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September 2014

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Bull Riding, Nemaha County (Nebraska) Rodeo, August 23, 2014



One of the Rodeo Queens Gallups with the ‘Colors’ around the Arena.

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The talent was especially good this year.

Voices

from the Valleys of the Nemaha
Photographer & Publisher, Stephen Hassler

Writers This Month

Devon Adams
Merri Johnson
Lee Nyberg
Vicki O'Brian
Marilyn Woerth
Thank You

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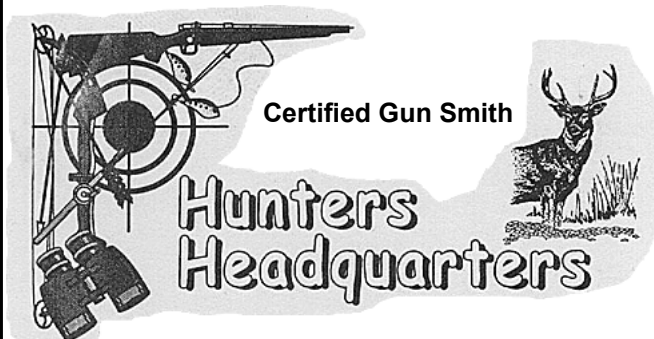
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September, 2014 *Your Country Neighbor*

Poetry by Devon Adams

BUCKS IN VELVET

It is nearly time for the big dance, and folks are getting ready. New clothes are coming, trading summer's golden tan for a camo color in the shadow grays of winter. The kids are in groups apart, as the eyes of their elders take on the hazy glaze of a distant longing. There is preening, posturing and sniffing. As sunsets come sooner, certain saplings are chosen to do battle. Soon, their bark is stripped, and green wood is oozing tree blood, while antlers draped with shredded velvet become polished daggers.

DAYS OF SAND

Now the river is wide, and wild. Filled with the loose things from fields and roads and homes, it is a menacing force of swift currents and running rain. Churning from beneath the choppy surface, sand boils away from the channeled bottom, spilling over the banks along with broken trees, bobbing boards, plastic jugs and dead animals. The moving scourge scours across fields and farms and roads, crushing bridges into splinters that join the rest of the nightmare sailors on a ride from hell. Months later, when the river is small and simple, the scattered scraps from here and there remain, along with the sand. Drifts and dunes cover most of the floor of the valley, waiting for angry winds to spin them into sightless fogs that obliterate the scenery. They will creep and crawl over fertile places until time turns them into stable land.

SEPTEMBER SUMMER

Today, the slant of the sun says, "Time for school, no more pool, football nights with cold, damp dew, and foggy river mornings. But, now and then we lose September altogether, when summer forgets to pack her bags and leave. The air stays soggy, and thermometers are stuck too high, while air conditioners strain and stumble, needing immediate repairs. It's time to harvest, but rain won't stop and fields are mucky, breeding swarms of hungry skeeters. But wait, here comes October! Except the golden leaves are falling now, drenched by a freezing rain, and did I mention that they're still attached to big branches broken by the ice that has wrapped them up and knocked them down? So much for Indian Summer. She must have burned her calendar to keep warm.

GHOST RIVER

The muggy moisture of summer is gone, as the fierce moon of autumn blazes over the fields, and drying leaves whisper on the crisp wind. A ghost river hovers over the lazy curves of the braided channels. As an early sun creeps into the sky, temperatures drop, and the wispy gray scarf of the wraith grows across the valley floor, like spreading milk.

IMAGES

Faces don't look the same in photos as in film, or live in person. The self we see in mirrors is different from how others see us. But a drawing or painting of a person is a changing reality. The artist finds hidden traits that aren't apparent in a superficial glance or two. But they are there in a finished picture, where others discover connections previously invisible to them. A portrait contains more than one person. Family faces float there, from generations past, and personalities show hidden facets from all the blood that mixes in their veins.

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Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

The dog days of August were making a valiant last stand the afternoon I sat down to write this. If you could literally see the corn grow back in June when it rained a summer's worth in a couple of weeks, you could surely see that moisture evaporating from every plant that afternoon. Portions of lawn that we had re-seeded last fall were on the verge of succumbing to the relentless heat of the past week. My imagination was withered, too, yielding zip, zero, nada in the way of material for this column. I lamented to my husband that he hadn't done anything goofy or dumb in the last month to inspire me.

Writer's block makes me antsy, so I suggested we take a drive, hoping to see something that would spark an idea for a topic. Despite being mildly insulted by my comment about his failure to inspire me, hubby agreed to the drive. He wanted me to see the awesome pile of used construction timbers recently stacked up in Nemaha that are awaiting a miraculous conversion into lumber for his tree house project. I believe his exact words were, "You've got to see this pile of timbers," or something like that.

You may recall that hubby hatched the tree house idea last February. It has finally gotten off the ground, so to speak, now that said timbers have been delivered to Nemaha and neatly stacked so they can be unbolted from each other. I won't bother to explain why they are bolted together. They just are. So, anyway, they have to be unbolted from each other for transport to a saw mill, where they will hopefully be cut into usable lengths for the tree house, as well as for the projects of several other guys who have been smitten by the possibilities for re-using huge, rotten-looking timbers. I guess you have to be a guy to get excited about such things.

So. We saw the timbers. Since we were already in Nemaha, hubby also gave me a tour of a new RV park in town. Very nice. Always good to see people taking initiative to keep our small communities alive. I mean that sincerely.

On the drive back to Auburn I told hubby that I had noticed a tree bearing large orange spheres as we were driving along Highway 136 earlier on our way to Nemaha. I instructed him to be prepared to pull over when I spotted it so that I could investigate the phenomenon. My first thought on seeing the tree had been that it was a hedge apple tree, but I thought hedge apples were always green. Naturally, I was curious. Who wouldn't be?

Long story short, the orange hedge apples were nowhere to be seen on the return trip. Hmm. An optical illusion? Figment of my imagination? Something to do with the heat?

When we got back to town, the thermometer on Carson Bank's electronic sign read 99 degrees. Hubby commented that the thermometer was "in the sun," as if that would somehow make it seem a little less hot. Our digital thermometer at home read 100.8 degrees, of course the sensor is in the sun. Hubby said he didn't think it was that hot. "It's just warm," he said.

I hope his perception of the potential for those awesome timbers turns out to be closer to reality than his perception of the temperature on August 24.

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Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

When I finally become part of the cosmos, I want to be the mischievous part. You know the part that snows in Mexico in July...or the part on a Nebraska game day in Iowa City a sign shimmers over the Hawkeye stadium; a red and white rainbow appears with one gigantic N shining at the top. Yea, that will make them jump out of their jerseys. Of course I wouldn't be able to pull that off all by myself, but I figure I can get enough Husker molecules together to rock the stadium. Who is in this with me?

I mean just because I will be energy floating around doesn't mean I can't have something to look forward to; I certainly hope it doesn't mean I will be stuck with harps and clouds. How boring! I hope my heavenly keeper (and I do mean I hope-heavenly) will give my atoms some interesting tasks to perform. (Besides splitting, LOL, you know splitting atoms. Oh well we all bomb once in awhile.) BONG!

Seriously though, have you thought about it? Are you prepared for your ever after story? It is not an easy thing to think about our ending story especially when times are busy and life is full. Have you thought about what will lead up to it, what happens after, what happens way after, what do you need to take care of ahead of time? Have you done any preplanning? Does someone know what you are thinking, have you written down what you would like done? Or like so many of us you haven't found the quiet time or space to think about your last event on earth?

Well for heaven's sake do it, do it now, no one else is going to do it for you, well until it's too late! I am a woman who likes to be prepared. Think things out, make lists, and ask the questions...what if? Not that I am not spontaneous, but some things in life are too important to leave to chance. Don't ever assume that someone else will know what you would like to have done. Will you turn around some day and the planning and doing time has disappeared in a heartbeat, literally?

I am at that point in my life where I enjoy having loved ones close, my principles intact and still being able to accomplish physical and mental tasks; these are the important things to me. I still have a few things to check off of my "Times Up" to do list, which I am chipping away at slowly, I just hope not too slowly.

The plots are bought, and hubby says he wants funky tombstones. I will give him the funky tombstones, but I get to decide what is written on them. (Although there are days, only a few, I dream of sending him in a rocket ship off to space, just kidding.) So when I google-it, do I type in tombstones (too western), memorial stones (too cheesy), gravestone (too sad), headstone (too scary), or what's up stones (too punk), oh I know, Second Installment Stones. From dust I came to dust I will return. (But I want to be the purple dust, okay?)

Whatever will the cosmos do with me? See, my husband may have a few ideas. Where else can you have such fun contemplating your forever story than right here; where life is good? I wonder what the cosmos thinks of everyone's cherished friend "Robin", he is missed; yet I sense a bit of him every day.

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Alzheimer's Affects Us All



Alzheimer's Caregiving—Stay “In the Moment”

By Lee Nyberg

We were talking about visiting the Aquarium, and suddenly my Dad said, ‘You can’t make a shirt from an American flag.’

People with Alzheimer's disease, the most common form of dementia, often take conversational "U-turns" like this. Improvisational Theater audiences frequently witness similar twists of plot. As odd as this may sound, taking a closer look at the overlap of caregiving and Improv Theater can help Alzheimer's caregivers increase positivity and flexibility in their caregiving.

Saturday's *This American Life*, an NPR radio show, featured a story about caring for people with Alzheimer's. When the segment's focus on the similarities of Alzheimer's care and Improv Theater became clear, I thought I'd heard wrong. I was intrigued by this different way of looking at Alzheimer's care training, created by Karen Stobbe, an Improv actor and caregiver for her parents.

The dictionary defines improvisation as using whatever is available to create something new. Cooks often improvise when they toss a meal together from the food available. Alzheimer's caregivers and Improv actors use the same philosophy everyday, according to Karen; both need a willingness to observe and go with the flow. She created "In the Moment," featured on This American Life, in 2003 to help others bring a person-centered focus to caregiving. In addition to finding classic Improv exercises a great way to train Alzheimer's caregivers in the unique approach they need, she also realized the key rules of improvisation are the same as the top Alzheimer's caregiving guidelines. Here are examples of tips on both lists:

- Join in the other person's world, wherever that is; agree with their reality
- Demonstrate what you want by modeling and mirroring
- Don't ask questions, issue kind commands
- Instead of arguing, acknowledge and validate
- Set realistic expectations and problem solve

While “In the Moment,” has more to it than I can explain here, I wish I had known about this kind of approach for communicating with my own mother. We had a lot of interactions like this:

Continued on page 9 >>>>>>>>>>



Pipevine Swallowtail on *Butterfly Bush*. Brownville Arboretum.



Sunflowers are bursting out all over (the roadsides)!

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<<<<<<<<<< Continued from page 8

Mom (fearfully): There's a man in that white car outside.

Me: No, there isn't. That's Chip's car, and he's with Dad on the back porch.

Mom (angrily): Liar! I'm going to get Thom [Dad] to handle this. You don't know anything!

If I had acknowledged and validated, allowed my mother to define the situation and really listened to her, per the Alzheimer's/Improv rules, we might have had an exchange something like the following:

Mom (fearfully): There's a man in that white car outside.

Me: Yep. I see him, too. I think he is cooking spaghetti in his car. It's Spaghetti Day.

Mom (calmer): Spaghetti Day?

Me: You're right, Spaghetti Day. You like fresh mushrooms on spaghetti. Let's go look in the refrigerator for mushrooms.

Improvisation takes an unrehearsed path, changing the actors' focus along the way. Similarly, caregivers use distraction and redirection to help calm an agitated Alzheimer's patient. Veteran Alzheimer's caregivers and Improv actors would agree: be a good listener and say "yes" as often as possible.

Many thanks to: netnebraska.org, www.thisamericanlife.org, and www.in-themoment.com.

Lee Nyberg seeks to help families and those living with Alzheimer's through education and her company, Home Care Assistance.



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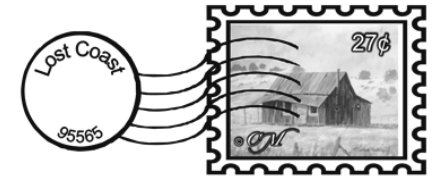
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At Summer's End... and Wit's End, too!

By Vicki O'Neal



"We're going boating," said my kids in Kansas City. "Then later—we're going to have a 'Block Party' with the neighbors! You wanna come?"

Boating sounded fun...But a block-party in KCMO? I was dubious. I don't like Kansas City—or any city for that matter! I'm a country gal to the core, and I just don't DO cities! But for my kids' sake, I decided to go.

I regretted it almost immediately.

The kids and cousins took me to a nearby lake. We set out across the water—all seven of us in a sickly little boat called the "Tan Turd." It soon lived up to its name. Within a minute or two, the boat started acting stinky. Smoke poured from the engine and it had to be shut down.

What now? There we were in the middle of a lake with big boats roaring by...Sophisticated boats with fancy folks staring at us. We sat in our pitiful little boat...Sitting there like a—

Well--like a Tan Turd floating in the Liu.

It wasn't amusing. In fact, it was downright dangerous!

Lacking an emergency flag, we grabbed a pair of bright red undershorts and hoisted it as our flag of distress. Then somebody opened up the picnic basket and pulled out our sandwiches. We had an impromptu picnic while the fancy boats roared past just yards away.

Eventually we were rescued and pulled to shore...The little Tan Turd with its sunburned crew beneath our iconic emblem: a pair of bright red skivvies.

The kids were not in the least discouraged over our failed boat-ride. "And now..." they said as we headed back to the house. "It's onward to the Block Party! It's gonna be the bomb."

Oh yay. I couldn't wait.

I'd never been to a block party in my life. We just don't have them in the country. I had no idea what to expect.

The celebration was already underway by the time we got back to the house. The street had been blocked off. People were milling about aimlessly, but they soon became more organized. A crowd of folks got into the middle of the street and began struttin' their stuff.

Music blared. People gyrated and shook and shimmied. They pranced and bucked. They drank great quantities of beer. It was quite a ruckus.

I was mystified. But the kids and cousins were thrilled. "Isn't it great?" they said.

Great indeed! It grated on my nerves greatly, but I didn't say so. I just smiled and nodded and tried to blend in as best I could. It wasn't easy.

They soon brought out enormous piles of food and lined tables with it. Burgers and brownies. Bowls of pasta salad and potato mush. There were flies flitting here and there, sampling the free food along with everyone else. A very pregnant woman was piling food on a plate—puffing away on a cigarette, sprinkling ashes everywhere—improving the flavor considerably, I'm sure.

I declined the sumptuous fare and ate a little fruit. I was feeling overwhelmed. But the party had hardly begun.

Darkness was falling, and out came the fireworks. The night became a jumble of explosions and blinding flashes of light. Sparks flew and I retreated to the house to cover my ears. It was there that my kids found me sometime later.

They arrived with bad news. "Your car got damaged!" they said.

I ran outside, distraught. In the dimness, I could see the hole in my windshield. A golf ball was embedded in the glass. Everyone gathered around me, apologizing and exclaiming. "We don't know how it happened! It's just terrible....!"

With dismay, I probed the glass carefully with my fingers. A second later, I peeled back the sticky tape on the "embedded golf ball". It was a prank...and a very bad one, at that! But I didn't say so.

"Good try....!" I said. They burst out laughing—all the silly city kids and their cousins. "Well, we thought you must be getting bored. You needed a little excitement!"

Indeed. A little excitement. I hadn't had enough for one day.

No—what I really needed was the tranquility of a Country Evening.... Flickering fireflies. The croak of frogs. The song of crickets. That's what I really needed and I would soon find it, too.

It wasn't long before I was heading back to the Barada Hills, feeling much relieved. I had fulfilled my duty as the Mother of my "cityslicker" children. I'd done what I had to do.

But I had one question at the end of a very long day:

"Why—oh why—can't my kids be more like their Country Mama...!"



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\$1 off Grand Italian Buffet; Limit 6/coupon

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