



Tiger Swallowtail on Thistle

Voices from your Valley

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Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

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Thank You

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Your Country Neighbor

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Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

It's Saturday morning and hubby just returned from an auction where he hoped to acquire yet another wood-working tool. Thankfully, the condition of the tools was so poor that he just walked away. So, not only did he not spend money on tools, he also did not spend money on golf because he went to an auction instead. Win-win for me! Of course, once he reads this, he'll use the rationale of not buying anything at the auction to justify spending more money on golf. Maybe I should re-think this: if he had bought a tool, at least he would have used it to build something on my wish list.

Or, he might have used it to build something to trade for golf equipment. He is currently building a computer desk hutch to trade for a buddy's very expensive driver. I'm OK with that. He's using up the scrap plywood that's cluttering up the shop. Plus, he's keeping in practice on furniture building techniques. I have high expectations for a new bench and chair to be built over the winter.

I may need him to build me a traction device as well. It seems I've managed to irritate a nerve in my neck that's causing pain in my left arm and hand. At least that's my self-diagnosis; I haven't seen the neurologist yet. I'm blaming too much snow scooping last winter, followed by overly enthusiastic gardening this spring. I'm sure my advancing age has nothing to do with it.

I'm wearing a cervical collar and wrist brace right now, and propping my arms up on a pillow in an attempt to achieve zero pressure on the nerve while I type. It's not working all that great. My pillow keeps slipping and my neck is starting to sweat. Plus, just knowing that my flabby chin is accentuated by the collar bunching it up like a girdle is demoralizing, even though no one can see it. And, if I cinch the wrist brace tightly enough to actually immobilize my wrist, it rubs and irritates the nerve anyway. I think I'd rather have a broken arm.

Ah well, what can you do? Hubby just paid a visit to the sports medicine doctor and got cortisone injections in his shoulder and hip. We can't have joint pain interfering with his golf game, now can we?

He should be good to go for awhile. Seriously, I don't begrudge him his golfing...much. As he frequently tells me, it's cheaper than psycho-therapy. Maybe.

Well, folks, there's a bucket-load of tomatoes and peppers on the kitchen counter with my name on it. I've already made freezer spaghetti sauce, so I'm thinking salsa, tomato sauce, and maybe tomato juice. I hope all the peeling and chopping doesn't aggravate my arm too much. But the gardener in me won't let all that wonderful fresh produce go to waste. I guess I'm too much like my grandpa: I just can't sit around and do nothing, even when it's for my own good.

Poetry by Devon Adams

WHAT IF

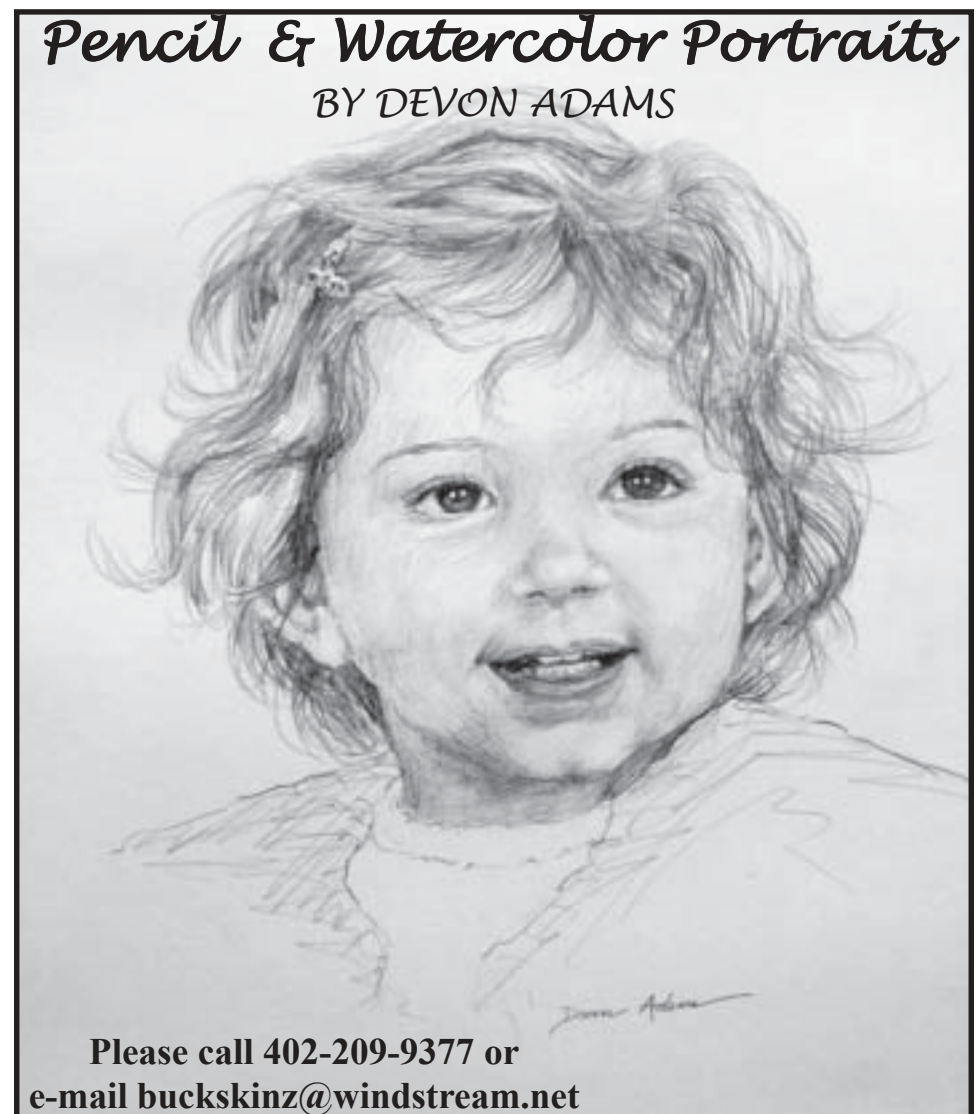
We remember flashes of memories in the most exquisite details, with all the color and sound and smells of certain places and times that draw us back into lost choices. Decisions that changed our lives were made in the briefest of instants, with no more deliberation than choosing which shirt to wear, or what flavor of ice cream sounded good on a hot evening. With no hints of intuition, we rushed into situations that were far more important than we realized at the time. Then, years later, a sudden quiver of recognition triggered by a sound, or a ripple of scent on a breeze, transports us into a time warp, and we are young again. On a damp spring morning, with wet diamonds shining in the grass, we deliberate once again about whether to answer a phone, or if we'll go to a party with a friend, or where to eat lunch. Simple thoughts, easy choices, but how did they lay out the map of our lives? If he hadn't been there, when I was there, would we ever have met at all? Or would we have walked through the years, reaching different destinations, not as happy, but not knowing the difference?

HOW MANY PAGES?

We all are writing books, although all of us are not authors. The pages are the days and nights of our lives, written only once, before tomorrow comes with empty lines. We never know how long our book will be, and more often than not, we are not expecting the end when it comes, and it falls to others to count our pages. So, pay attention to what you write.

AT A GLANCE

He came through the door, excited about practice, with words running faster than his lips could speak. His legs are longer than before, and the angle of his cheek is sharp. His shoulders are wider by the day, with muscles in his neck filling spaces between the tendons. His mother isn't quite as tall now, when he stands beside her, and his feet are wanting longer shoes. But as she turned to greet him, she saw the man her son would be, just from the corner of her eye.



THE QUILTING BEE

Shirley Neddenriep

One day last week I had a really special reason to clean house. Two granddaughters and my sister were coming for the day.

We had planned this for awhile, still it took me until the last minute to get floors vacuumed and mopped, bathrooms cleaned (forget windows). A stack of mail waiting to be read, an entire years worth of scrapbook stuff had to be re-located in order to have a couple of rolling tables for extra work areas.

Granddaughter brought her "Brothers" sewing machine. Sis helped get the Bernina from the sewing room. The entire kitchen was filled with sewing apparatus! No room for men folk. Not much time for cooking.

The air was filled with laughter, comments, pleas for help. Fabric scraps covered the kitchen table and spilled onto the floor. Threads littered the place in colorful snarls.

"Watch the quarter-inch seam! Always lay the Quilter's Rule with the rough side down - to hold the fabric, you know . . ." New pattern. Quilt as you go. Eleanor Burns. Fons and Porter. Experience. Inexperience. Out of this came complete table runners, one that would have been complete but for mis-information; we only had one-half the pattern!

Like playing Solitaire with 51 cards. And a fourth nearly complete, we did good. We traded working on each other's projects, resulting in an interesting combination of techniques!

At noon, "Pre-heat the oven to 350 degrees!" She laid pre-sliced chicken breast in a layer on a large jelly roll pan and shot it with dabs of BBQ sauce. In 20 minutes we had chicken, hot rolls, fresh green beans, minced onion, orange Jell-O salad and a prayer. In a few more minutes all the dishes stashed in the DW in a hot water rinse and back to quilting!

"She used to be a 4-H leader and won't let anyone forget it!" as sis pronounced judgment on a budding seamstress's work. Struggles with an unruly binding, a real mess. I couldn't leave it. Puckered. A gap. The one seam ripper among us burned with use. I ripped the seam apart.

Sis sewed it back. I ripped it apart again. Sisters do that. "I can't get it, and you can't either!" and she snorted off to the couch, worn

out. "Get her a pillow from your grandpa's closet, Please." Done. She napped. I sewed the messed up binding. I had a different perspective. The granddaughters smothered smiles at the behavior of their senior sewers. "You can tell they are sisters!" they whispered, sharing their secret.

"There! See, its finished." and it was, neat and trim, no puckers, no bare spaces where the seams didn't meet."

Color, placement, alignment, learning how to whip, to use the rotary cutter, to avoid selvage edges and why, we did it all and more: toured the 'garden' and noted the climbing black-eyed Susan on the little windmill tangled into the whirling blades and still growing.

An uncle stepped in, hot and sweaty, puzzled at a kitchen filled with seamstresses instead of cooks! "What is going on here??" Laughing. He could not see the logic in taking a whole length of fabric, cutting it into little pieces and sewing it back together again! His work in the searing sun and bothersome wind held more appeal. And logic. He found a cold drink for himself and escaped the Bedlam.

A son came by and took photos to prove that, 'Yes!' we really did spend the day at a quilting bee!



"Giant Swallowtail" on thistle

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Where Life is Good

by Marilyn Woerth

I am accident prone, clumsy, whatever you want to call it, that's what I am. My husband has banned me from most of his power tools. There have been several incidences in recent memory (they weren't really my fault). Like the time I was using the riding lawn mower and the branch from the weeping crabapple tree tore my (his) large ear protections off and I backed-up over them, now how can that be my fault. Or the time I was using the electrical chain saw and I cut through the 60 foot cord (no sparks!). And then there's the time I was using the electrical miter saw and a block of wood flew clear across the garage (six years later and my fingernail still isn't the same).

So I am banned. Then there's the clumsy part. And having one artificial knee hasn't helped that area out at all. One day I was minding my own business and the toe of my left shoe (the side the bionic knee is on, I wish) hit the metal edging of the path. My leg completely stopped (like I hit a brick wall) from the waist down movement just quit but from the waist up I plunged forward. Two complete summersaults later and this pleasantly plump, getting on in life me, is sitting in a totally different direction than when I started.

Best news was that I didn't have a scratch on me. I have played that back in my mind a million times, still can't figure it out.

Then there're the brain warps and the strangest things come out of my mouth. Once I told my mother-in-law that I was going shopping at Pears. She said, "What?" I said, "What did I just say?" "You said Pears." (Penney's and Sears). Then a few months ago a daughter-in-law caught me joining my two grandson's names to make Braden (Brady and Aiden). I didn't even realize what I had said. "Come on Braden, let's go outside." (You have to admit it's efficient.) Honestly, I think my in-laws need hearing aids.

Let's see what trouble I can get into out in the garden. I am growing white obediloxs (obedient plant and phlox) in the moon garden. Or my hostrunnas are doing quite well (hosta and brunneras). See what fun we can have with a little brain warp. Oh well, I am probably boring you by now. But just wait until I do the next exciting thing, like the time I made my eyebrows go bye, bye (I'm not explaining that one). Okay, now how do I end this monologue? Way out here where life is mostly normal and very, very (thanks to my over worked guardian angel) good.

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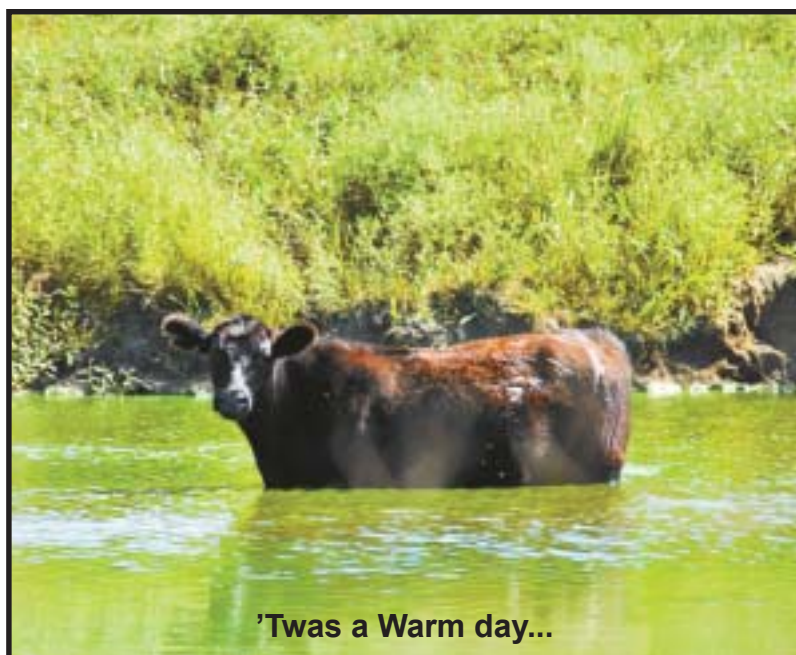
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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler
(photo submitted by author)

Fishing:

The River conditions still haven't changed much since last month's issue. Although the river is in it's banks today, nothing says it won't be out tomorrow. Access to the river is bad at best and be prepared to call for a pull or to start walking because it's muddy. It's funny the way the mud dries because there are about four different variations of Missouri River Mud. One is just flat called Gumbo. It's slick, balls up on your tires, and your done – your tires end up looking like racing slicks. The mud is only an inch deep, but you can't get any traction. Then there is the Blow Sand. Soupy when it's wet but hard as concrete when it dries, and of course like powder when it breaks down or when the wind blows (hence the name - Blow Sand). You never know about blow sand, whether you're going to spin and sink out of sight or just drive on top of it. Then there is the Fish Scales. The mud dries up on top and cracks up into slabs or scales. This usually makes it rough going as you bounce from one to the next. They also tend to flip up, hitting the undercarriage. The bad thing about Missouri River Mud is that you may have one kind of mud for 20 yards and a different kind the next 20 yards, so if you're going to chance it, be ready to walk or talk. Now for the fishing. Fishing has been picking up but you have to change the way you usually do it. Instead of fishing in the channel as you usually do, you fish the rivers tributaries. Creeks and other river tributaries that feed into the river are backed up and high but are providing fishing action as the river fish are coming after the bait in the back waters out of the current. And success has been pretty good. Small for the most part, but some night fishing has yielded bigger fish coming into feed. What are they biting on? Night crawlers for the most part, but chicken livers and frogs are getting some action too. This is a sand toad year for those of you who don't already know. They are everywhere you look. But although they are good bait on the river, I haven't heard of any luck using them as bait this year.

Hunting:

Fall hunting seasons are coming back around one by one and its time to get out and do a little scouting if you can put up with the bugs. This Spring's hatch of young turkeys are growing to the point that it getting harder to tell if it's the mother hen or the youngsters you see – of course you don't see them for long with all the foliage. They are there one second and gone the next. Also, the deer are moving around as of late. The bucks are in velvet and the does are escorting their fawns (some as many as three fawns this year). But as soon as a frost comes along every thing is going to change as the deer get ready for rut.

Fall Deer Season Permits are still available over the counter or on-line until the close of deer season. Keep in mind that tagging deer this year will be different:

TELECHECK


You will be are required to telecheck your bagged big game on the internet - on all seasons except the regular firearms deer season. During the regular firearms season check stations will be manned – all other check-in's are to be performed on the internet. Need to check out the 2010 Big Game Guide. They are available at Walmart and on-line at the Game & Parks web page (outdoornebraska.ne.gov).

Summer River Fishing is hot but will gradually get better as the weather decides to cool off. With the recent 60 degree nights, come better opportunities to get out and do some night fishing. 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."




Jamie Reeves from Peru showing us a couple of real nice channel cats taken from the swollen Missouri River.

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The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



Grasshoppers galore!

They come in all sizes and various earth-tone colors: spring green, dusty tan, even soot black; the only thing they have in common is their voracious appetite.

In my garden they prefer chrysanthemums, sunflowers, rhubarb, and marigolds....in that order.... but once they've reduced their favorites to sticks they'll eat anything that doesn't move. I've powdered them with sevin dust, doused them with malathion spray, and even baited them with something which looks a bit like sawdust, but as the summer wears on, and the hoppers grow in size and number, it's painfully obvious there isn't enough poison in the world to rid the western states of an infestation of biblical proportions.

They're on the march....and nothing...not crop dusters, sprayer equipped four-wheelers, or prayer can stop them.

Tire shop customers have their own stories to tell, from a man who hasn't mowed his lawn in weeks because the hoppers keep it trimmed better than his riding lawnmower, to the widow who was finally able to clear her yard of the weeds her husband once cut with a tractor mower.... only to find thousands of grasshoppers clinging to her house the following morning munching away on the flaking paint.

En masse the critters are a living, breathing hailstorm, a destructive force of nature before which man stands powerless.

I've been giving some thought on how to

turn the tables on this eating machine with legs, and I think I've come up with an idea.

Freeze dry the insects, package them in fancy cellophane bags, label them organic and market them to a targeted group of consumers.... backyard chicken lovers. The sort of people who rig-out out their hen houses with expensive double-paned windows and believe the word green represents a way of life, not a color.

Stop laughing...I'm serious about this. As they say, "strike when the iron's hot."

Just think of the advantages. No more corn or sugar beets, or fighting power companies for our share of irrigation water; grasshoppers thrive in the untilled

pastures of the arid high plains...the drier the better. It's a match made in heaven...or more honestly, the imagination of an over-worked farm wife who envisions an international company with the mission statement. "A million grasshoppers, a million dollars."

I wonder if there's stimulus money for an idea like this...or a government grant...or better yet a millionaire looking for a business partner?

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Karen

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Serendipity...?

Nobody is sure what it means, but Webster's says: It's the "gift of finding something valuable that you weren't even seeking."

September is full of those kinds of things...Surprises. Adventures. Strange little discoveries.

One day last September, I stumbled on some serendipity in the midst of insanity. I thought I'd tell you about it.

My husband and I were on an autumn road trip, enjoying the splash of color across the landscape...Two middle-aged honeymooners out for a spin. We stopped at a hotel, and Michael decided to go on a six-mile jog, as is his custom. I decided to go on a little jog, as well—to the nearby McDonalds a block away.

On the way there, I discovered something sitting on the curb. It was a stolen handbag.

Being a naïve country gal, I wasn't thinking about purse snatchers and identity theft...I merely thought some lady had lost her bag. A moment later, a seedy looking car pulled up next to me. The man, inside, stared at me and the bag intently.

It was then I knew I'd stumbled onto something sinister. With a yelp, I grabbed the handbag and ran pell-mell toward McDonald's, my heart pounding wildly.

What should I do? The man was coming after me! I made up my mind quickly. Clutching the handbag, I ran for the ladies' restroom at McDonald's and dived into the handicap stall. Now what? What if everybody thought I was the one who had stolen the bag and wallet? What if I was arrested and carted off to jail while my husband jogged serenely into the sunset?

Suddenly, the door of the restroom opened. Someone came in and rapped on my stall door. A foreign-sounding voice said: "May I use big stall, please? I need to change clothes!"

What the heck?! What strange thing would befall me next?

Leaving the handicap stall, I saw an elderly woman standing there. She looked at me knowingly. Her eyes probed the bag in my hand.

"I saw you take da bag," she said. "And I saw da man in car who had it before you." She disap-

peared into the stall with her garment bag and began changing her clothes. "Do not leave here, dear. You be in trouble—with stolen bag and wallet."

"But I didn't steal it!"

"I know. Man stole it...He went through wallet and bag before he left it on curb."

I felt perplexed. "Why didn't you report him?"

The woman suddenly stepped out of the stall. She stood looking at me. "Yah. Yah," she said. Her accent was distinct. She sounded German. "I have learned in life...You mind own businesses. Do not invite trouble."

Trouble. Right.

"Well...What should I do, now? Should I call the police?"

"No! Mind your own businesses...!" She looked at me sternly. "But do not leave here alone. Da man waiting for you. He follow you forever."

She could see the growing panic on my face. "Stop!" she said. "Think clear, now! Women in da Great War survived because they think and plan in da face of danger. You know this?"

I nodded. Her words steadied me. I thought hard for a minute, then decided to call my husband on the cell phone and explain what had happened. Michael was panting like a steam engine when he answered his cell....He sounded alarmed at my predicament, but said he'd be right there. He only had three miles to run to reach me. Could I wait?

Yes. I could wait. I had no choice.

The German lady finished dressing and prepared to leave. I felt a bit sad. She seemed my only link to sanity in this world of stolen wallets and handbags.

"Ma'am..." I said impulsively. "Could I have your cell phone number...In case I need it?"

She complied, rattling off her number quickly. Before I could find a pen in my purse, she stepped out the door and was gone. I ran to the mirror and scribbled her number on the glass with my finger—then transferred the number to my cell phone. It somehow seemed important to keep track of her. The German lady had given me stability. She'd been a witness to my dilemma, and I didn't want to

lose her.

These matters were on my mind when my husband arrived fifteen minutes later. Michael had run like the devil was chasing him. I didn't know how much he loved me 'til he showed up, dripping wet with sweat. He'd passed every jogger on the course—even ones half his age.

Michael insisted on calling the police and they came a few minutes later to interrogate me. I wish the German lady had been there to help me answer questions. But she was gone. Gone..."minding her own businesses".

I've never called the German lady's number, since that day. It is still logged in my cell phone, though... a kind of hedge against future disasters and predicaments. It gives me backbone and courage....reminding me of "all-da-women-in-da-Great-War" who survived because they thought clearly in the face of danger.

I discovered several things that September day....How to run like the dickens with a stolen handbag when someone's chasing you. How to hide in a handicap stalls. How to scribble phone numbers on bathroom mirrors and make friends with old German women.

I'd discovered a little adventure...Some mystery and intrigue when I wasn't even looking...something valuable that I wasn't even seeking.

Best of all, I learned how much my husband loved me. Even at middle age, he'd outrun all the young jocks on the road just to rescue his scared princess. To me, that meant so much.

Ah yes. It's called Serendipity.

You should find a little Serendipity of your own, my friend.

It's worth finding.

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