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Country Neighbor

September 2005



YOUR WINDOW WITH A COUNTRY VIEW



A Monthly Magazine From the Rural Midwest



Monarch or mimic? See page 3.

CONTENTS

Here's what September's about	2
September is mostly Summertime	3
Window on Fifth Street	4
Real Estate, Finance, and Insurance	5
It's all happening on Main Street in Brownville!	6 & 7
Country Scenes	8
Service Directory	9
<i>Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report</i>	10
Ann's Recipe & Merri's Diary	11
Poetry & Short Story Winners	12 & 13
Frieda's "The Underground Railway Station"	14
Karen's <i>The Face of Drought</i>	15
Joe's "Money and it's Value"	16

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Your

COUNTRY NEIGHBOR

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Thank you!

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Look for Your Hometown
at this website:
www.YourCountryNeighbor.com
(capital letters optional)

September is about...

This month is especially about welcoming Northeast Kansas to our Country Neighborhood! Perhaps I should say it the other way around. Your Country Neighbor received a warm, encouraging welcome by every individual I met in every Kansas community I visited. I hope this publication will be entertaining and informative for such a deserving audience.

September's also about saying good-bye to Summer and hello to school, cool nights, and harvest. It's a great time of the year!

Josh is still fishing, Roger is still harvesting tomatoes (and melons, I hope). Ann is baking, Devon's writing poetry, and Frieda is remembering her life while in Kansas. And Joe has some complaints about some signs of the times.

Your Country Neighbor is pleased to bring you pieces of their lives...precious moments to share.

Have a beautiful September!

Last, but not least, don't miss the news releases on page 11.

Your Country Neighbor

**This Edition Delivered to Iowa,
Missouri, & Nebraska!**

Available in many grocery stores, restaurants, gift shops, pharmacies, cafes, antique stores, farm-and-home supply stores, hardware stores, and other businesses in the following communities:

In Nebraska: Auburn, Avoca, Barada, Brock, Brownville, Cook, Dawson, Elk Creek, Falls City, Humboldt, Johnson, Lorton, Nebraska City, Nehawka, Nemaha, Otoe, Pawnee City, Peru, Shubert, Stella, Syracuse, Table Rock, Talmage, Tecumseh, Union, Verdon, and Weeping Water.

In Missouri: Rock Port, and Tarkio.

In Iowa: Emerson, Farragut, Hamburg, Malvern, Riverton, Shenandoah, Sidney, and Tabor.

In Kansas: Corning, Fairview, Goff, Hiawatha, Morrill, Oneida, Sabetha, Seneca, and Wetmore.

September is mostly Summertime!



The Viceroy Butterfly is a mimic. Birds avoid it, thinking it's the bad-tasting Monarch. This one suns itself on the *Steamboat Trace*.



The Monarch is slightly larger than the Viceroy, but the main difference is in the markings on lower wings. Here the Monarch is sipping nectar from a *Butterfly Bush*. The Monarch on the cover is tasting the bloom of a thistle.





Nobody home.



Kansas Native



Storm moving in...I was driving in the right direction... away.

<p>Watch Roger's</p> 	<p>Garden Grow!</p> <p>And buy his fresh, homegrown Tomatoes at the Farmers Market in Auburn Sat 8:00 to Noon and Tue 3:00 to 6:00 pm.</p> <p>For the best produce, find Roger's booth at the Farmers Market in Auburn at the Nemaha County Fair Grounds. Come early, Roger sometimes "sells out" the first hour!</p>  <p>See Roger's Garden at www.yourcountryneighbor.com Click on "Nemaha Gardens"</p>
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Window on Fifth Street

My window on Fifth Street remains open these cool nights. In the morning I think I hear the sound of the school bus leaving its 'stop' before I want to get up. During the day I see College students walking back and forth from home to campus and back home again. But summer is still not over. Yes, the leaves will begin falling soon, the busses are running, but it's not over 'til it's over. And that's not until September 22nd. This has been a great summer, and I don't have to be ready for it to end. A few cool nights don't mean that the air conditioner won't be needed now and then on some September days. I remember when classrooms were pretty darn warm in September.

I can still see Sagittarius in the southern sky...at night of course. But it won't be long before the Pleiades will be rising in the evening. So what to do to make it last? Well, having been reminded that the Fall Foliage Tour is scheduled for later in September, also reminds me that the late summer wildflowers are busting out all over. You don't have to wait until the leaves change color to take a scenic summer drive in the country.

Speaking of summer color, the butterflies have been especially numerous given that the rain has been good to their food sources and its humidity helps release them from their chrysalises (that's right, cocoons are for moths).

August was a rewarding month for us country camera buffs, and I expect continuing rewards in September. The Monarchs have barely begun migrating and I have yet to experience the wonder of nature that is a tree with its branches loaded with resting Monarchs in the late afternoon sun. Maybe this year.

Still, it's hard to fight that seasonal stuff that September brings. Labor Day, football, and back-to-school feels like Fall, even with green trees and eighty degrees! So I'll just go with the flow. I'm enjoying the cool nights, the late summer colors and the anticipation of more colors this Fall. And my window on Fifth Street shows me each day, one at a time, and for a little while longer, I see summer.

Sumer Scenes



Not many of these days left...it's been good.



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See page two for contact information.

BROWNVILLE

Call 1-877-559-6005 to see what's happening in Brownville this month!



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Missouri River Bridge



Carson House



The many flowering gardens fronting the Brownville 'Shoppes' attracted many butterflies this August.

Here a Swallowtail intoxicates itself on Phlox blossoms.

The garden at Whiskey Run Creek Vineyard and Winery was the main attractor at the West end of town, especially the *appropriately named Butterfly Bush*.

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Enrich your visit to Brownville. Take the tour with Bob Curttright at the *Whiskey Run Creek Vineyard and Winery*.



The gardens in Brownville were especially fine this year...notable locations were the winery, the cafe, and some residences in between. They were still blooming when this publication went to press.



Tons of grapes are ready for processing in the wine facility. As this issue goes to press, the pressing will have been completed. Take the tour to see what's next.

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Country Scenes



(Old) Barn-of-the-month.



Blowing in the wind.



Nice country cottage.



Storm cloud over Iowa's Waubonsie State Park.



This scene reminds me of a painting.

More pictures of country scenes are in color at: www.yourcountryneighbor.com

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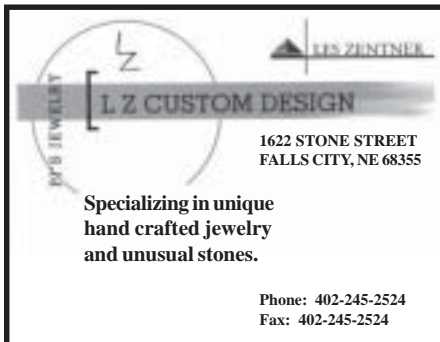


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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler
Photos Provided by Author

Fishing:

The action on the Missouri River has come and gone and come again this past month. The water cooled off with the recent rains, then warmed back up with the hot days. This gets the fish coming and going, biting and then not biting. This can be aggravating at times, but the fish seem to get back in the groove of biting eventually. What makes it hard is that I, like many others, only have the weekends to fish, and as of late that's when the water is cool and the fish don't really want to play. But it always seems like they get to biting just in time to go back to work on Monday. Imagine that!

What are they hitting on? The Channels are hitting crawlers, grasshoppers, and dough baits. And the big Flatheads and Blues are hitting leopard frogs, chubs, and gold fish. Big Bait - Big Fish. Be patient when you go out. They are there. It just depends if they want to bite on what you give them.

Hunting:

Squirrel Season opened August 1st and I managed to make it out for an early hunt. This means hot temperatures and bugs. But if you want some young ones you need to get out early so you can distinguish, by size, which ones are this year's litter. I had been hearing them in the back yard "raising cane" off and on the last couple of weeks, and once I made it to the timber I found out why. There is plenty to fight over! By plenty I mean the amount and size of nuts this year. Squirrels fight birds and even themselves over territory, and the territory is usually a range of nut trees. The ground is already littered with nuts and the hulls of nuts the squirrels and other critters have been consuming. And the trees are still just loaded with nuts. It wasn't hard to pick a couple off. While they are fighting, I'm maneuvering for a shot. I have a few for now. I'll get back out when the bugs and spiders get frostbitten and the leaves start to fall. That is my favorite time to hunt them, when you can see them and hear them better. And you don't need as much DEET. Squirrel limits this year are 7 - bag (in the vest) and 28 - possession (in the freezer).

This month's pictures are of a few young red squirrels taken early and look at the size of the acorns taken with one scoop off of the timber floor.



Dove season starts September 1st, so don't forget your HIP number. Doves are considered migratory birds, and to hunt migratory birds you need, in addition to your hunting license, a Harvest Inventory Permit. Obtaining one is free by applying on the Nebraska Game & Parks Web Site or by calling toll free 1-888-403-2473, available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It is good from 8/1/2005 to 4/17/2006. If you were born after 4/30/1989 and live in Nebraska you do not have to register.

FALL TURKEY - Permits can now be obtained for the Fall Turkey season. Fall Season allows you to kill two turkeys (male or female). This could include two shotgun permits, two archery permits or one of each. Fall Archery Season starts October 1st and Fall Shotgun Season starts October 15th, and both seasons extend to November 30th. The season is closed during the regular firearm deer season November 12th through the 20th. **THIS IS NEW!!** The Fall turkey season lasts to the 30th of November but you **CAN NOT HUNT** and you do not want to be in the woods when the rifle deer season is on. **THINK SAFETY!** There is not a draw for fall permits this year - just purchase on-line or obtain yours by mail or by visiting a Game & Parks Office.

Hunting seasons are coming back around fast and will be here soon enough. So get out and get a little practice in where you can. And don't give up on the river yet - fishing has slowed but there are still plenty of good fish left this year. 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."



"...a few young red squirrels taken early."

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Recipe of the Month

Baked Potato Variations

Now that the new potatoes are no longer new, let's bake 'em by the ovenfull. While the oven is on bake enough potatoes for at least three meals.

Meal one – Regular baked potatoes, loaded of course.

Another meal – This might become a trade secret in my own eating establishment some day but I'm going to share it with you anyway. Baked potatoes make the very best **French fries**. The potatoes should be done but not overdone as they will break up. Just cut them into French fries and fry in hot oil till golden. Drain on paper towels.

Now for the most impressive of baked potato fare – **Twice Baked Potatoes**

Peel the potatoes and mash
Add the following as though you are making regular mashed potatoes:
Milk or table cream
Butter
Sour Cream
About ½ t mustard per potato
Grated Cheddar Cheese
Salt and pepper to taste
One Egg per two or three potatoes

You may have noticed that I did not include much information about quantities. That is because it is a terribly personal, by your own taste, sort of thing. If you are watching your fat intake then use the many low fat ingredients that are now on the market. If eggs are not on your diet, then just skip them, it will still be great.

Optional ingredients to add to the potatoes or have on the side:
Cooked diced onion
Chopped green onion
Bacon bits or diced meats
Herbs like basil, parsley or cilantro

Mix it all up and place in a pretty, buttered baking dish. Bake at 350° for 30 to 50 min., according to the number of potatoes you are working with. The top will form a slight crust when done. Serve with additional toppings if desired (more sour cream will be unnecessary).

As always, **have fun and enjoy with loved ones.**

News Release

Ann's bakery/coffee shop is opening on Sept. 5 (maybe the 3rd) with sweet rolls, coffee and tea from 9 am to 11 am (call ahead if you would like to pick up office treats earlier than that). Lunch and Supper will be served 11 am to 1 pm and 4:30 to 7 pm Monday through Friday. Sandwiches, soup and salad will be the menu, followed by pies, cakes and ice cream (all homemade). There will be special hours for events like football Saturdays and homecoming. Groups can make reservations for whatever hours they need. Bakery goods can be ordered anytime by calling (402) 872-4865. Fresh bread will always be on the shelves for take-home. Come in and see us at 1705 Park Ave., Peru, Nebraska (just North of Neal Park, across the street from the water tower).

Diary of an Unemployed Housewife

by Merri Johnson

August: 'tis the season. All you gardeners out there know what I mean. It's the season for dealing with the bounty of your orchard or vegetable patch. The hoped-for reward of fresh produce that caused you to abandon reason and plant way too many zucchini and tomatoes in May has come to fruition. For us, the bounty came in the form of grapes and peaches.

My husband and I made 18 quarts of grape juice from our three vines. It's incredibly easy to do. In fact, two people are just about one too many for the task, if you catch my drift. Having said that, it's more than a little ironic that preserving the bumper peach crop fell entirely to me, even though planting the peach tree a number of years ago was entirely my husband's idea. It's even more ironic when you consider that this is the first real harvest we've had, just when I had finally gotten him to agree to cut down the tree if it failed to produce yet again.

I find that fruit trees are fickle and finicky. They can be blanketed with delicate blossoms in April and then get hit with a killing frost. Sometimes they set on so much fruit that branches break or they simply drop the fruit. Or, in our case, the wretched squirrels get to the peaches before they can ripen.

None of those misfortunes befell our peach tree this year. We culled dozens of peaches from clusters of two and three so the tree could supply nutrients to the growing fruit. We propped up sagging branches with 2 x 4's. We trapped squirrels and covered as many branches with bird netting as possible. It all paid off when I picked about 15 dozen perfect peaches.

Ours is a dwarf Reliance, enabling me to pick every last peach standing flat-footed on the ground. When I spread those mango-burgundy hued, three-ounce globes on my dining room table, I considered calling Martha Stewart magazine to see if they wanted to use them in a photo spread. They were that beautiful. But you can't stand around admiring ripe fruit for very long. So, I got out the canning supplies and six hours later I had ten half-pints of jam and three and a half quarts of slices in the freezer, plus about half the crop still on the table! Deliveries to neighbors ensued. The remaining peaches went in the fridge to take along on our visit to my city cousins in Minneapolis.

It was a wonderful harvest. But I'm not sure if I really want a repeat next year. I guess I'll just leave that up to Mother Nature.

News Release

Fall Foliage and Art Tour coming to Nemaha County, Nebraska

Fall foliage tours have long been staples of New England's tourist trade, but you don't have to travel to the east coast of the U.S. to be wowed by Fall's palette of reds and yellows. Nemaha County's own "east coast" along the Missouri River puts on quite a show as the oaks, maples, cottonwoods and sumac exchange summer's cool green for the warm hues of Autumn.

This year, local artists and artisans will complement nature's spontaneous art show with exhibitions of their own creations the last weekend of September and the first three weekends of October at sites in Peru, Brownville and Auburn, Nebraska. Exhibits will be open weekends at the following locations: the Jindra Fine Arts Center on the campus of Peru State College, Hoyt Street, Peru; the loft of Whiskey Run Creek Winery, 702 Main St. and several shops downtown in Brownville; Mad Hatters Coffee and Tea Company, 13th St. and Highway 75 in Auburn and at Wheeler Inn, 19th St. and Highway 75 in Auburn. Additional sites are being added daily. There is no admission fee to any exhibits. While you're stopping to enjoy the local art, make a point of visiting other shops and eateries, too.

Art exhibit and tour maps will be available prior to September 24 on the Nemaha County web site www.visitnemahacounty.org and at local restaurants and lodging establishments. The route follows the bluffs along the eastern edge of Nemaha County all the way to Indian Cave State Park. Or, you can follow a previously mapped Fall Foliage Tour route published in the Southeast Nebraska Visitors Guide. This route begins south of Nebraska City and ends at Peru. What the heck, be brave and create your own route!

Whatever route you choose, you won't be disappointed. Your excursion will take you through frequently changing landscapes, ranging from river bottom with burr oaks towering above you on the bluffs, to hilltops offering panoramic views across ridgeline after ridgeline. Be sure to take along your binoculars. Many people consider the hardwood foliage of the bluffs to be the highlight of the season. But the subtle fall shades of roadside grasses, with accents of blazing sumac, can be every bit as lovely.

Portions of the route parallel the Steamboat Trace hiking/biking trail, so you might want to take bicycles or walking shoes along.

If the price of gasoline has you saying "No" to all but absolutely necessary driving, consider this. A 50-cent per gallon increase in the price of gasoline adds only about \$2.50 to the cost of a 100-mile trip. The scenery and the art exhibits are free. You can't beat that for an afternoon of pure pleasure. You might like it so much, you'll decide to spend the whole weekend. With several B&Bs and motels in Nemaha County, you're sure to find accommodations that suit you. Lodging includes: Peru: Coleman B&B (402-872-7715); Brownville: Pearson-Kelley Guest House (402-825-6637); Auburn: Cooper House B&B (402-274-5540), Palmer House Motel (402-274-3193), Auburn Inn Motel (402-274-3143), and Arbor Manor Motel (402-274-3663).

GHOSTS AT THE FLEA MARKET

by Devon Adams

Ghosts at the flea market follow their possessions and watch the shoppers and the browsers. Then, when someone buys something that belongs to THEM, they follow it. They walk to the car with the buyer and ride home with him or her. So that when you buy an object at a flea market, an auction, or a garage sale, you are getting more than you bargained for. There is a ghost for every object. So if you fall asleep under that wonderful old quilt that you bought today, keep in mind that you may have company.

The time has come to clean the rooms
and carry out the furniture and all
the objects from a life that's gone.
They'll sit beside the empty house
in the spring green grass.
Tables will be loaded with collections
of lovely glass and plates,
along with simple jars and bottles
and small appliances that work or not.
Auctioneers will call their chants
for bids on family history.
Buyers buy in single lots or groups
of chairs or beds or fancy dishes.
Some buy the best, while some
prefer the useless flotsam
that is clutter anywhere it goes,
in knick knock boxes packed
full of ugly figurines and planters wedged
between old lamps and pots and pans.
There are others in attendance at the auction,
in addition to the buyers and the bidders,
who stand in quiet contemplation of the crowd.
They watch each winning bidder and
then they walk beside the purchase
as it's carried to the waiting truck or car.
When the sale is over and people drive away,
there are extra passengers riding with them.
They are sitting there unseen.
Soon the treasured purchase will be placed
inside a home or in an antique store
or in a truck that goes to towns
with famous flea markets.
All those rooms and trucks and city streets
are crowded with the ghosts that we can't see.
We walk between them and right through them
on our quest for something new and different.
They are a separate crowd, apart from life,
but still connected with their past.
They mingle with us every day
and watch us live our lives.

Poetry, etc.

ACHIEVERS

by Lila Meyerkorth

Back to school again, creating anxious
moments of excitement and healthy fear
for achieving the ladder of success.
Beginning with 0%—I can't, climbing
all the way to 100%—I did.

Even if it's like Lincoln's road to
the White House; starting with having
failed in business in 1831, defeated in
legislative in 1832, second business failure
in 1833, to suffering a nervous breakdown
in 1836, defeated for Speaker in 1838 and
Elector in 1840, for Congress in 1843, for
Congress in 1848, defeated for Senate
in 1855, defeated for Vice-President in
1856, for Senate in 1858
Elected President in 1860.

Autumn season is robed in amethyst.

Trees dressed in fire and air with
passionless desire. Nebraska football
keeping score, hopefully not so much
whether you won or lost, but how
you played the game.

Heading into service, into duty where
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Living across from the Elementary School

by Chris Hillman

The sound of a very large diesel engine warming up after its long needed rest. The squeaks of small square windows, being dropped to allow the fresh morning air to run its course down the long path inside. The glow of the flashy light shining so bright and at the ready once again. And finally, the last sign that the time has once again reached us...the sound of Hank, the lead school bus driver, as he cusses about this and that, on all his bright yellow charges. Yes folks, it's official; school starts back up again today!!!

More Winners of Southeast Consolidated Schools Sixth Annual Literary Contest

Last month's published Short Story Winners were from the Third Grade. This month's winners are from the Fourth Grade.

Short Story

MY DOG RICCO

By Hayley Huey (1st)

In the middle of January my mom came home with a new puppy. I was very excited. The new puppy was white and had lots of hair. My mom said that he was a miniature Maltese and he would not get very big. He will only weigh about 4 pounds when he is a full grown dog.

The puppy was very excited and jumped around a lot. We were having a hard time finding a name for him. Tessa wanted to name him Prince Charming. Kyla wanted to name him Usher. I could not think of a good name for him. My brother Dalton was watching one of his favorite movies when the perfect name came to him. Dalton picked the name Ricco off of the movie "Home On The Range."

One week after my mom brought Ricco home he had a seizure. My mom took him to Dr. Herring, a veterinarian in Falls City. She kept him overnight and gave him some special medicine. My mom picked him up the next day and was told that he was a diabetic dog. My mom had to learn how to give him special medicine.

Dr. Herring says we have to be careful not to let Ricco eat junk food and other things. He has to eat a special dog food and special snacks. My mom says it is okay to share things sometimes. She says to give him but a bite or two and no more.

If I am not careful he likes to steal slices of orange away from me when I am eating one. It is not just oranges that he likes to steal. He will steal any fruit that I am eating, apples, bananas, kiwis, and craisins. Craisins are dried cranberries and one of mine and Ricco's favorite fruits.

I am careful not to let him have too many fruits. I want him to live a long time and be a part of our family. Ricco is now eight months old and has not had another seizure. He goes to see Dr. Herring for regular check ups. His hair is almost long enough to touch the ground now. My mom takes him to a groomer to have him trimmed and bathed. I will go help the groomer this summer when I am not in school. I am very excited about going to help the groomer this summer when I am not in school.

Ricco is a fun dog to have around. Even though he snores sometimes, and has not quite got the hang of pottying on the puppy pads all of the time.

BUFFALO STAMPEDING

By Paige Watkins (2nd)

Hi, my name is Sanchos. I am 14 years old. I'm from part of a nomadic tribe. My tribe's name is Arapaho. We call ourselves "Our People." I used to live in North Dakota and Minnesota. I am now found in Southwestern Nebraska. I spend most of my time hunting.

One day I was out riding my horse and all of a sudden I heard what sounded like thunder. I turned around and saw a big swarm of buffalo. I hurried and I scattered off. I rode toward the tree and climbed up. As I was turning around to look if the swarm of buffalo had calmed down, I saw that my horse had gotten trampled. I had no way to get back to the tipi. After I climbed back down the tree, I started to cry. I was so sad; I had no intention of going back out riding by myself ever again.

That was the most exciting and saddest day of my young years.

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The Underground Railway Station

by Frieda Burston

We didn't know whether we would ever meet again, so we pretended that this last trip together would be just a fun trip. We would take our time, stop on the way for all the tourist attractions, buy cotton candy and balloons for Lulu, and take off our shoes to walk in the sand.

Abe had been transferred to Photo Intelligence and was being sent to Japan. The Air Force needed engineers to read aerial photos, and find the safest routes for the US Army to enter the big cities of Japan. He had one more month of training left, in Salina, Kansas. Then parting.

At Jacksonville, Florida we took off our shoes and walked on the beach. We ate hot dogs, we bought cotton candy, we drank sweet cold soda pop. We went to all the attractions, even the Psychic.

Now I was not one for seeking out Psychics. I had been a gypsy fortune teller for years at Halloween school carnivals, and I could tell a fortune with cards or hands or head bumps. I learned a "real genuine Gypsy fortune-telling" when I was still a little girl, and I thought that I was really psychic until I got to school and took advanced courses of Psychology— then I saw what a clever fake I had been, and how I had fooled myself along with everyone else.

See, my mother was born in Romania. Her father died and her mother remarried when she was five, and she was left with a young nanny while my grandmother and step-grandfather went to Paris for their honeymoon. The nanny was full of anxieties about boy friends, and was always running down to the gypsies to ask about them. Finally the nanny ran out of money.

The gypsies offered to teach her how to read the cards, so she could tell her own fortune. All they asked in return were my mother's turquoise earrings. The nanny traded the earrings for the teaching, and conscientiously taught my mother — at 5 years old— how to see the future, in return for the donation. Mama believed in it absolutely, and taught it all to me. Well, well, now.

I made a local reputation for having a lot of fortunes come true, but I never felt quite comfortable about it. Got into Junior College in St. Joe, and discovered that one little thing that Mama had taught me, was the key to my success. I wasn't seeing into the future— I was seeing into the minds of my questioners.

Each card had several meanings. How did you know which meaning to choose? Easy— pick a card that had universal appeal, and look at the client's eyes. Mention all the things the card could mean. If the muscles around the eyes tensed up, or the eyes narrowed a little, you went down that path. Watch the eye muscles.. That was the secret. The client's mind tells you what to say—

So when we came to the Psychic, I was ready to go sand-walking, but Abe said no, we were on holiday, take this in too. And we went in.

She was an ordinary looking lady with a nice smile, and she said immediately, "No, this isn't your last trip. Lots of others."

Well, that wasn't so hard to figure— Abe was in uniform. We had a little girl, so presumably we had been together a while. Barring accidents, we'd have more trips, come peace time. .

I tried not looking at her, looking at the Atlantic and smiling to keep my eye muscles relaxed. It didn't matter— she didn't look at me. She was talking above us. "I see you surrounded by mystery and music, mystery and music. How interesting!" she said. "You are going West" (Not so strange— where do you go if you don't go West from a beach in Florida?) "They want you in Kansas City, but you don't want to live in Kansas City. Whatever decision you make, it will be final, but it will be your decision. And I can't see more than that mystery and music surrounds you, but I don't know what and I don't know how. But I don't see danger, just mystery."

I reminded myself to put that into my little speeches at carnivals, it sounded like a real good future. We thanked her, smiled at each other, and left.

"Us, mystery?" said Abe. "The Air Force would never allow it— if there was any mystery in our future, someone would have checked it out already. I'd have been in jail."

"Just part of the scenery," I told him. "Part of the tourist scene."

We went West. We arrived in Kansas City and the folks celebrated Lulu's second birthday. Then they told us of their plans for us, for after the war. We would settle in Kansas City and Abe would forget about engineering down in South Texas and join the family business with his brothers.

"Well, the Psychic told us," I reminded Abe. And then we packed up the car again and went on West to Salina, Kansas.

There was, of course, no place to live. The motels were full, and people were sleeping in their cars because there was no place to rent. The new activity wasn't ready for us.

Abe went to report, I took Lulu and went to a grocery store. We bought food, and I talked with the clerks awhile about where we had come from. Then I asked, "Does anybody know of a place we can rent for the summer?"

Some of the customers laughed. But one of the men waiting on me said, "Maybe. You look like clean people. Your child is quiet. My cousin's gone for the summer, and didn't

have time to find a good tenant. I got the key. Suppose you go look at the place with me."

The "place" was in a big sprawly old house that had been divided into two apartments downstairs and two upstairs. He unlocked a lower one, and we went into what looked like an antique shop with a huge grand piano in a corner. I looked at it and said "WOW!"

He smiled and said, "Yes, my cousin is a music professor at the college. It's locked, so your little girl can't bang on it."

"My little girl isn't a banger," I told him. "Open it and watch her."

Lulu sat down and went daintily "plink, plink." with a small finger.. The store man took the piano-lock key off his key chain and held it out to me. Lulu finished plinking and closed the piano keys. The man took my check and left. Lulu and I went to meet Abe and bring him home with us.

Music surrounded us.....

Now — was there a mystery here, too, as well as music?.

No mystery developed. Life in Salina was quiet except for the adjustments people were having to make about what Peace would mean for them. For us it meant only that Abe would take us back to the small town in South Texas where he had been working on the levees. We had decided that we weren't townies, that we wanted our children to grow in a small place, as we had. The family in Kansas City assured us that the door was always open, and we parted still good friends. Life was uneventful.

Then one day, a week into the summer, I decided to rearrange the closet. The professor had left a lot of boxes of music papers, all arranged against the back wall of the closet. "Music surrounds you"— I smiled to remember the Psychic's words. But it made hanging up our clothes a little awkward. I wondered why he hadn't stacked all the boxes at the short end of the stairs, because it was a very long closet, the whole length of the big front room. I decided to do it, make notes, and put them back in their places before we left.

I moved the boxes. The back wall of the closet had apparently been part of the front room before the house was divided. It was wainscoted beautifully. The wood was soft looking and mellow. I ran my hands over it.

And a part of the wall moved.

I was looking into a small room under the stairs.

With a flashlight I saw that there was a low, crudely made rope-sprung bed under the short part of the stairs, and a rough table and stool closer to the door. On the other side of the room, another door had been cut into the wall. No locks.

I wondered if the old lady who lived in the other downstairs apartment, knew that someone could come in from this side and murder her in her bed and then escape without a clue. Then it occurred to me that somebody could come in her front door, murder her, and then come over and murder us too—

But no— hadn't the Psychic said, "No danger, just mystery—" ?

I closed the door. I put the boxes right back along the wall as I had found them.

Back at the store, I asked the store man, "Who built that house? When?"

It was no surprise to hear him say, "My grandfather built that house before the Civil War. It was still a grand place when we were little, before the family grew old and spread out. My cousin split it into apartments."

I asked, "Was your grandfather an Abolitionist?" and he answered as I expected:

"Oh yes, you could say he was the town leader in sneaking slaves out of Missouri and holding them until someone could sneak them into freedom in Iowa. Had quite a reputation for facing down slave-hunters. People thought maybe he had an Underground Railway Station, but nobody could prove anything, and he never said. They didn't, you know, or some night someone would have burned them out. And as you see, the old house is still standing."

I thanked him, picked up my groceries, and left. We had found the mystery that surrounded us.

How the Psychic had sensed the wainscoted wall, I don't know. How she had found the hidey-hole but hadn't recognized what it was, that was easy. The Civil War was long over, the coming end of World War II would have obliterated any trace of the Civil War—except in Missouri and its neighbors in Kansas. Someone in Florida would know the Civil War only from history books in grade school, and I didn't remember any history books mentioning Salina. It just wasn't that important, it was just one of the little towns in Kansas that took slavery seriously enough to do something about slaves.

But that adventure in Salina made me wonder if perhaps there was something more to telling fortunes, than just watching the eye muscles tense.....

A Farm Report from the Western Plains

The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott
August, 2005

August; the summer dog days.

As a little girl I believed the phrase referred to our dog's love of spending his summer afternoons beneath our north porch. Crawling on his belly Ike would wiggle through a hole he had dug beneath the weathered wooden steps and slink to the far corner where he could nap in relative comfort until the sun went down. As I grew older I discovered the 'dog' wasn't Ike at all, in fact, wasn't even a real dog, but a star called Sirius. No matter.....in my Nebraska sky Sirius is a grey and white farm mutt with a fondness for damp dirt and a little girl's dirty face.

Ike was my first dog; the first one I remember anyway. Named for President Eisenhower he was the only dog my parents ever named after a politician. Over the years our farm has been called home by more dogs than I care to count. They usually came in as strays, with no pedigree and of questionable family background, but not always. Every so often, as the result of unforeseen circumstances, we would suddenly find ourselves dog-less and my father would put out feelers in the local community for a new puppy. It never took long for someone to say, "I've got a passel of 'em. Come pick one out."

One spring afternoon, following a rain which made the fields too wet to work, my Dad loaded my brother and me into his pickup and we drove ten miles north of the tiny Nebraska-Wyoming border town of Henry to the Schmidt farm. We came away with two dogs, one yellow, and one black.

We named the yellow one Schmidt, after Ralph and Jurene, and called his brother Blackie, for the obvious reason. My mother wasn't expecting a double dose of dogs and was uneasy about the potential destructive nature of the puppies; her concern was well-founded, in just a few days there were holes in the flower beds and chewed rubber hoses on the lawn. After the rambunctious pair stripped her clothesline bare of clean wash and chewed every sheet, shirt, pants and pair of underwear to smithereens she put her foot down...."One of those dogs has got to go.....or else!".....Schmidt's black brother went to live with my aunt and uncle.

Years later, one bitter January evening, Schmidt disappeared. He was an old dog by then, hard of hearing and stove up by arthritis; all that remained of his youth were fading memories of chasing rabbits through the pasture and riding the wind in the box of Dad's irrigating pickup. He had sat under the leafless cottonwoods most of the day, every so often uttering a mournful howl, a sorrowful sound which spiraled up into the icy air like the smoke from a dying campfire. The next morning he was gone. My father said he had been telling us goodbye in the only way he knew how, that he had gone off somewhere to die, but I wouldn't, or couldn't, accept the reality of the old dog's death and for weeks searched every culvert, rotted stump, borrow-pit and field; I never found him.

If all dogs go to heaven then that's where he is; in his prime and running free.

Blue was the dog of my late teens and early twenties. Fiercely protective, the Australian heeler took an instant dislike to Dale when he came courting. There wasn't such a thing as a romantic goodnight kiss on my front porch steps because Blue ruined the mood by snarling and growling through a mouth full of Dale's blue Levi's.....and his leg. For the entire time Dale and I dated his left calf was black and blue.



Blue's antagonistic nature softened a bit after Dale and I married, but for as long as he lived he never let Dale and I walk side by side....he always walked between us.

He died a peaceful death. One summer day he walked into the alfalfa field behind the house, lay down to go to sleep and never woke up. For most of his dog-years he had guarded his human-family from all sorts of threats, real and imagined, and he was tired. He had done us proud.

Once the dog days arrive the illusion of an infinite summer begins to waver. In July it's easy to pretend summer will last forever, that long lazy evenings and honeyed twilights will go on and on, that snow doesn't exist and the grey days of winter will never come. It's like being twenty-one and believing old age is a disease you'll never catch. But when reams of paper and neat rows of boxed crayons replace plastic sand-box toys on the shelves of the local Mega-Mart, and county fair carnivals shake the dust from little-used fairgrounds with rides that have the exciting prospect of turning even the strongest stomach, the game of make believe becomes harder to play.

The endless summer is waning. September hides behind August's smile and the river of time flows ever on.

Farmers continue to tend to their irrigation duties with the dedication of a physician making hospital rounds, but more and more often their eyes stray towards the harvest equipment and their minds turn to calculations of repair costs, fuel prices, and the bottom line. It's a futile exercise. Plugging sixty-six dollar a barrel crude oil and two dollar corn into a harvest equation proves only one thing: If oil was grown in thirty inch rows, gasoline would be twenty-five cents a gallon.

As the old saying goes: The good Lord controls the weather.....but the markets belong to Uncle Sam.

Karen

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Money and it's Value

by Joe Smith

The other day I was looking for some help around the farm, I asked a bunch of boys if they wanted to work. I was paying \$7.00 an hr. Their father told me the boys were making a lot more than that some where else. When I was in high school, way back when, I worked out on the ranches for \$75 a month plus room and board. This was a bed in the bunk-house or the saddle room. Then I went to \$90 a month for one summer. The summer I got married I was making \$125 a month. After we moved to Colorado and went to work for a saddle shop, I was making less than \$50 a week. That is about \$1 a hr. in the 1950's.

I was talking to Red Hahn and he had the same things to say. He worked for a farmer for \$65 a month, room and board. Between jobs in the winter he worked for an uncle for room and board for very little money. Now days if a kid doesn't have a car, pickup or a 4 wheeler he feels left out. The bad thing is you can't find anybody to help you. My welding shop prices have been in the \$20 range for 30 years, so I guess to stay up with the times I had better go up to the \$30 range, or maybe the \$40 range. I would still be under what others are charging for the same work. Then maybe I can pay these high school kids a little more. I have spent my life helping others, fixing their broken things. Most of the time, they paid me for my work. Sometimes I never charged them for the work. So this gets down to what is the value of money?

As a farmer, we pay for the increase in all the costs that are passed on down to us, but when we sell our corn or beans, we really have to work hard to get a decent price for our crops. Basically we take what they offer. Fuel has almost doubled, but corn prices hover around \$2. This can't go on much longer, When we first moved to the Johnson area, in 1969, we bought diesel for 10 cents a gallon. Propane wasn't much more. Everything is way out of balance. If I didn't love to farm, I would just say to hell with it. But then what would I do to stay busy? I have been connected with the farms for about 52 years, but have done other things to supplement my income, between the farm, oil business and welding shop we have survived and done well, Even worked out when times were hard.

So how do you value money compared to 40-50 years ago? Our expenses just keep rising and the price we get for our crops keep going down. Labor for almost anything has gone out of sight. Run into a deer if you want a surprise at the repair costs. So now the question is, what do we do to turn this thing around? Corn should be about \$6.00 a bushel, beans, over \$10, in comparison to the prices we pay for our supplies. This is food for thought. Speaking of food, a Snickers bar was a nickel, Gasoline was less than 20 cents a gallon, and at the same time corn was near \$3.00. A bag of seed corn was around \$12, now just add a 0 to that and end up with \$120. Joe



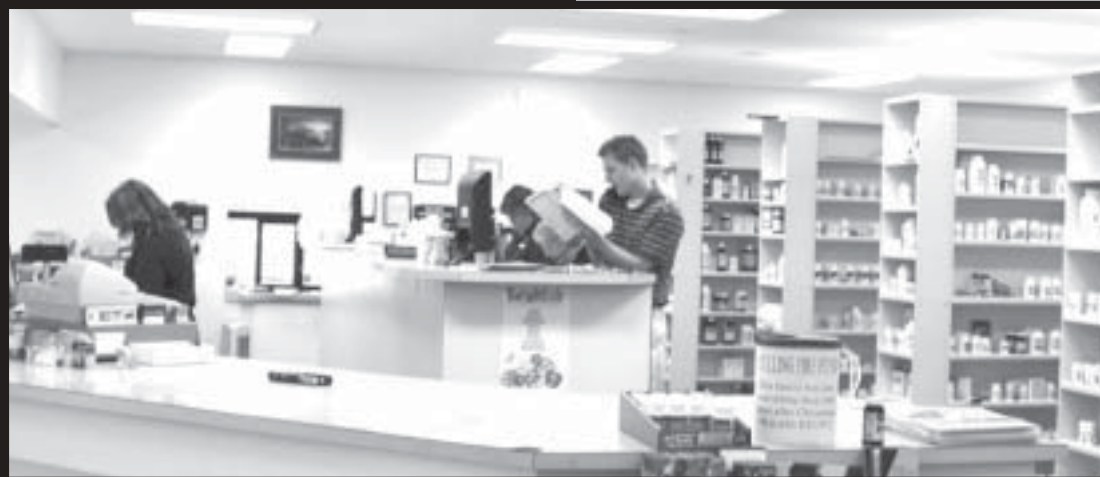
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