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Country

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April 2011

Neighbor



Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

Writers this month

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Shirley Neddenriep
Vicki O'Neal
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Thank You

Your Country Neighbor

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*Editor's note:
More than five years of
this publication are online at:*

www.yourcountryneighbor.com

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Celebrate the "Good Life" at
Brownville's Wine, Writers & Song Festival

Brownville welcomes young and old celebrants of the 'good life' to a free, three-day-long festival of writing, reading, music and wine, the 2011 Wine, Writers and Song Festival, April 15, 16 and 17. The weekend offers an unforgettable experience, a country excursion to the Midwest's only International Booktown—Brownville, Nebraska.

The festival's kick-off will be held on the three-deck, floating Bed and Breakfast, the *River Inn*, on Friday, April 15, from 5-9 p.m. Entertainment will be offered by comedienne/writer T. Marni Vos, and the band, *Midwest Dilemma*, during a dinner party (\$15 per person) aboard the boat. Everyone is welcome, though reservations are required as seating is limited.

For a full slate of the festival events or reservations, please visit www.Brownville-NE.com, call Nora Tallmon at (402)825-3992, or e-mail nora.tallmon@gmail.com.


The Wine, Writers and Song Festival is sponsored by the Nebraska Humanities Council, Nora Tallmon Web & Print Design, A Novel Idea Bookstore, The Merchants of Brownville, The River Inn, the Spirit of Brownville, The Lyceum Bookstore & Café, The Antiquarium Bookstore, Brownville Fine Arts Association, The Brownville Village Theatre, and Whiskey Run Creek Winery.

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Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

Dare I poke a little fun at religion during Lent? Yes, I dare. Mind you, I'm not poking fun at faith or God, just the attitudes that we sometimes develop about the proper way to "do" religion.

A couple of years ago I commented, via this column, on an NPR story about some women in the Northeast who were giving up the use of their automatic clothes dryers for Lent. As I recall, their focus was on the benefit to the environment, rather than on the "sacrifice" of convenience for themselves. It struck me that their choice of sacrifice was counter-productive, owing to my own – perhaps incorrect – understanding that giving something up for Lent was more-or-less equivalent to fasting. The point of fasting being to use the time you would have spent cooking, eating and cleaning up to instead pray or meditate or perhaps do a good deed, as long as you do the good deed with pure intent. No problem! I don't know about you, but absolutely *all* of my good deeds are motivated by pure intent.

But the women who were giving up their clothes dryers and hanging their laundry in their musty basements were actually spending more time on mundane activities, leaving less time for spiritual pursuits. What was the point?! If Jesus died to save the environment, and if clothes dryers are destroying it, perhaps one should give up clothes dryers all together, instead of only as a "token sacrifice" for six weeks out of the year.

As theology would have it, it turns out that the Bible actually does say, albeit subtly, that Jesus did die to save the environment. Or, more precisely, that he will restore all of creation, not just humankind, when he returns. So, I hereby officially apologize to those women in the NPR story.

This year I had my eyes opened to another way in which sincere believers differ on "doing" religion.

I observed a notice posted in a church asking the members to suggest ideas for having *fun* during *Lent*.

You can bet I did a double-take on that one. As a Missouri Synod Lutheran, I didn't think I'd ever seen those two words in the same sentence. Unless it involved an injunction *against* having any fun during Lent.

I happen to know the Pastor of the fun-loving congregation, so I asked him to clarify what I was sure was just an unfortunately worded cry for help with planning special services. It turned out that I was partly right: he was looking for help. But the "fun" part was not a mistake.

It dawned on me then that certain believers have been having fun during Lent for longer than I've been around. If you've ever attended a Friday fish fry, you know they aren't in there doing penance! By golly, if you have to eat fried bullhead that was caught in the Missouri River last year in order to demonstrate whatever it is that eating fish on Friday demonstrates, you are entitled to have some fun while you're at it.

I think I'll make this the year to start attending at least one Friday fish fry. But I'm not planning on stringing a clothesline in my basement anytime soon. The one in my backyard is good enough.

PEGGY KUSER

Certified Public Accountant

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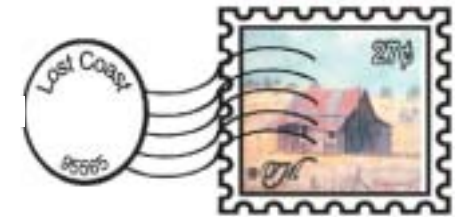
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Of Angels and Strangers

By Vicki O'Neal



People-watchers...That's what writers are. We're not nosy, of course. We just see life-stories unfolding about us, and then we have to try to make sense of it all.

Recently, I had several odd encounters...Three, to be exact.

The day began normally enough. I was driving past a Nursing Home when I saw an old lady in a bathrobe climbing over a locked gate. She almost fell. I jumped out of the car in time to catch her.

"Oh, thank God!" she cried. "The Lord has sent an angel to help me!" She clung to me tightly. "You are an Angel from heaven, aren't you!?"

Her name was Evelyn. She smelled old and tired—but she was precious. I held her 'til she stopped shaking. "Evelyn," I said. "You have to go back inside."

"Oh no!" she said. "It costs too much to stay here. I need to go home to my own house!" Evelyn was one determined old gal, but I finally got her back inside.

Our entrance caused a quite a ruckus. The Charge Nurse was a rompin'-stompin' woman who disliked escapees-in-bathrobes. I felt like such a traitor—bringing the old lady back! But what could I do? I promised myself I'd return to visit the old gal, soon.

Evelyn was an inspiration. 83 years old and still climbing over fences! What a lady!

My next encounter, that day, was on the opposite end of the scale....It was absurd. Absolutely ridiculous.

I saw a prissy young woman standing by her sports car, talking to herself. She was dressed in stylish sportswear with the word "PINK" emblazoned across her rear-end.

Ms. Pink was a drama queen if I ever saw one. I watched in stunned disbelief as she started shouting, waving her arms as she pranced about the parking lot.

I soon realized she wasn't shouting at herself. She was giving the dickens to somebody on one of those ear-phones. She raged and bellowed. She thundered and swore.

It was amazing to watch.

Eventually, she climbed into her sports car and

began grooming herself in the rear-view mirror. Tweezing her eyebrows. Putting on make-up—still talking insistently. Although she prettied up on the outside, her insides remained the same...Ugly as sin.

At last, Ms. Pink started her car and roared off down the road. Still pouting. Still shouting. I wasn't unhappy to see her go, but I regretted not getting to see the rest of her story.

After that, I felt the need to relax and regroup. I went to the coast to do some beach-combing. There I had my third encounter of the day.

It was as if the Good Lord had saved the best for last.

I found a little girl running amongst the sand dunes. She appeared out of nowhere. A small angel... A pixie with braided pigtails, big brown eyes, and a sunbeam of a smile. Though I'd never seen her before, she seemed to bond with me instantly.

"I'm Olivia," she said, skipping down a sand dune. "What's your name?"

Olivia lived in her own world where all strangers were nice...Where the plainest, ugliest rocks on the beach were the best!...Where jeep-tracks in the sand were really dog-tracks in disguise.

She weaved fantasies amongst the driftwood and seaweed. She prattled and scampered, tossing rocks and handfuls of sand. With big brown eyes, Olivia saw things I couldn't see. She dreamed aloud: chattering to me...to herself...to the sky.

Her fantasies carried us to faraway lands. She was young, yet ancient in her wisdom. Old-Worldish. Whimsical. Magical. A willow-the-wisp that flitted from topic to topic—with butterfly agility. I followed her as best I could.

At last, I caught sight of Olivia's parents sitting on a blanket, just beyond a big sand dune. So—this child wasn't an Angel, after all. She had parents... People who were as relaxed as Olivia, herself. So trusting. Too trusting, really!

I wanted to warn them about the perils of "stranger-danger"... But they waved me aside with a chuckle. "We want Olivia to live unafraid," they said. "Isn't she great? Don't you wish everybody's kids could be like her?"

I had to agree.

All too soon they had to pack up and leave. The sun was starting to set.

With mixed feelings, I watched them go. Olivia carried her "plain, ugly rocks that-were-the-best." She laughed and twirled her way across the sand dunes—following the path of jeep-tracks that were really big-dog-tracks in disguise.

As abruptly as she had come, Olivia disappeared from my life. I sighed. What memories I'd made today. What lessons in living!

Three strangers of different ages and temperaments. They spoke to me of what I was...what I could be... and what I shouldn't ever become! Ms. Pink: tough-and-jaded. Dear old Evelyn: sweet-yet-determined. Little Olivia: young-and-innocent.

I sensed that I would never see them again...and it was so.

Olivia vanished forever into the misty sand dunes. Evelyn was transferred to another Nursing Home somewhere. And Ms. Pink...Well. I really didn't care where she went. I was only glad that she was gone.

That evening, as I watched the sun sink into the ocean, I breathed a simple prayer:

Lord—let me always remember this day. Let these strangers and their stories remain forever in my heart. May I be as persevering as Evelyn... As joyful and imaginative as Olivia. And may I never be like Ms. Pink...in any way.

Amen!

Vicki O'Neal
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Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

“She is a perfectionist,” is one title that will never be attached to me. Organized, (mostly) yes, but perfectionist, nada. It ain’t going to happen. All one has to do is read my past articles to know that I make spelling errors, grammar errors, misplaced punctuation and how about those dangling participles or whatever they are. Sorry, Mrs. Warren, my college technical writing professor, I am a failure. (Hangs head).

This also happens in my gardens. Some of my gardening blunders did happen before I self-educated myself, and before I took the Master Gardening course at the University. But I am sure I have made mistakes even after enlightenment. There’s one thing you can always count on; I will never achieve excellence.

In the garden the lilac bushes are too close to the maple tree. The spruce is too close to the tall ornamental grasses (I told Steve it was too close), the daisy’s need more sun, and that climbing rose under the cedar trees; what was I thinking? The all white moon garden has shades of pink in it (either ph in the soil, or busy pollinators). Nothing is just right, nothing. Except for the plants themselves (providing they are not weeds or invasive), they are just perfect.

In reading, the numerous garden books and magazine articles that I have, I have come to a conclusion. I will never be a renowned gardener. Why, you may ask? Because, I pretty much leave my mistakes alone. Almost all renowned gardeners are never satisfied with their gardens and are always moving things around. I swear they spend more time digging and replanting than they do relaxing and enjoying. So therefore, I will be banished to the pages of mediocre gardener (if that).

But you know what, that is all right with me. I don’t garden for anyone but me. And if those two different shades of pink are jarring to your eyes, sorry, if it’s alive it stays. Maybe I am just lazy, (somewhat), maybe I have just too many acres (definitely), but the truth of the matter is I’m just mellow when it comes to my gardens.

When we have visitors to our garden they are given an oral written map of the yard as well as a diagramed map. After the heading, “Welcome to Woerth Family Gardens”, the first sentence goes like this: “This is not a weed-free landscape and we make no apologies for that fact.” Amen to that, sister.

So when you visit our gardens expect flaws, rest assured the plants will dazzle you, no matter where they are planted. Somewhere, in these three acres you will find something that will quip your interest and it may even be the imperfection of it all.

One thing I do know, and I thank heavens every day, is that I live in a place that forgives my imperfections and is part of what living the good life is all about, don’t you agree?

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The Asparagus Bed

Shirley Neddenriep

"The Farmer" and I began married life at home on a little place not far from where I live now. A little house, a little fenced yard, a little garden space.

I knew enough about a garden to plant one and to start with a perennial vegetable - asparagus. Back then garden seed and plants were ordered by mail. What excitement to have the brown cardboard box arrive, usually from Earl May! Plants would be packed in fibrous excelsior and seed packets tucked in the box corners as well!

I would unpack the asparagus roots and plunge them into a bucket of water to be refreshed overnight prior to planting. My new father-in-law came along and observed the drowning roots. He fished deep into the pocket of his faded bib overalls and pulled out his pocket knife. While eyeing the bucket of roots, he carefully carved off a hunk of Copenhagen. Then he pronounced firmly, "They'll rot!"

I looked into his weathered, browned face. His impish blue eyes sparkled with mischief. After some careful thought, I answered him, "I hope not!"

Early the next morning I took the bucket of roots to the garden spot and dug a

long, straight trench for them. The Farmer had used the Ford 900 series tractor and a 2-bottom plow to turn the earth over for a garden. (That tractor is still here, recently refurbished, and runs like a top, as they say!)

I grabbed our spade and used it to mound up soil for each of the young plants. The roots were spread out and down all around the mound, with the crown of the plant setting atop the mound of earth. Then I carried water for them and filled in the earth around each one. That asparagus bed thrived and each year spread a little. The only drawback was the waiting! Asparagus plants must be two years old before harvesting begins.

We harvested asparagus tips for the several years we lived there. I even tried Hollandaise Sauce once. And it wasn't like Larry the Cable Guy said at all, but delicious!

After we moved to this place I tilled a spot for asparagus. Boy, that was a workout! But I did manage to handle that five horsepower Troybilt tiller, or the other way around - the machine and I ended up with a place tilled nice and deep for a dozen asparagus plants. They are still producing after 55 years.

Sons, and later, grandsons helped care for the asparagus. They hauled manure to the bed as an excuse to operate the Ford tractor and loader. I could not persuade them to enjoy eating asparagus, though. In that regard they agreed with Larry.

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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler

Fishing:

The River is clear and running pretty low right now. The ice flows are a thing of the past and fishing boats are a common site on the river in the last couple of weeks. Fishermen has reported the action is slow but well worth the trip out on the chilly water. They reported catching mostly small channel cats and fair size sturgeon. Nothing real big yet but it is pretty cool yet with the water temperature right at 40 degrees. What are they biting on you say? They seem to be hitting night crawlers mostly but pretty good action on dough baits and chicken livers. So it time to get you river poles out and check out your tackle. Fishing time is coming on.

Lake & Pond Fishing:

A month ago I was talking about 10 inches of ice on area ponds and lakes but you can color that gone. All the ice is gone and with minimal rise from run off. A lot of the time the run off would cloud the water and raise the pond/lake so access is more difficult and the fish can't see the bait as well. But the waters are clear and the fish are biting. Catching mostly bluegill that are hitting on night crawlers and power bait but also had some luck catching a few small crappie. I used some wax worms I had left over from ice fishing and had luck on them too. The fish are not real aggressive but are biting.

Hunting:

The Spring Turkey Seasons are here and permits are available. The spring season dates as follows:

Season Dates - Spring

Archery — March 25-May 31

Youth Archery — March 25-May 31

Youth Shotgun — April 9-May 31

Shotgun — April 16-May 31

Permit Limit: Three per hunter

Bag Limit: One male or bearded female turkey per permit

Permits are \$24 this year & \$6 for a youth permit.


It could stand to warm up a little but if you want to brave the chilly wind a little there is plenty of fishing and hunting to do right now. The Spring Turkey Seasons is here and with the warmer weather there will be more opportunities to catch a mess of fish or bag one a big Tom. So get your permits and get ready

because the time is 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."




This month's picture is of the Peru Boat Ramp – you know that the river is low when you can see the concrete slab of the ramp exposed.

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The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



Like most inhabitants of Nebraska I'm a connoisseur of wind and well acquainted with its ins and outs, ups and downs.....and several of its assorted children, namely Windsock, Windchime, Windchill, Windmill, Windpower.....and "Windblown" a soulful tune about the plains....and those of us who choose to make a life here.

When I first heard the song I nearly tossed it onto my imaginary scrap-heap of dislikes, but the breathless, whispery voice of Kimmie Rhodes, and the uncommon lyrics, begged a second chance.

It's a wonder I resisted so long.

"Winters that seem not to end - go out like a lion and then - springtime comes straggling in - all windblown" fits Wyobraska's wild and wanton March like a comfortable pair of shoes, and what farmwife doesn't picture her red-eyed, wind-burned, tousled-haired husband in the words "I can see you standing right there with the sand in your eyes.....and your hair all windblown"?

I know I see Dale, weary and worn, his eyes narrowed and bloodshot after hours of doing battle with a fierce 50 mph wind even God himself couldn't tame.

The song doesn't keep me from disliking the wind; it just pretties it up.... like a single yellow daffodil in a flowerbed of weeds.

While spring's first Sunday was lovely, the warm temperature and calm sky were temporary. Monday was okay, Tuesday less so, and Wednesday disgustingly dirty...inside and out.

Like a baby with a bad case of colic, a cold wind kicked and screamed from sunrise to sunset, stirring up clouds of dirt outdoors and laying down a film of fine dust indoors which smelled like mud when wiped with a damp cloth. Fancy-pants decorating magazines often talk about 'bringing the outdoors in' but I doubt this is what they had in mind.

Today, Thursday, was nearly as bad; the wind wasn't quite as forceful, but a skiff of early-morning snow was proof-positive that 'real' spring is further away than the calendar, and our newly arrived pair of robins, would have us believe.

Farmers took to the fields this week shredding stalks, spreading manure, and disking; planting season is just around the corner and there's a certain sense of urgency that wasn't there a week ago.

Thursday evening, as we trudged past the over-flowing manure spreader on our way to the feed shed for buckets of cracked corn, seven year old Katelyn, our oldest granddaughter, wrinkled her nose in disgust. "It smells like money." I said, echoing my father's words, but she wasn't buying.

Covering her nose with the sleeve of her coat she mumbled, "No it doesn't....it stinks!" I tend to agree.

Like many farm families, we're struggling with day-light savings time; while it might be the 'bees-knees' for eight to fivers, for those of us who work until it's too dark to see our hands in front of your faces, it's the 'bees-behind'. I dislike eating supper at nine, doing dishes at ten, and rolling into bed at eleven....just to get up at 5 a.m. to a pitch-black sky.

Whoever coined the phrase "Time stands still for no man," never met an American politician.

I've a busy week ahead with paper work, yard work, and spring cleaning all staring me in the face. But I'm not worried...I've an extra hour a day to get it all done.

As Always, Karen

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Poetry by Devon Adams

CAMO

He was watching me, as I walked softly along the deer path. The mud was wet, like dark chocolate waiting to be fudge, and cotton candy clouds drifted by, in no hurry to be anywhere else. Tiny green blades were pushing up through the old, faded leaves from a long lost summer, and branches were sprouting velvet buds still wearing their fuzzy brown jackets. He was certain that I didn't know about his hiding place, beneath the arches of the wild rose bush. His big brown eyes followed my steps, but he never moved a muscle, seeming to hold his breath. He had become invisible, he thought, with his camouflage of neutral grays and browns, blended through his fur. He was good at this, I thought, or he would have been dead a long time ago. Life lasts only as long as you can hide, as any rabbit would say, if they chose to speak to you.

BREAKING UP

Like a bad lover, winter kept coming back with more snow, melting into cold mud that grabbed shoes and boots and hooves, and wouldn't let go of them without a fight. Then reality finally dawned. With a warm sun that heated through the chill and broke apart the jams on the rivers, Spring won the battle, and made a memory of dark ice.

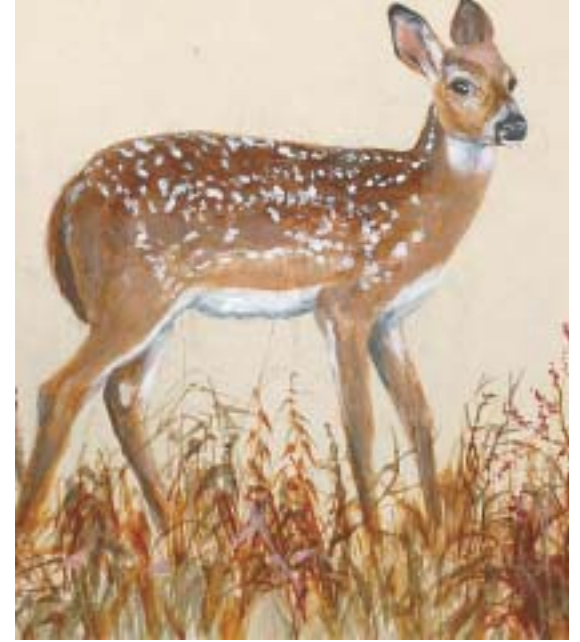
SKY SHADOWS

They'll be here soon, dropping out of the sky like silent angels, floating low to find the bodies of the dear departed animals who've left for better pastures. If the crows and the coyotes, and the other critters who are here throughout the winter have left some bones and skin from the season of the cold sun, then the newly arrived turkey buzzards will make quick work of them, while they wait for the newly dead that will be appearing shortly along the roads, and on the farms and other places where life exists beside death.

DOWN BELOW

There is a space lying under the blue air that is full of turbulence and movement. It is crusted with the dust of earth that supports a thin layer of humanity. Like toys strewn on the living room floor, houses form clusters of cities, connected by ribbons of roads. There are fields and trees and many rivers of water that run toward the seas of the planet. But lurking below this frosting on the cake is a massive kingdom of rocks and stones that floats on a boiling mass of molten lava. It is hidden from our eyes, and we cannot see the formation of the storms that rock us and destroy our lives and our structures. We are jolted awake in the midst of our naivete, only to perish in the violent spasms that move and shape this globe. We are trapped between the sky above and the dark sky below, tossed about by currents in the air and in the earth. Our remarkable existence could be cut short, becoming just another footnote in the long list of extinctions.

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GLIDE PATH

In the shell pink light of an early spring evening, their silent wings glided over the barely green hills. They descended into a valley of the blue bluffs, tipping this way, and that, riding the last of the breeze. Finally, their stilt-like legs found the soft mud on the bank of the pond, and they were home, the blue herons of summer.

Sandhill Crane Migration near Kearney, Nebraska, March 16, 2011



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