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2009



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## Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

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Thank You

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### Your Country Neighbor

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### Editor's note:

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## Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

There are markers on the road of life that let you know you've reached a particular point of no return.

Certain biological occurrences of adolescence come to mind, but we won't go into those.

The birth of one's first child is usually a pretty good wake-up call. Unless you're young enough to be oblivious to the ramifications of decades-long responsibility for another human being. In that case, you may roll along for a few years just having fun with the baby before the full impact hits you.

Even if you don't have children, your 30<sup>th</sup> birthday can be counted on to drive home the point that you are no longer a kid yourself. Oh, sure, you can insist that age is only a state of mind. So you've already spent three decades of your precious life with nothing to show for it. There's no need to panic, you tell yourself, you still have time. If you're thirty and you're reading this (which I know is unlikely), take my advice: it's time to panic, or least to get going. Time will only go faster from here on out.

I could list many more sign posts: the first gray hair, creaky joints, more biological occurrences. But you know them all.

There's one, however, that's a little more subtle, at least on the surface. But on closer inspection, you see how telling it is. It hit my husband and me on our 38<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary last month.

Our son and his family gave us *food* as an anniversary gift. *That's it, you ask? You're all in a dither about a gift of food?* Let me tell you, when your children send you a box of fruit, cheese spread and crackers, you have hit a serious marker. This is no flimsy aluminum sign on a post; this is one of those brick edifices with engraved lettering that will last for centuries.

Don't get me wrong. Our son is nothing if not thoughtful when it comes to gift-giving occasions. Still, when we called to thank him for remembering the day, he felt compelled to apologize for the lack of imagination in the choice of gift. He knew intuitively that it was lame.

And I confess I've done the same thing to my own mother. She doesn't want any more clutter and she has more clothes than she can wear. So, we give her fancy fruit baskets or home-made single-serving freezer entrees. Bless her heart, she never acts disappointed.

On the other hand, my mother is going on 84 and eats like a bird, and my husband and I are not yet 60, and at no risk of under-eating. It isn't that our son thinks we may be neglecting our nutrition; it's just that we have reached the age where we are very difficult to shop for. I mean, think about it. Thirty-eight years my husband and I have been together. Do we not already have enough stuff? We generally go out and buy whatever we need or truly desire.

I guess we just need to impress on our son that being remembered is all we really want. A card or a phone call makes our day. We've reached that point in life. Now that I think about, it's a good place to be.

## DUST IN THE RAIN

Time is a transient,  
just passing through,  
like a minor actor  
in a walk-on part,  
ephemeral in presence and  
as evanescent in existence  
as a shadow ghost glimpsed  
in peripheral vision.  
Seconds pass under the sun  
in measured beats that  
seem out of synch with the  
cataclysmic dust of the big bang.  
We are specks in the sky,  
as durable as dust in the rain.

## Poetry by Devon Adams

### COLD COMFORTER

The currents have changed  
in the river of clouds flowing over the plains.  
There are no more clumps of cotton balls  
floating like ships in blue water,  
or black walls of thunder crashing  
through tender green crops.  
Now the corn stalks are rattling  
in a chilly wind, and walnut trees  
have stripped off their leaves and  
stand naked and shivering.  
A low gray comforter hangs over  
the finished patchwork fields,  
its folds damp and wrinkled  
with moisture dripping down  
as cold rain in big drops.  
Summer light is a memory, as  
autumn days turn dark at both ends.

### HELLO AGAIN

We had a nice talk,  
my dad and I,  
although no words  
were spoken.  
It was on a golden day,  
with passing shadows  
from clouds sailing  
above us in the sky sea.  
In an instant he was  
sitting there beside me,  
smiling as he always did  
when I was a child and  
he was with me.  
Was it just a daydream,  
or was he really there?  
I don't care, because he was  
there when I needed him.

### OLD DOGS

They are oblivious to time.  
It must be wonderful not  
to worry about feeling old.  
Every day is new, and  
tomorrow is not a thought.  
Only the present exists,  
without the weights and  
measures of the past.  
They do not notice the  
white around their muzzle,  
or the slowing of their steps.  
Only the tears in the eyes  
of their human companions  
may lead them to wonder  
why there is sadness.

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## A SPECIAL GIFT

by Shirley Neddenriep

My friend had driven from Texas to have breakfast with me at the Lied's Conference Center dining room. I hurried to comply with the early hour we had set. She had driven from Omaha and sat at a table near the north windows. She had arrived first and studied the menu as she waited for me. I had spent precious minutes of our time lost.

The huge room was mostly empty at 8:30 am on this Tuesday morning. She looked up; we had a friendly greeting for each other. She drives up each year and each year on the final day of her week-long visit to family in eastern Nebraska, she and I meet for breakfast. It's so fun, meeting an old friend in a delightful place. Living close by, I do not go there except for special times like this one.

She enjoys the atmosphere at the Lied's and the cooks there are learning much about gluten-free dining, so I like it too! We chatted away during our meal. She brought me up to date on who retired, who is planning retirement. She herself will retire from the NRC in 2 years and 5 months and is counting the days.

Then she plans to quit being an apartment dweller in the city and find a small one-story house in a little town with a doctor and someone to clear snow from her driveway.

I'd brought my camera, she had hers as well, but when I suggested a picture, she fussed about her nails being painted red. "My nails are red!" she held them away, "they should be tan to match my dress," smiling wretchedly! Personal appearance is important to her! I'd worn blue jeans and a half-fancy top.

Her two-piece silky outfit was beautiful, draped nicely and a comfortable fit for driving. She wore a gold chain and a matching gold clasp held her long dark hair in back. And new gold earrings, she showed me! We discussed clasp, fish hook, and post at length. Mine were post, very difficult to insert and seldom worn, but for this extraordinary day, I won the struggle. They matched my blouse -

We asked a waitress to take pictures, I'm sure her red nails will not show. "You must remember where you are," I reminded her, "here in the Midwest, in Nebraska, nails painted to match dress color are a never mind."

I am old enough to be her mother. Still, we have interests in common. Both of us dislike the word-processing program, MS Word. And for the same reasons. (Sorry, Bill Gates, we just don't like it!)

When WordPerfect came on the market our supervisors at the NRC declared it the Cadillac of word-processing programs. Then came Word. The government held firm stating that to change to a new program would be too costly. Give the government some slack on this issue!

But as time passed and other companies, government agencies and school systems changed to Word, finally the NRC felt compelled to change also. Productivity is affected, but the change was made to stay in step with the times.

She paged through the photos on my camera and exclaimed, "you have lots of pretty flowers. What are the yellow and orange ones?" "They are to attract butterflies, I explained, and I have seen only one Monarch all summer!" "Oh! There were a lot of butterflies in Omaha!"

Isn't that the pits. People visit rural areas to see flowers and butterflies and birds, but the fauna has all flown off to the city. Like grandkids. They are citified, like my friend wanting her nails to match her flowing brown and tan gown or maybe the birds and butterflies and grandkids just like to be where there are people. Lots of people. And jobs.

She had a 10-hour drive and planned to take #75 to Topeka, then the Toll Road to Wichita and on south. Being one for variety, I think she takes a different route each visit. I wished her a safe drive. She wished me good health. She, who came through a brain aneurism a year ago, her life saved by the quick action of people gifted in ER techniques working the lobby of her building. On her birthday! She commented that her gift was waking up. Another day. She counts them all a gift. As should we all.

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## Flying

by Joe Smith

Strange as it seems or once seemed, people do fly with the help of some type of aircraft. It is hard to imagine that these planes can even get off the ground as much as they weigh. They weigh tons and with all the passengers and their luggage, that really brings it up, Amazing to say the least.

Sixty years ago, we lived on North Hill in Roswell, New Mexico. I went out to our little airport and watched the planes sometimes. I asked the fellow that ran the airport what it would cost to get a ride in a plane. He owned several and did take people up for a spin around the town. He told me if I would sweep out his hanger he would take me up. Every afternoon after school I would ride my bike out and sweep in the hanger. That was a never ending job. They would leave the doors open and the sand would blow back in. But come Saturday the owner came in and said, "You want that ride?" He had a passenger to take up and there was barely room for me. The fellow was big, but I didn't care. It was quite a ride for a ten year old kid. It lasted about an hour. I was on cloud nine for sure. I rode home and that evening my mother asked me where I had been all week. I told her about the hanger and the plane ride, which she was very doubtful about. When dad got home she told him what I had said. He knew the fellow that ran the airport and he called him. So he found out that indeed I had been up in a plane.

Next time was in Deming New Mexico where I farmed for seven years in the late 50's. I had a good friend that ran that airport and he asked me if I wanted to fly to Albuquerque to a cattleman's convention. I said sure. He had a nice 4-passenger

low wing Piper of some sort. As we got near the Rio Grande Valley, we hit a big down-draft. My head hit the ceiling and my butt hit the seat real hard when we hit the bottom, we probably fell a couple hundred feet in a few seconds. The FAA man came on the radio and said, "Watch for down-drafts near the hills coming into the valley". Kenny pickled up the mike and said, "We found them okay". He took Marta and our son with me one time just to look at the farms from the air. Jason made the comment, "Mom you are the prettiest shade of green". She wasn't sure about those tight turns in the plane.

The next experience was when I was living in Nebraska. My dad had a stroke and it looked bad, so my brother said I had better get down there. Boyd Wakelin took me up to Omaha and put me on a plane early one morning. I flew through Dallas and got on one of those little planes that stopped every 100 miles. It was 5:00 in the evening when I finally got to Roswell, just about eleven hours. I could have driven it in that time. Dad passed away and Boyd brought Marta down for the funeral. What would you do without friends? This past week I flew down to Austin, Texas; took less than four hours, took longer coming home because of a 2-hour layover in Dallas, but still it wasn't bad.

First time I flew to Kentucky, I flew through Atlanta, Georgia. I'm scared of big airports and that one was big. I'm 74 now, and still get nervous around big airports, but flying is a fast and comfortable way to go long distances in a hurry, and much better than they used to be.

What is fun is visiting with different people from different places. You can meet somebody in a way off place and he lives just 40 miles from you. That has happened several times.

Joe Smith

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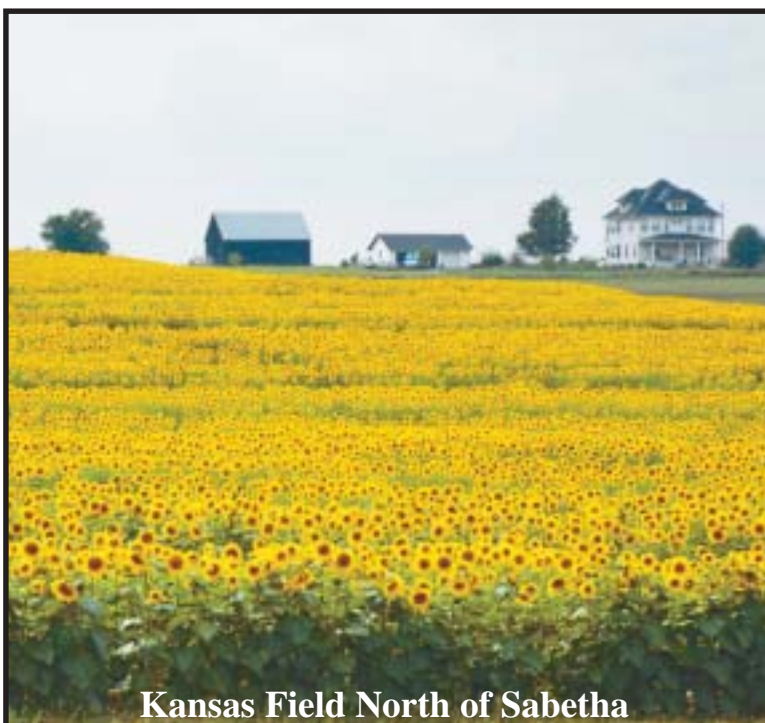
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## Hunting Night Crawlers (continued from August)

by Larry Christy

. Because the worms weren't just laying there stupidly, willing to be scooped up. They were illusive and had to be caught. They might be laying extended out over several inches of the ground, that is all except for the very last few inches of themselves which they always kept in their holes. So, the instant they became aware of you they'd retreat back down into the safety of the soil. It was amazing how fast a worm could disappear out of sight when alarmed by the vibration of a foot fall or a beam of light falling on them. I've heard it said that a worm is not sensitive to light, but I tend to think otherwise. Sometimes the only way you could get a grab at a worm was if you only let the dim periphery of your flashlights beam illuminate their location, otherwise they'd be gone. It could have been that certain ones were just more sensitive to vibration, but it seemed that the light also played a part somehow. The worms were wary, so you had to be stealthy and quick. This was the challenge and thrill of the hunt. For although a worm might be disappearing by inches down into the soil, you could usually strike and grab the last two or three inches of its body, leaving you in a battle of tug of war with a fat slimy night crawler, and it was incredible how strong they were. You - 10 thousand times larger, tugging against a single worm for a full minute or more, fighting the power of suction created by their slimy bodies contracting against the walls of their tunnels in the damp earth. If you got too anxious or pulled too hard the worms body would snap, leaving you with a pathetic shriveled stub of worm. But, on the other hand, if you were patient and just held tight, the worm would finally tire and would come sliding easily out of its hole so you could drop him into your can and move on.

Every now and then it was a good idea to shine your light down in your coffee can to check the ones you had nabbed because they never quit trying to get away. You'd find them clinging to the

sides of the can, stretching up to the rim, silently pulling themselves over the edge to fall back down into the dark cover of grass. So you could lose a few that way if you weren't careful, and you didn't want to lose any, not even one. You were trying to fill that can.

There were ways to fill the can at a faster rate. I recall tales of people using probes inserted into the soil that would deliver a jolt of current which would send the worms up out of their holes. Either that or the leads of an old crank telephone that would send a shock into the wet earth and make the night crawlers ascend to the surface for refuge. But these were just tales..... Myths and possibilities. These methods probably would have worked, but it seemed that someone, maybe it was grandpa, viewed such methods as being very un-sportsmanlike and unacceptable. So no one that I knew ever shot any juice into the earth. It was all luck of the draw and skill. Besides, it was said that worms caught in this manner would soon thereafter die. And after selling one such "bum" batch to the bait buyers, you'd be closing the door on ever selling ANY worms to them again, legitimately caught or not.

*To Be Continued Next Month*

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# Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler  
(Photo provided by Author)

## Fishing:

The Missouri River is peaceful this time of the year. The smell of decaying leaves and vegetation seems to make you aware that fall and winter are coming on full speed. The boat traffic on the river has increased the last month with Labor Day Weekend and nice weather to be out on the river. Whether you're fishing or boating, the enjoyment of the river this time of year is appreciated and humbling. Now to the fishing. This month has been kind of funny. The month started out slow but fishing has picked up as of late, with some pretty big monsters landed as well. They seem to be coming out of the holes and starting the process of feeding up for the long winter. What are they biting on you ask? Chubs & goldfish for the big ones (Missouri River Rules – Big Bait/Big Fish). Crawlers and dough baits are still the old reliable for the smaller stuff. The bugs are still a concern but they are not nearly as fast and aggressive as they were a month ago which also points toward a change in seasons. But for now, still bring the bug spray – the ankle biters seem to be the worst. Seriously though, if you want a poke at a monster cat, now is the time to get out and give it a try – they are looking for something to eat – 'right now'.

## Hunting:

Fall is here and the hunting seasons are opening one by one. Squirrels are barking and doves are cooing. It's enough to really get your blood pumping. It's time to quit mowing grass and get to the field for some good fall hunting. I know the only thing that would make it better is a hard frost, but right now putting up with the bugs and spiders isn't all that bad. For me, summer is over and it's time to change gears and get in the hunting mode.

**TURKEY** - Turkey-hunting permits are still available to buy (permit sales started Aug. 10 and they can be purchased through 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 no more than two turkeys during the season. A hunter may buy no more than two permits for the season.

Turkey-hunting permits range in cost from \$12.50 to \$91 each, depending on the kind of permit sought and the residency of the hunter.

**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** - Deer permits are still available for any remaining antelope or deer permits and open to residents to buy any remaining elk permits. Just buy your permit at the Game & Parks Web page <http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/hunting/hunting.asp>.

Once again there are bonus deer tags for antlerless deer to be harvested to control the Nebraska deer herds. It's a great opportunity to get some venison in the freezer. I wish processing fees weren't so costly. I will cover local deer processing locations and prices in my next article.

Fall is here bringing with it cooler temperatures that will allow you to get out to rap up your fishing for the summer and start in on some hunting. Although the river is a great place to still go for water fowl hunting and what not, it's to the hills for me to chase squirrels and turkeys. You really ought to get out and get some of this nice weather. We'll be begging for it in another month or two. 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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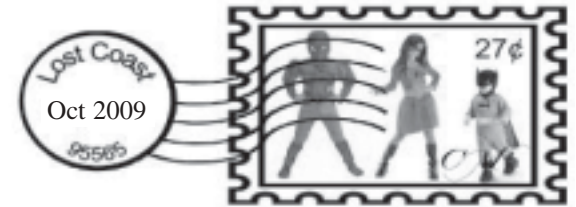
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Joe Whisler from Peru is shown with a big Blue Cat.



Adam Kerwin & David McConaughy from Auburn shown with a 65 pound Flathead Cat.



Soon they'll be showing up on your doorstep, so we might as well talk about them... Those little ghouls and goblins—otherwise known as children.

In October, they don masks to hide their identity... but in reality, their true natures come out of hiding. Don't tell me you haven't noticed. The begging for treats and candy doesn't just start in October. Nowadays, it has become an endless quest for kids: "Gimme... and gimme. And gimme some more." It doesn't stop at candy. They want iPods and PlayStations and Xboxes and MP3 Players. They even want Blackberry cell phones, for crying out loud!

And modern parents give it to them... That's the sad part.

Parenting is the hardest job you'll ever have. It comes with no training. No fringe benefits. No pensions or 401K's. No retirement. A full-time job with less than part-time benefits.

At birth, when babies first open their eyes, they steal your heart—only to leave it abandoned somewhere on the Road to Teen-hood. They're hardly out of the womb before they're making their demands known. Feed me. Hold me. Burp me. Give me you're your life... Your bank account... Your dignity... Your everything.

Laugh with me. Cry over me. Then leave me alone, and don't let the door hit you in the rear on the way out.

And what is our response as hip-and-chic Parents of Today? We overindulge these munchkins... These pint-sized Czars who set up camp in our house. We cater to their whims. We spoil them senseless.

They give us a hug and a slobbery kiss full of cookie crumbs. Then we beam. We stamp the account: "Paid in full."

Manipulations? They learn to do it very early. "I wuv you, Poppy and Mummy." They can hardly say the words, yet... but they know how to play mind-games and they can us mercilessly.

Are they using psychology, or reverse psychology. Or is it double-reverse psychology which is actually—?

Oh never mind. It's too confusing. Too humiliating. Who wants to be known as a parent who's being manipulated by a tot in diapers. You've turned into a dysfunctional Enabler with a capital E... and you have no idea how it happened.

Modern parenting is not for cowards. Apparently, it's only for martyrs and morons and other less-than-dignified-individuals. Just ask Bart Simpson!

But I digress.

By the tender age of two, these ankle-biters have learned to divide the household—pitting Poppy against Mummy. They can cause World War III at the blink of an eye... those big baby-blue eyes that look so innocent.

There are no peace treaties... but many casualties. They are cunning in their strategies—calling in reinforcements... Their siblings. The family dog. The parakeet.

They don't abide by the Laws of Nature, or the Geneva Convention... nor by the rules of the Household.

Parents soon become Prisoners of War—with children as their guards and wardens. You can't go out to eat because your kid throws such embarrassing fits. So, you're stuck at home—feeling lonely and depressed. The POW scenario becomes even more real when the kids become teenagers. Every aspect of a parent's life is ruled by the behavior of rebel offspring....

Junior is on parole and must be constantly monitored. Nobody trusts him, or wants him around. Susie is pregnant and you don't know what to do with your future grandchild. Should you get an abortion... or should you raise the kid yourself for the next 20 years? If so, what happens to your retirement? And what about the "Golden Years" that you were promised?

Oh my. That's grim. Let's change the channel and find something more pleasant.

Ah—how's this? A mom and kid playing in the sandbox. Those long-ago memories of early parenthood. Days of dewy disillusionment. Before the advent of Xboxes and iPods and MP3 Players. Before Junior developed an obsession for carrying knives, and Susie developed a penchant for carrying unborn fetuses.

Where did all those years go? There's nothing left of them. Just yellowing photos, and old home videos. Bittersweet memories that bring tears to your eyes. How tiny the kids were. How incredibly precious. How you wish you could've gained control of them back then!... Before they made you their POW. Before they became the ultimate controller of your life! How did these little ankle-biters turn out this way?

Good question, folks. Like I've said before, I think it's due to parental over-indulgence and a lack of consistent love and discipline and— Oh never mind! My phone is ringing and I've got to climb down from my soapbox to answer it.

I can see by the caller ID screen that it's my own ankle-biter on the line. Well. She's not an ankle-biter any more. At the moment, she's a Straight-A Honor-Student.

But God only knows what tomorrow holds. Kids nowadays are so plagued with stress and peer pressure—far beyond anything we knew as youngsters. It's all because we— Oops. There I go again. Ready to climb on the soapbox. I've got to run, folks.

Just remember to put something special in the Trick-or-Treat bag this year. Then shut your door and lock it, and be glad that all those modern-day ghouls and goblins outside aren't your responsibility.

At least, not until they break your door down.

Good luck to you all!

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# The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



It was only the first day of fall but on September twenty-second Colorado and Wyoming were already experiencing some fairly significant snow-falls; some blamed the early snow on El Nino, others pointed to La Nina as the culprit...and of course 'Believers' fingered Global Warming as the guilty party. I'm holding our Midwest Meteorologists responsible for winter's sudden appearance, because flesh and blood humans always make better targets than weather patterns with foreign names, or scientific theories based on conjecture and computer modeling. Who wants to argue with the bits and bytes of a computer program? Where's the fun in that?

In direct contrast to last week's balmy weather these final days of September have been cloudy and damp with intermittent showers. Bean harvest came to a screeching halt with the first ½ inch of rain and remains at a standstill while we wait for 'drying weather.' During this bean-harvest lull my men have kept busy spreading fertilizer ('four year old Luke calls it 'spreadilizing') and tinkering with the grain drill. A shipment of Clearfield red winter wheat seed is due Friday morning, and if all things go well they should be drilling by the afternoon.

Some sugar beet farmers started Early-Harvest this week... others will wait until Regular-Harvest begins the second week of October to pull. In my estimation nothing matches the smell of a newly harvested beet field. The earthy aroma of freshly turned soil blends with the sweet smell of broken beets creating a unique perfume... a remembering smell... one which brings to mind all the good things about harvest: the thump of beets hitting the truck box, truck-driver camaraderie, the sea gulls wheeling and turning above the beet puller's wake as if it were ship at sea, and the worms and moles they seek, creatures of the ocean, not the earth.

Men who have given up raising beets will often state, with firm conviction, that they don't miss the anxious springs and backbreaking summers...but I've never heard one say they disliked harvest. Just this past week my father reminisced about those long-gone Octobers; leaning against the tailgate of his farm pickup he began.....

"It's the sounds I miss: my brothers calling out to each other as they drove the horses and wagons to the field, their voices amplified by the still, cold morning air; the jingle of harnesses; the creaking of wagon wheels; the voices of hired hands as they stood alongside the rows waiting for the horse-drawn beet puller; the sharp 'cra-a-a-ck' of the top-knives and the thunk of the topped beets as they hit the ground."

"After the beets were topped my brothers would come along and fork them into the wagons before unloading them again at the beet dump; that was hard work, not like today."

He paused, and took a breath....., "After harvest was finished my brothers would take jobs with the sugar company re-loading the same beets they and our neighbors had unloaded, then they'd haul them from the dumps to the factory. On those evenings when night came early I'd hear them before I could see them, joking and laughing from their wagon seats, talking to the horses as they neared the yard. When they were close enough my mother would stand on the porch and call to them in German... Hurry up. Supper's waiting."

He glanced towards his two great-grandsons playing with their tractors in a pile of loose dirt, and said half to us and half to himself, "When I was their age I couldn't speak anything but German. When I started school my sister Mary pretended she didn't know me because she was embarrassed I couldn't speak English... but none of my sisters would teach me anything!"

His voice trailed off, and after a few moments of silence he shook his head sadly... "I'll never hear those sounds again."

It was only after he'd walked across the lawn to the house he still shares with my mother that I realized something; while he can't hear a locust singing in a cottonwood overhead, his brother's voices are as clear to him as if he were working next to them in a beet field.... despite the great divide of seventy years.

He is the last; the memories of his parents and siblings, and their life together as a young family, are his and his alone. He is the keeper of the flame, the final caretaker; and someday he'll be gone... along with those precious memories.

They say you miss what you can't forget, but I'll miss what I never knew; how my grandmother stood when she kneaded bread, where my grandfather learned to carve wooden baby rattles..... and the sound of my uncles' voices when they called out to each other on cold October beet-harvest mornings.

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