the milk cows, topped with jams
and jellies made from raspberries, strawberries
and wild plums, whose jars were like precious
gems trapped under a seal of paraffin and lids
that popped like gunshots when the jar was done.
Refills were expected and eaten with gusto.
Afternoons were for groaning and stretching
and sleeping it all off before the company
went home and the memories stayed forever.

Pencil & Watercolor Portraits

WILDLIFE & PET PAINTINGS ON BUCKSKIN



by Devon Adams

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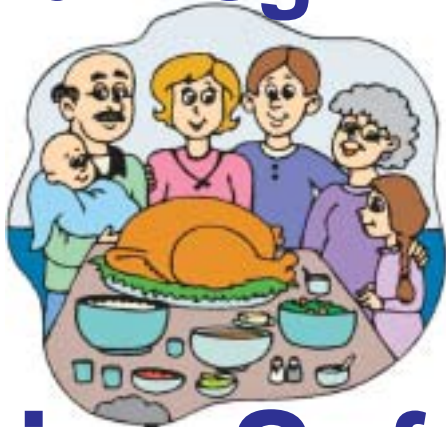
COLD DRAFTS

As a cold white sun crawls over the hill,
and the temperature drops five degrees
with the start of the early winter day,
a draft moves under the doors and
across the house, from room to room.
It is chilling, like the murder on page one
of the crime novel, like water flowing
in a cold creek, like an ice cube down
your warm, bare back.

SUN SPOTS

They follow the sun,
as the earth grows cold.
Like sunflowers turning
toward the light, they
move from place to place,
from warmth to warmth,
holding on to the last
of the summer heat,
until there is only light
without warmth, day
instead of night.
They are the cats
who live outside, and
they have been here
for thousands of years,
watching us, watching them.

Going Home For Thanksgiving?



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Where Life is Good

by Marilyn Woerth

Have you been living the good life? Do you have wonderful memories? Tuesday night is date night at our house. It started way back when the boys were in middle school (way back when). Date nights usually consist of a meal out (the simpler the better) and a movie with popcorn, and hand holding (the most important part). A few months ago our Tuesday night out became a Wednesday night (mtg. on Tue). We went to see the movie "Eat, Pray, Love". Okay, we do all those things?

It was a philosophical movie about a depressed semi-established off-Broadway writer who, after a failed marriage and another failed relationship (to a younger man), had to go off and find herself. So she left her life behind and went searching for herself for a year, in Italy, India and Bali. Poor, poor dear.

Okay, some background on me. I believe in the old philosophies; bloom where you are planted, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, if you have lemons, make lemonade, do the next good thing, etc. LOL, a friend in Jordan (yes, the country), once asked me on facebook (yes, I have met him in person), if he could make champagne out of those lemons. I told him to go for it and then send me the recipe. So whenever I see someone whiney, myself included, for really no good reason, (try being a poor sick kid in a third world country), I get miffed.

As for the title part of the movie, here's another part of my philosophy; eat something different. There are a lot of different kinds of restaurants in this country (you don't have to go to Italy), or experiment at home (it's okay). If you pray, pray harder. If you don't pray, start anywhere and everywhere, and use any words. As for the love part, love yourself, then the whole wide world (they're just like you).

Well, by now you're probably wondering what my problem is. It was, after all, just a movie. And you are probably asking yourself, "Why is she going off on us or whatever this is?" Well (deep breath), the truth is, I just needed to remind myself to **FOCUS** on being thankful, fix what needs to be fixed, pray for what needs to be prayed for, build memories for the lean times, and love with all your heart. (I did leave out the eating part. I do that quite well, thank you very kindly.)

And thank the heavens that I am able to do all this where life is simple and complex and wonderful, but only if I remember that it is. So... "Happy Thanksgiving" from the good life and love to you all.

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CLOSING IN ON NOVEMBER

by Shirley Neddenriep

“This is a good cup,” he remarked, reading its logo. “Yes We Can!” emblazoned on its side. A gift one year from the *Johnson Rag*, the little newspaper of that town. He poured himself a coffee and we exchanged bits of news. This son and another had come from the city to help with harvest. Its a change of pace for them and a God-send for the son who operates the combine and grandson who drives the truck and/or grain cart.

Those sons grew up together on this place, and for me, I find cooking for them a pleasure, and hearing them talk together is enjoyment in its purest form. They find all kinds of other jobs to do. One morning the two of them removed the rear axle from a tractor to extend its wheels outward. They attached a four-bottom plow that had not seen the light of day for 20 years.

I mentioned the garden. “Where do you want the dead furrow?” The next thing I knew a garden spot was plowed, deep and wide, very wide. “Well,” he said later, “you should have been there.” I did go out later to inspect, and found that the green beans from last summer had set another picking.

Granddaughter had planted them in concrete. The ground was that hard. But those plants came up and thrived. I protected them from the mower blades. As long as those plants are green, being a legume, they are putting nitrogen into the soil. So whoever mowed knew to drive past the green beans, not mow them. But I was surprised at this Fall Harvest.

In the meantime, one son spent a day with that tractor and plow doing conservation work. While he worked, the second farm-raised-turned-city-guy son came along with the old pickup, bringing a part for the tractor. “While I am here,” he stated, “I am going to pick that triangle of corn.” The combine had missed it in the dark. In about ten minutes he had it all picked and tossed into the truck bed. He took off across the corn rows for home. Later, I heard what happened.

Nearing the stop sign at the highway he noticed smoke and flames behind him. A battery sat in the pickup bed and some wire. In bouncing across the field the wire had come in contact with both battery terminals and sparked, igniting the corn shucks. Cell phones come in handy times like this. He called the tractor-driving son and ask if the battery was a good one. “Well,” he answered, “it must have been to have set those shucks on fire.” Meantime the wire stuck, shorted out, getting hotter and hotter, until it melted a hole in the top of the battery.

He pulled the wire away, burning his finger, but never mind. A little later he came to the house to run cold water over his finger. “Did you cut your finger?” I was busy with those green beans and only found out later what had happened. “I burned it on a wire,” and he left with a Band-Aid and Neosporin. I have vowed not to ask any further.



Happy Thanksgiving from:

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Continued from Page 2

medication you take, works with the pharmacy of your choice and works for your financial circumstances.

Contact your local Extension office to make an appointment for a drug plan comparison during the Annual Open Enrollment period starting November 15. A complete list of drug plan comparison events in southeast Nebraska can be found on the Cass County Extension website at: <http://cass.unl.edu> Should you have questions about Medicare or Social Security, Mary Ann Holland, Extension Educator and Trained SHIIP Professional can be reached at the Cass County Extension office at 402-267-2205. You may also want to call the SHIIP office directly at 1-800-234-7119 with questions about Medicare.

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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler
(photo submitted by author)

Fishing:

The River has not been good this last month. Yes - it flooded out of its banks again! Really for no good reason this time other than a lot of water being discharged by the Corp of Engineers from dams upstream. Some folks are getting out to fish but some have said, "What's the use?" and have gone elsewhere to fish or given up fishing for this year all together. One thing the water has brought to the area is the amount of water fowl and migrating birds in general. The sky is full of birds morning, noon, and night it seems. From flocks of ducks and geese to large flocks of huge White Pelicans. With plenty of places to lay up and wait for the weather to push them south. It only seems to make sense to stick around the flood waters of the Missouri for now. Looking to the skies isn't the only place to look this fall - some folks are getting a line in and having pretty good luck too. A lot of Blue being caught for some reason and of course the small channels are tap, tap, tapping at the bait to feed up for the winter's cooler waters. "What are they biting on you say?" They are still hitting chubs, Goldfish, Carp minnows, and Leopard Frogs - and the small fish are hammering the crawlers and dough baits. And like I have said before, "Tackle up," it's that time of year where you don't know what your going to catch.

Hunting:

Fall hunting seasons are here. And it's not hard to pick one - just need to check this year's brochures from the game and parks and go. Practice time is over - hunting time is here.

Upland game and seasons are as follows:

Species	Bag	Possession	2010 Opening
Cock Pheasant	3	12	Oct. 30
Youth Cock Pheasant, Quail and Partridge Seasons	2	4	Oct. 23
Quail	6	24	Oct. 30
Partridge	3	12	Oct. 30
Rail	10	20	Sept. 1
Snipe	8	16	Sept. 1
Woodcock	3	6	Sept. 25
Dove	15	30	Sept. 1
Squirrel	7	28	Aug. 1
Cottontail	7	28	Sept. 1

Turkey Season Dates - Fall

Archery and Shotgun - Sep 15 - Dec 31
Permit Limit: Two turkeys per permit
Bag Limit: Two turkeys per permit

Fees

Resident - \$24 Nonresident - \$91
Youth - \$6
Resident Landowner - \$12.50
Nonresident Landowner - \$46

Deer Season Dates

Archery - Sep 15 - Nov 12, Nov 22 - Dec 31
November Firearm - Nov 13 - 21
Muzzleloader - Dec 1 - 31

Fees

Resident - \$30 Nonresident - \$209
Youth \$6

Season Choice (antlerless) - Sep 15-Jan 18 (archery); Dec 1-31 (muzzleloader) and Nov 13-21 and Dec 26-Jan 18 (firearm)

Deer Season Permits are still available over the counter or on-line until the close of deer season.

Fall River Fishing can be tricky but it's still good right now as the water cools off. A lot of early hunting is available right now too. The bugs are still hanging in there, so take plenty of repellent. And don't forget, there is still time to plan your fall deer hunt, and permits are available now. 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."

Darrin Reeves from Peru showing a nice Blue cat.



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The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



Every so often, out of curiosity or boredom, I'll tune the TV to the Los Angeles news. On a bad day they'll be nothing more exciting than a babbling plastic-surgery-perfect weather-girl, but on a good day I'll catch a car-chase.....a cat and mouse, good guy-bad guy "I'm in pursuit" reality show filmed by an eye-in-the-sky helicopter crew; I've seen more California scenery this way than a high-flying Condor.

Once the perpetrator is caught, handcuffed, and hauled away in a squad car, the camera usually pans over the rush-hour freeway...a bumper to bumper, smog choked artery where commuters are forced to waste years of their lives cooped up in vehicles with interiors the size of a small walk-in-closet.

Today, as I left home for the tire shop, I thought about those men and women who do daily battle with traffic jams longer than the length of my entire commute...and murmured a prayer of thanks for my dirt road.

My 4 mile trip into town began with shooing our herd of cats from the porch steps, side-stepping two happy-go-lucky dogs, and saying good-morning to our hired hand Ralph, who was working on a truck which just yesterday stalled, groaning and moaning, at the Morrill Quick Stop. The 'automotive flu' seems to be going around as the tire shop's repair schedule is always booked solid two weeks in advance.

I left the yard and turned east onto the gravel road, waving to Dale as he walked from the feed truck towards his pickup. I didn't see him again until early evening, although he called the tire shop mid-morning to check on corn prices; I keep the Chicago Board of Trade web site, the shop's bookkeeping program, and tire distributor's home pages on-screen.....and move from one to the other throughout the day.

The cows, locked in the front pasture until the

corn is harvested, were lined up at the just-filled feed bunks, while the calves, freed from the watchful eyes of their mothers took the opportunity to high-tail it across the dewy grass, kicking and twisting and butting heads in youthful exuberance. Come weaning time those same calves will cry for their mothers until their voices are hoarse, but not this day.

This day they were still carefree kids.

A mile and a half east I turned left onto the pavement, crossed the North Platte River Bridge, and hit the rural version of total gridlock...a combine following a tractor and disk.

They hung over the center line, but turned off about half a mile later, lumbering down into a yard like a couple of prehistoric beasts with arthritic knees. Later I learned they weren't able to combine a thing... the corn was too wet.

Time and colder temperatures will eventually take care of the problem, but until then farmers will keep trying. They're an edgy lot when they see the calendar sliding towards November and Mr. Winter pulling on his long-johns.

Another mile and I was at my desk, fielding phone calls, customers, employees and paperwork. It had taken me a total of 11 minutes from home to work...in spite of the combine logjam.

And there you have it...a morning commute high-plains style.

Los Angeles....eat your heart out.

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Monotony. Routine. You ever get that feeling...? Where's the adventure? The excitement?

Well. The other day something happened, and I discovered that boring-is-beautiful...and that excitement can sometimes be chaos. I learned to count my blessings long before Thanksgiving Day arrives...!

It was one of those dreary afternoons when you just want to crawl back in bed. Maybe cuddle with the hubby, for lack of better things to do. I was bored stiff—longing for an adventure of some kind. Wearily, I crawled beneath the covers for an afternoon nap while my hubby searched for a good video.

"Try to find something adventurous," I said sleepily. "It's such a boring day."

Suddenly, there came a loud BOOM that shook the house.

"Earthquake!" I shouted, leaping off the bed. I'm a Cali-gal, now, and I know just what to do. I grabbed for my skirt and danced a jig, trying to shimmy into my clothes and untwist my undergarments. Everything seemed tangled and all mixed up....

Except for my husband. "No," Michael said calmly. "It's not an earthquake."

I stopped dancing about. "Look at the lights!" I said.

We stared. Power surges were traveling throughout our lines. Lights flickered. Digital clocks blinked. Electrical devices buzzed and beeped.

Michael went outside and I hurried after him, pulling on the rest of my clothes. We could see that a dump truck had slammed into our power lines, jolting the connectors at the top of our house. It was causing mayhem with our electrical supply.

The smoke detectors went off inside the house and there was a distinct smell in the air.

"Fire!" I said, running back inside. "The fluorescent light in the kitchen is hot. It's smoking!"

Michael hurried to shut off the breakers, receiving a jolt from the metal box for his troubles. The whole circuit panel felt hot.

We hurried through the house, checking for fires. It was surreal. Boring afternoons are not supposed to turn into mayhem! Not even when you're wishing for adventure.

Through a window, I could see that our neighbors were already on their cell phones, calling the authorities. They were talking as fast as their jaws could flap.

Meantime, the dump truck driver was trying to make a fast getaway. Michael ran after him and jumped up on the truck's running board. They exchanged pleasantries—none of it very pleasant. Then the driver drove off without a backward glance.

Suddenly, smoke started billowing across the property. "Where's that smoke coming from?" I shouted.

Nobody knew, but the air was getting thicker by the minute. We scurried about with renewed energy. "Lord, have mercy!" Smoke everywhere. It rode on the wind—sweeping around us and making me frantic. Where was it coming from?

At last, I heard Michael's words, drifting to me on the breeze: "Don't worry! It's just a neighbor burning his trash. It's under control."

I slumped in relief, but only for a moment. From the top of our driveway, came a rush of noise and flashing lights. A ladder truck was pulling up. Then another fire truck and an ambulance arrived. We were besieged by firemen and EMT's.

"Who's been electrocuted?" asked the firemen, tromping across our flowerbeds. Down the driveway they came. The air was filled with the sound of heavy boots and urgent words.

"Somebody got tangled up in the power lines? Where is he?"

"What?" I shook my head, dazed.

Another wave of emergency workers descended upon us...they seemed to be coming in droves. "Um...I don't think this is necessary," I said. "Nobody's been electrocuted."

They looked disappointed.

A patrol car spun into our driveway. The lady cop jumped out. She whipped out her notebook and started writing fiercely. "The dump truck guy...?" she said, flourishing her pen. "The hit-and-run driver? Tell me all about him. Did you see it happen, ma'am?"

It took quite a while for the situation to sort itself all out. The power company finally arrived and fixed the power lines. The firemen checked out our

house and left. The patrol lady went away with her notebook full. She'd interrogated me, my husband, the neighbors, and the stray cat.

Well. Not the cat. But almost.

I heaved a sigh of relief when the last vehicle disappeared down the lane. It had been a harrowing afternoon, but something good had come of it. The trucking company agreed to buy us new carpeting and another light fixture to replace the old smoky ones.

If we hadn't been at home when the events happened, however, the story would've been vastly different.

"The house probably would've burned to the ground," Michael said somberly. I nodded. Thanksgiving at the O'Neals would've been a sorry mess, this year....But God had been merciful!

The sun was setting. Day was done. "I need a good dose of chocolate," I said to Michael. My hubby obliged. He made hot cocoa and buttery popcorn. He raided the fridge. Kipper snacks. Sardines. And a little of my leftover "squash pizza."

We dined in our dim little kitchen beneath the burnt-out light fixture. I lit candles and copper lamps and turned on my rainforest waterfall. Night crept in around us....and it was good. We still had a roof over our heads and all of our possessions.

Bowing our heads, we thanked the Lord for our house and for our strange larder...for the blessed outcome that had come from chaos. We thanked God for all of the "boring days" in our past...and for the future ones yet to come.

There are several morals to this story. First—good things do come from the bad. And secondly: you should cherish the mundane!...The monotonous routine. Your life can be turned upside-down in a moment, and it might never be the same again.

Now, folks—the story's over. Go have yourselves a blessed Thanksgiving! And be especially thankful if it's monotonous....Even downright boring!

God Bless!

Vicki O'Neal
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