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Snow Geese East of Rulo, early March, 2015



Snow Geese rise up from feeding east of Rulo, near Big Lake, early March.

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Voices

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

Writers This Month

Devon Adams - page 4
Carol Carpenter - page 11
Stephen Hassler - page 3
Merri Johnson - page 5
Lee Nyberg - page 8
Marilyn Woerth - page 9

Thank You

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COVER COMMENTS

These snow geese were feeding in a field along the highway east of Rulo, near Big Lake. I have another photo on page 10 taken at the refuge.

March brought some good weather which in turn, brought migrating waterfowl... finally! So I had a few good photo experiences. Unfortunately, the geese didn't stay around long. But as they say in Chicago, there's always next year.

I was luckier with the Sandhill Cranes on my visit to Kearney. See pages 3, 6, and 10.

Next month I hope to photograph a Bald Eagle pair and their nest, and take advantage of the bird activity in my backyard. Enjoy April!

That Spring Feeling?

Stephen Hassler

When my brother and sister were 9 or 10 years old and shopping for a gift for our Mother, they spied a goblet high on a shelf where special items were kept out of reach of little hands. The colorful piece was a lovely shade of violet with silver trim, and a lid sculpted with clumps of fruit; grapes, cherries, and such. It took all of their savings (\$3.00 and change), to make the purchase. It may have been a gaudy knick-knack to an adult, but it was a magical object to these small children, and they knew their Mother would be as happy with it as they were.

As one of them stood holding it, experiencing a shiver of joy, nervous fingers lost their grip and the goblet dropped to the floor, breaking into several chunks of ceramic. Their expressions of horror were as overwhelming as their previous feelings of joy; expressions that hovered between shock and tears, so moving to one of the other shoppers that she took pity on the children and purchased the remaining matching goblet as a replacement.

I recall that shiver of joy, that over-whelming “feeling”, when I was very young; sometimes when being “tucked in” at night, sometimes before a Sunday picnic or a fishing trip, always on Christmas Eve. Maybe it’s a family thing.

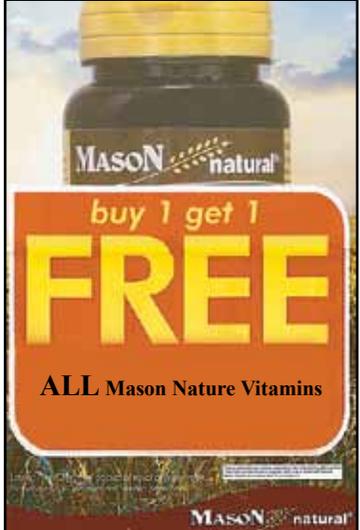
Perhaps I’ve entered into the early stages of my second childhood, because for the last few weeks I have been occasionally experiencing that ‘shiver’. It’s as if I knew I were going to win the lottery, or maybe the feeling is due to a more mature version of, “In the Spring a young man’s fancy turns to thoughts of love..., etc.”

I have been eagerly awaiting Spring, and maybe that’s why I’ve seemed a bit giddy lately. Well, I’m not going to question these ‘good feelings’ any further. I expect “this too, will pass”. So in the meantime, I’ll just ‘roll’ with it. And try not to lose my grip.



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Sandhill Cranes at Dawn, March 21, 2015, near Kearney, Nebraska

Poetry by Devon Adams

OLD HOME PLACE

I see it up there,
hanging high on
a branch, far from
the hungry teeth
that would devour
it's occupants. It
looks sturdy, still,
after being battered
by the wanton winds
of last year, when the
orioles raised their
chicks with hope and
hard work. Perhaps
they'll come back to
the old home place
once more, and find
it strong enough to
reinforce, before the
eggs are full of life
and ready to be laid.
Old, empty houses
are sad to see, with
only memories to
keep them company.

IT'S ONLY NOW

After all the days of winter,
with it's stark, cold beauty
that can be cruel, we can
believe in light that melts
the ice and warms our
chilly, weary bones.
Only when the sun hangs
high can we see sweet
grass grow, savor soft air
and smell the flood of
perfumes drifting with
the gentle breezes. We
have sailed away on the
warm ship of spring.

LIGHT FROM SHADOWS

Looking for truth
means searching
for light in the dark.
Unless we find our
hidden thoughts,
we can't know the
inside of ourselves.
So we must dare to
examine fear and pain,
that masquerade
as anger and rage,
before true peace
will come to us.

HOW DO YOU KNOW?

Days are like dust, blowing
past without notice, until
they've become years.
Then the people who look
back at us from mirrors
are someone else. They look
old, and act old, like pieces of
worn machinery. Bones and
muscles creak and pop and
stop when they should go.
Some days the image in the
mirror is confused and can't
remember yesterday, or how
to drive from here to there.
But how do you know when
that image is you, and not the
person you always thought
you were?

BACKGROUND MUSIC

Every memory has music
playing in the background.
Maybe it is popular songs
from high school days, or
wild concerts on the grass
about the grass, or the
reverberating voices of
our friends and enemies
from the highs and lows
of our lives, when it was
hard to find the rhythm
and the rhyme that fit our
style of thinking and belief.
It might be chimes from
chapels, or evening prayers
sung by choirs of doves.
The harsh notes of panic
and fear from the guns of
war are never silent, even
after we come home, but,
with courage, they can be
muted behind the sweeter
sounds of life. The important
thing about the music is that
you have to learn to listen.

SUNFLOWER SPLENDOR

The arms of the morning
reach over the edge of
earth in a desperate
scramble to get away
from winter and into
the warm embrace of
a forgiving spring.
Soil drinks the heat
like a desert drinks
water, and there is
a swelling of growth.
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Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

Raise your hand if you're one of those people who always feel like you've forgotten something as soon as you leave city limits. I'm right there with you. It doesn't matter if we're going to visit our daughter in Georgia, our son in St. Joe, my family in northwest Iowa, or we're just going to Lincoln for the day.

We pull out of the garage and almost immediately I start getting that nagging doubt about whether I packed my prescription or left it on the kitchen counter. Did I put my makeup bag in the suitcase or forget it in the bathroom? Is my suitcase really in the trunk or is it sitting in the garage? I don't know how many times hubby has had to pull over so I could open the trunk or my suitcase and re-assure myself.

Last Saturday was kind of like that. We had made plans a few weeks earlier to meet friends in Lincoln for lunch. After several rounds of email deliberations, we decided to meet at the Green Gateau at 11:30. Our friend is familiar with downtown Lincoln and offered to email driving directions to us. On the evening before the planned outing – with said email not yet received – I attempted to call our friend, but got only a busy signal.

Not to worry, said hubby, he'd consult Google Maps and check out the best route. He googled the restaurant address and spent about 15 minutes "driving" around the vicinity of the restaurant via the Google GPS street-view map. We could see the restaurant and the surrounding businesses there on L Street, right where Google said it should be. Hubby cruised up and down and all around checking the one-way streets and parking options. If you've never "driven" on the computer, it's like playing a video arcade auto racing game. Frankly, I find the experience more confusing than helpful.

Anyway, hubby felt confident of locating the restaurant, so I didn't bother to check my email for our friend's directions. Saturday morning came and we headed out at the appointed time.

But a block and a half from home, I got that nagging feeling. Maybe I should check my email one more time. Even if we knew where we were going, what if something had come up and the plans had changed? Plus, I hadn't brought my friend's phone number along. (I'm not one of those people who have the number of everyone they know in their cell phone. Plus, I had left my cell phone on the kitchen counter, so.....)

"I really think we'd better go back for the phone number," I said, trying for a meek, yet firm, tone. Hubby heaved a sigh and got that here-we-go-again look on his face, but he turned around. (That's one more notch in his belt of spousal long-suffering.) Once inside the house, I thought it best to take a quick look at my email. Sure enough, there was the promised message from our friend.

My hunches on whether or not I've packed everything may not be all that reliable, but my intuition on that Saturday was spot on: not only was the restaurant street address incorrect (thanks for nothing, Google), but our friend's phone number had changed. Had we driven to Lincoln on our incorrect information we would have been driving in circles and been unable to reach our friend by phone to figure out where in the world we were supposed to be. Hubby would have been really frustrated then.

The Green Gateau turned out to be on S. 10th Street. I still haven't figured out how Google Maps managed to show it on L Street. But the food was wonderful, the company was great, the weather was beautiful, and we found a great architectural antiques store practically next door, which I can't wait to go back to. All-in-all, it was a most fortuitous day.

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Sandhill Cranes near Kearney, Nebraska, March 20, 2015

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This Female Cardinal's Spring plumage is especially vivid.
Photo by Carol Carpenter

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Alzheimer's Affects Us All



Difficult Parents and Dementia: What to do when they need you, but won't accept support.

By Lee Nyberg

"Mom won't go to the doctor—what now?" asked my friend, (we'll call her Liz). She and her dad believe her mom needs to be evaluated for dementia; after all, it might be the reversible kind, due to medication, thyroid or metabolic problems or depression.

Luckily for Liz, her dad is able to offer unobtrusive support and while her mom's behavior is increasingly concerning, there hasn't been a disaster. When faced with resistance to medical treatment or help, sometimes families must wait for a crisis in order to act.

Here are 4 key reasons an older adult may avoid your attempts to help:

1. Avoiding the doctor: They may suspect dementia, and be afraid the doctor will confirm their fears.
2. Refusing to discuss financial arrangements: May be embarrassed they haven't saved more or worried you will pressure them to "gift" their money when you understand just how much they have.
3. Depression: No interest or ability to act.
4. Resisting help: They are grieving and in denial of the realities of a chronic illness, like dementia.

When the parent with dementia has a spouse to help with daily life, you have more flexibility. Families may be able to delay bringing in professional care until a person begins to wander, becomes incontinent or has such challenging behaviors that families need respite. (Note: Wandering may happen in early stages of Alzheimer's.)

Persist, respectfully, in your offers of help.

- Remember you are all adults, even if one family member has dementia.
- Use detachment to keep your emotions and frustration in check.
- Suggest the healthy parent guide the parent with dementia ("Help me do this for our daughter...")
- Encourage siblings and family friends to give the caregiver short breaks (for example: "Let me take George to get his hair cut and you can have a few hours to yourself."). Periodically suggest adult day services and other forms of respite care. Offer to pay.
- Explain you need both parents to sign HIPAA forms for medical information release so your can talk to their doctors in case of an emergency.
- Use bargaining. Liz's family cruise, a much-anticipated trip, became leverage. Here's what Liz said: "Mom, if you'll go to the doctor to have your medications and thyroid evaluated, we'll be able to go on our cruise together with a clear understanding of what to do in an emergency. Dad's getting a check up, too." Liz's dad arranged a cognitive evaluation for both of them prior to the appointment, so the medical professionals were able to incorporate it in a low-key way.

Unfortunately, when at least one parent is capable, both may close ranks and refuse to cooperate or communicate. If you feel like you are just waiting for a crisis, use this time. Plan how you would handle an emergency that removed the healthy parent from caregiving, even if temporarily. For example, brief your siblings on dementia care basics, bank your vacation days at work, and interview home care agencies. This sort of preparation helps you stay calmer if you do have to dive in to help.

Lee Nyberg seeks to help families and those living with Alzheimer's through education and her company, Home Care Assistance. Home Care Assistance is North America's premier provider of in-home care for seniors. Our mission is to change the way the world ages. We provide older adults with quality care that enables them to live happier, healthier lives at home. Our services are distinguished by the caliber of our caregivers, the responsiveness of our staff and our expertise in Live-In care. We embrace a positive, balanced approach to aging centered on the evolving needs of older adults. For more information visit our website: HomeCareAssistance.com or, if you'd like to speak with a Care Manager, call us at 402-763-9140.

Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

Words are complicated. As children we are taught to use our words. But then we learn quickly to be careful on how we use those words; don't use too many words, don't use words to tell an untruth or to get you out of trouble, and don't use bad words. In other words use the correct words, the correct amount of words, correctly, appropriately, and if writing, spelled just right (my demon). AUGH, it's amazing that we don't all just clam up and become hermits.

But there is a reason why the printing press is considered the number one most important invention in the modern world. And why people held prisoners or isolated from humanity will report how much they missed the sound of another human voice.

"Sweet words are like honey, a little may refresh, but too much gluts the stomach." — Anne Bradstreet, 17th century poet and author. Oh Mrs. Anne Bradstreet those are definitely true words. As a mother, wife, former employee, grandmother, sister etc., I know something is up when praise upon praise is heaped upon me. I get that little clutch in my stomach that says "Now what do they what?" or "What have they done?"

"Without knowing the force of words, it is impossible to know more." — Confucius, 5th century Chinese philosopher. For the month of March my book club read a book that left me sad and troubled. A futuristic book written some time ago, but the future was the 1990's. The author's story centered on the fact that man had become sterile; the story revolved around humanity's reaction to that reality. Words used to provoke a feeling, tell a story, a subject to be thought about, discussed, philosophized. Was I glad I had read the book? The happy part of me says no, the educated part of me says yes, the true me says I wish I hadn't, but I'm okay with it. Words are complicated, so is life.

"Words are a pretext. It is the inner bond that draws one person to another, not words." — Rumi, 13th century Persian Poet and theologian. I found myself shopping in a big box store surrounded by people in the middle of the afternoon. While standing in line at the checkout counter I realized that it was eerily quiet and the clerk and the customer ahead of me both had sad looks with their mouths drawn down as much as humanly possible. When I looked around it seemed like everyone in the store pretty much looked that same way. Well this just would not do. When it came my turn I made some pleasant comment to the clerk, she looked up interested and responded. In the few minutes we had, we both agreed life is good and this is a wonderful place to live. When I reached for my change, she grabbed my hand with both of hers, shook it and gave me a huge smile. I left the store with a hop in my step. Her human contact did more for me than she will ever know. Where life is good if we just share it.

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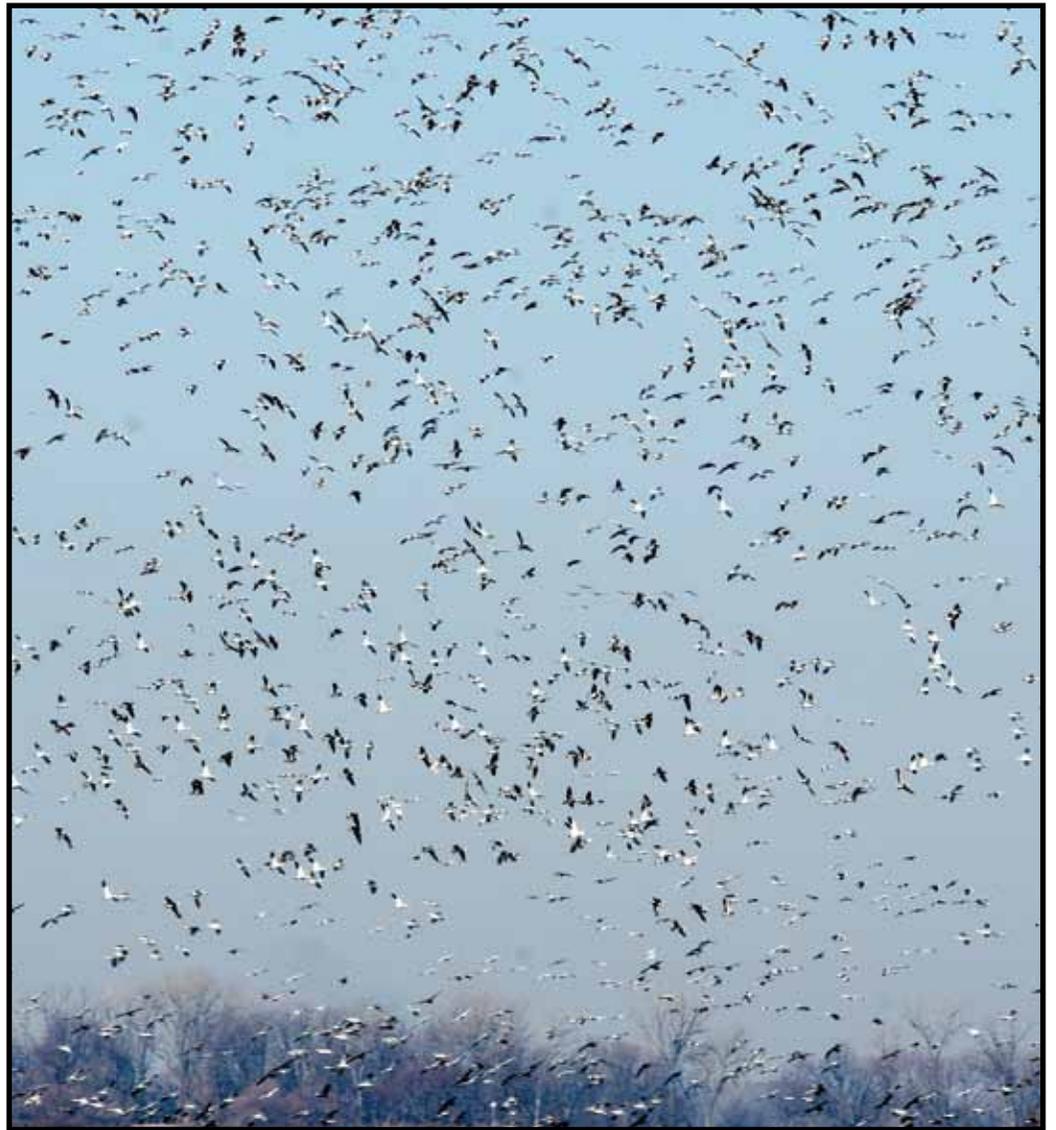
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Snow Geese at Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge
Near Mound City, Missouri, mid March

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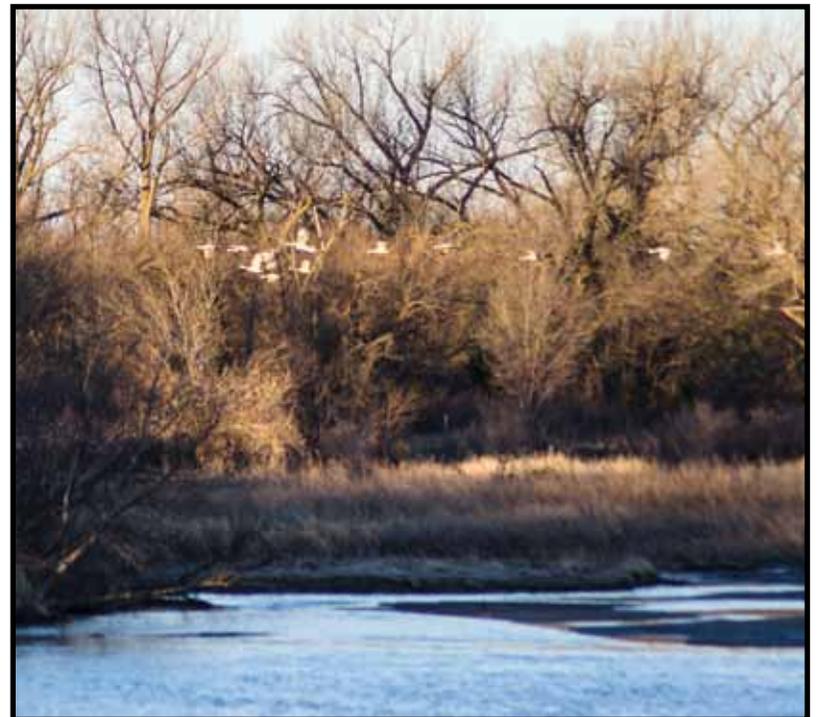
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Just after Sunrise, Cranes leaving Platt River roost
Near Kearney, Nebraska, March 21, 2015



Four in the Morning Blues

Sleep steals away and I roam the halls
 Norwegian Pearl in the Atlantic sailing
 through dark waters, at four in the morning
 blues music walks along where
 two guys at the bar, three sheets to the wind
 oblivious to the night
 holler like jackpot winners.

All the performers have gone to bed
 only the insomniacs and me
 wandering around in the cold
 looking for a quiet place
 away from mops and vacuums
 from the kitchen bang and rattle
 and I walk to the back of the ship
 to watch the steel water roll
 on the fringe of not night
 of almost day
 hovering at the edge
 of a forgotten dream.

Dusty Star Mountain

In Glacier National Park,
 along the east side of the Continental Divide
 at the west end of St. Mary's Lake
 Dusty Star Mountain rises;
 eroded by glaciers and thrust faulting,
 sedimentary rock narrows to a knife's edge.

Blackfeet believe this sharp peak sacred
 for when lightning strikes and sparks fly
 the native people believe that
 when sparks rain down
 flowers bloom
 and if the sparks fly up
 they turn into baby stars.

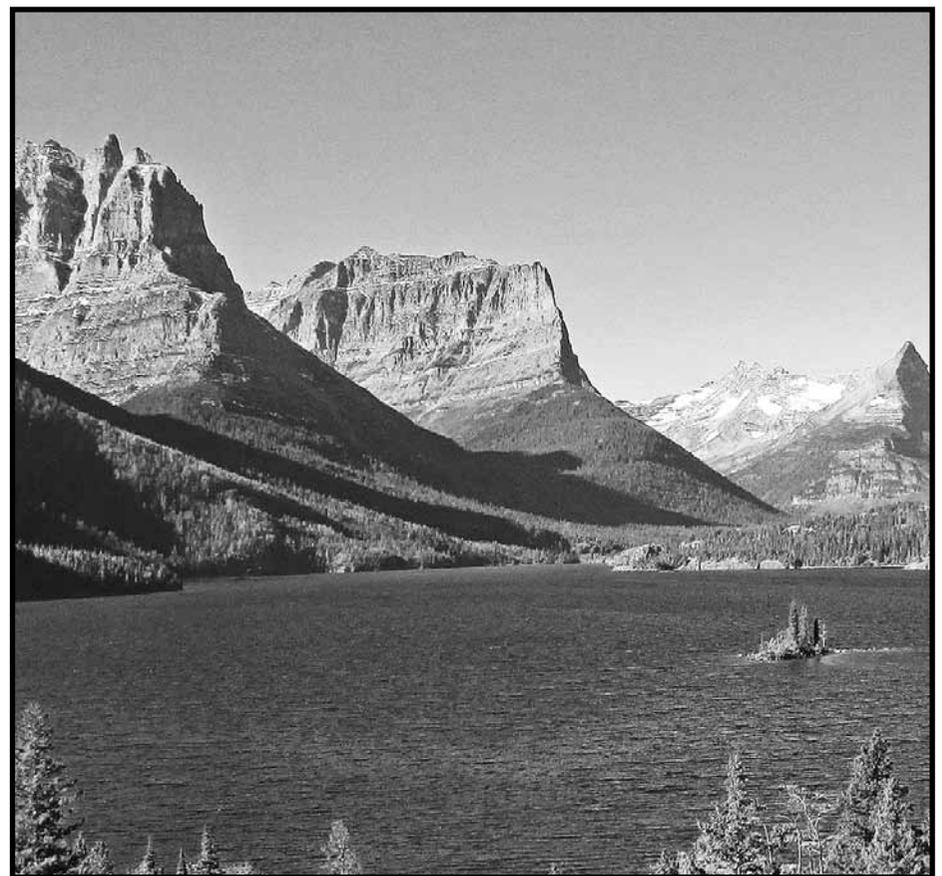


Below Zero

Sunlight sparkles
 the crackling snow and
 in the bright air
 smoke swirls across the valley
 and over the ridge by the cedars
 between the neighbor's house and ours.

I look out the window, thinking about
 the pioneers who toughed winter's icy breath
 in sod houses or tiny wooden shacks
 gathering snow to melt for coffee or tea
 burning candles against the dark.

And I realize that I'm just not that tough because
 I can sit here and think about the settlers while
 relishing blueberry buttermilk pancakes
 and sipping my delicious warm cinnamon coffee
 knowing that the cold and dark will not
 be the end of me.





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