

# Your **Country Neighbor**

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December 2010

Cooler Temperatures Up North Have Resulted In The Return Of The Snow Geese to Squaw Creek Wildlife Refuge --- Taken Nov. 19, 2010

## Voices from your Valley

American Bald Eagle	2
Merri's Diary	3
Devon's Poetry	4
"Where Life is Good"	5
"A Tuesday Drive"	6
Hunting & Fishing Report	9
"The Face of Drought"	10
"A Magical Christmas"	11
Coupon for Valentino's!	12

## Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

### Writers this month

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Merri Johnson  
Shirley Neddenriep  
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Karen Ott  
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Marilyn Woerth

Thank You

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### *Your Country Neighbor*

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### *Editor's note:*

*More than five years of  
this publication are online at:*

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One of a pair of eagles that lives in the wildlife refuge year round.  
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## Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

We're on the road again, heading to St. Joe for a multi-tasking weekend of shopping, helping our son with home projects, and playing with our granddaughter. We're eager to see her model her Tinkerbelle Halloween costume that we've only seen via emailed photos so far. That will be our reward for soldiering through the shopping.

The list is organized and we plan to hit only three stores, but I'm still dreading it. There are a few mundane, hardware store items to be gotten, but then we're into the tall grass of shopping: actually having to make decisions. This is where it all falls apart. What to select from the baby gift registry that is three pages long? Then there's the futility of shopping for cheap, ready-made Christmas program props, which I'll end up having to make myself, an option which is really unfortunate since I may actually be worse at "crafting" than shopping.

But, that's not the worst of it. I also have to shop for another woman!! It's bad enough to have to choose clothing for myself, but choosing the right style, size and price for someone else is almost too much to ask. I have a sick feeling I'll be on a return and exchange mission on my next trip.

But I have a strategy. NO comparison shopping. The first item that fills the bill goes in the cart. And I will not dither over the design on the Lowe's gift card. My son-in-law will not care if the card is decorated with a Christmas wreath or a hammer. Plus, my husband will be with me to keep me on task. If he were Catholic, he'd surely be sainted someday for virtuous marital patience during shopping trips.

It's a good thing there's nothing big on the list because we have an 8-foot step ladder in the car with us. Literally. In the car. There's barely room for the two of us. Our car has fold-down front and back seats, so you can actually slide an 8-foot ladder in through the trunk and all the way to the windshield if you want. Of course, that limits passenger seating, so I'm installed in the back behind the driver's seat. My husband didn't miss the opportunity to point out that today I'd be a "real" back seat driver. Very funny. Of course, in the next breath he was bemoaning having a ladder, instead of me, for a front seat companion. I guess it didn't occur to him that I was in the same situation.

Speaking of ladders, my husband will be up on this one tomorrow, helping our son hang a new fan from their 12-foot living room ceiling. Hubby acquired plenty of experience installing ceiling fans over the course of living 15 years in a house without central air conditioning, but none in a 12-foot ceiling. What are those statistics on people falling off ladders, again? Never mind. I don't think I want to know. If you haven't read about him in the newspaper by now, it means he beat the odds.

The question is, should I stick around for his balancing act on the ladder, or take our granddaughter to the park and teach her the joys of jumping in leaf piles? No brainer, you say? Sounds good to me, too.

I really shouldn't complain about spending a couple of hours shopping today, when my husband will have to endure the shopping *and* spend his Sunday either up on a ladder or flat on his back under the bathroom sink dealing with the frustrations of plumbing in tight spaces. He really does deserve sainthood.

## PEGGY KUSER

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# Poetry by Devon Adams

## MUD TRACKS

It rained last night, and the trails are marked with clean cut edges and points of deer hooves, little ones next to big ones, baby steps following mom, deeper impressions from the feet of a buck in a hurry. Along the edge of the path is a crooked seam stitched by tiny bird feet, looking for this and that, here and there. Threaded through and between the marks of hooves are perfect hand prints, with detailed fingers, and sharp nail points leaving exclamation points. The raccoons have many stops to make in their endless journey to find food and entertainment. Soon the mud will dry and dust will blur the evidence, but the traffic never stops, on this wild highway.

## A WALL OF TREES

The clouds hung low over the fields like a damp gray comforter, and breezes gusted in chilly waves of mist. Coats and hats were helpless against the penetrating cold humidity of the dark and dreary winter afternoon. Harvested fields were open to the blast, but behind the timber the air was calm, with only the top branches waving their skinny fingers, trying to catch the wind. The trees were a wall of protection, and they were full of birds hiding inside the cocoon.

## RED GRASS

The green has gone with the frost, and the stems and long leaves have been painted in a brand new frame of mind. They change their attitude as the sun moves across the winter sky, screaming loud in red at sunrise and sunset, settling for a milder mood at other times, and under clouds. But when the rain comes and soaks their clothes, the grass throws a party and wears the wet in streaks of magenta crimson, blushing to be caught in wet T-shirts.

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## GEOMETRY LESSON

Think of the sky as layers, with every gain in altitude marking a new level, as in a geometry diagram, detailing the definition of a plane. Then picture jets drawing white lines in the upper atmosphere, as single prop planes chug slowly below them, forever losing the race from horizon to horizon. Below them are lots of wings with feathers, pointing south or north, in spring or autumn, as geese and ducks fly their ancient sky routes. Then, closer to the ground, are the little birds, and all the bugs that seem to flit at random, with their motors buzzing and whining in an endless meander along the plumes of scent woven through the foliage.

## Where Life is Good

by Marilyn Woerth

The stillness of the crackling cold brushes across the window pane. Floating white specks continue piling higher and higher upon themselves. Silence, broken only by the shrill sounds of young laughter spearing the air with wafts of warm dewy breaths.

A giggle, a crunch rapidly repeated many times more, the smack of hard plastic upon the crusted snow. Cousins holding hands as the banana colored sled nestles next to the racy green one. Both gaining speed as they traverse down the swollen white landscape, ducking between trees, while metallic digital boxes click as they streak by.

A flip, a roll, a giggle, a smile and it's time to do it all over again. "I win," says one. "It's my turn," says another. A fuzzy navy head encrusted with sparkles rushes by trooping up the hard packed launching mounds. Smacking the top of that icy run, once more, once more, once more.

Another spill, another red liquidy nose, kissed and licked by a puppy's rough warm tongue. Another giggle, another warm frosty colored breath escapes floating towards the peak of the hill.

Organized activity at the top, taller versions of the ones below, rolling, smacking, piling high, now a wool hat, a knitted scarf, pieces of charcoal, a red pepper smile. The swiftness of well versed hands adept to the task they perform.

Looking down from the house a woman smiles, delighted to have her expanding family home. She stirs the pot upon the stove. Warm sweet chocolate in frothy milk with a smidgeon of cinnamon tweaks the nose. The rush of frigid air as bundles of energetic chaos spills into the room. Bustling chatter turns to soft speech as freezing hands turn warm upon the heated mugs. Another cozy warm memory tucked next to an aging mother's heart.

Wishing you all a fuzzy-warm memory where life is good.

# Merry Christmas



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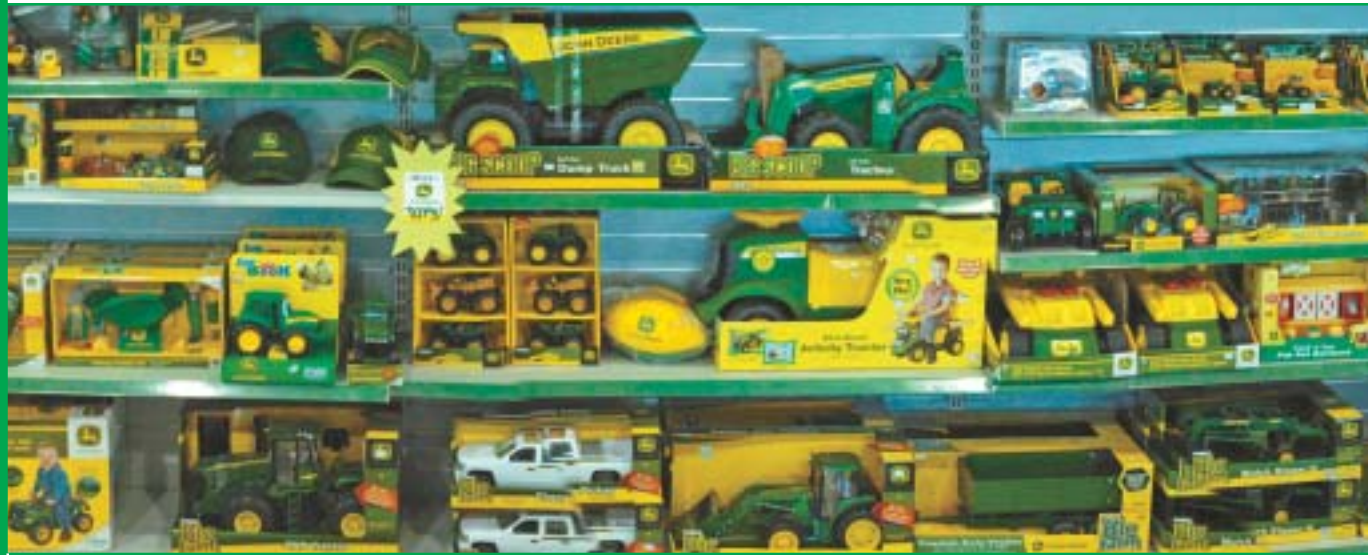
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## A TUESDAY DRIVE

by Shirley Neddenriep

After lunch one November day, I drove one of our harvesters to a far field to retrieve the combine, then on to Nebraska City to see my optometrist. Along the way a few combines still rolled, gathering in their harvest. A little sigh of relief that ours was finally done in great weather.

At the City a crew worked constructing a new intersection just south of the Viaduct. Seems a three-way turn has been declared a danger zone for traffic. They are using the town's 'incentive funds' to re-design and construct that corner. A detour flagged with signs guides drivers through a labyrinth into the city.

Getting out of the town that day was difficult. (Later, I learned that all the detour signs had all been knocked down by a driver who smashed the 'No Trucks' sign and drove on through!) After my appointment, wearing sun shades to protect my dilated eyes, and with an angel on my shoulder, I drove south hoping to find the way home. A little blind, confused, and dizzy from a still undetected sinus problem, I turned left a block too soon, missing the south bound and now unmarked detour.

After a quarter tank of gas and blocks of wind-swept orange and gold leaves, I began to wonder. Would I ever find an exit?? Streets were lined with banks of gold asters, red blurs of color - Lantanas still in bloom or a Stop sign?? Finally, I went right to the top for help. A parked garbage truck; its driver picking up stuff. I reasoned he would know the way around town. "Which way?" "South," I answered. My car was headed north at the time.

He gave me directions using street names and landmarks he knew. Even if I had written them down, I would still be circling at dark. "What if I went to the north edge of town?" "Go to the stop sign, turn right and at the bottom of the hill, turn left. It will take you to Frontage Road and Highway #75 South."

With shuttered vision and my angel (though tense) still on my shoulder, I managed to stay clear of exits leading to Lincoln, Omaha, or Wyoming until finally the circuitous route brought me to the familiar intersection and a red light. There, only 27 miles from home, a tank came toward me. He had the right to turn across in front of us all, and drove onto #75 South, MY ROAD! to block or escort me for the twenty miles ahead. A wide load. No room to pass. A pilot car preceded him, an escort came behind.

Continued on page 7 >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

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<<<<<<<< Continued from page 6

The pristine white tank turned out to be the leg of a wind tower, hauled on a low-slung flat bed especially designed and bearing a tag of \$145,000. That trailer had about 1/2" clearance to the highway surface. It was headed to a Wind Farm along Hwy #8, near DuBois, according to news gleaned from the "Grain Line." We traveled south at 60 mph, the going rate, so no one needed to pass; but they did. One old pickup towing an older trailer came around to use my buffer space I'd saved behind the escort, to exit at Paul. Same for each town: Julian, Brock, Peru. All in a big toot, all exceeding the speed limit, while behind me a big rig bided his time. He wanted around, couldn't pass the wide load, knew that, stayed back. I suppose that he and the tank traveled in a non-contracted convoy as far as Hwy. #8. I hoped they traveled safely, as my angel and I had.

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# Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler  
(photo submitted by author)

## Fishing:

The River is in its banks but still running full at this time. This is not the norm for this time of year. Usually it's lower and the rock formations that form the channel are clearly visible. Local duck and goose hunters seem to be getting in the river with their boats, but I would think that it would be a little hard to find any calm water with the river as high as it is. Ducks and geese will usually look for a calm eddy or back-waters to lull their day away, in between eating runs to the local farm fields on the Missouri River Bottom. The eagles are back too, as they follow this year's migration of water fowl south. Fishing has been pretty scarce as of late but there are some diehards who are still hitting the banks this last month. Pansize channels for the most part and they are hitting the crawlers and dough baits pretty regular. But with the opening of hunting season the focus has changed to hunting and it's time to put the poles up.

## Hunting:

Fall hunting seasons are turning into winter hunting seasons with the recent snow storm that blew through. Although it warmed back up, it still lets you know just how fast the weather can change. Also, the cooler weather has got the deer moving big time. Deer are in places that you don't usually ever see them, even right in town. It's always been said that they go where there is the least pressure from hunters and they are right. If they would just stay off the roads – it seems an awful waste of meat to have one killed in an auto collision. It doesn't help out the auto owner either – maybe the body shops.

Upland game and seasons are as follows:

Species	Bag	Possession	2010 Opening
Cock Pheasant	3	12	Oct. 30
Youth Cock Pheasant, Quail and Partridge Seasons	2	4	Oct. 23
Quail	6	24	Oct. 30
Partridge	3	12	Oct. 30
Rail	10	20	Sept. 1
Snipe	8	16	Sept. 1
Woodcock	3	6	Sept. 25
Dove	15	30	Sept. 1
Squirrel	7	28	Aug. 1
Cottontail	7	28	Sept. 1

### Turkey Season Dates - Fall

Archery and Shotgun - Sep 15 - Dec 31  
Permit Limit: Two turkeys per permit  
Bag Limit: Two turkeys per permit

### Fees

Resident - \$24 Nonresident - \$91  
Youth - \$6  
Resident Landowner - \$12.50  
Nonresident Landowner - \$46

### Deer Season Dates

Archery - Sep 15 - Nov 12, Nov 22 - Dec 31  
November Firearm - Nov 13 - 21  
Muzzleloader - Dec 1 - 31

### Fees

Resident - \$30 Nonresident - \$209  
Youth \$6

**Season Choice (antlerless) - Sep 15-Jan 18 (archery); Dec 1-31 (muzzleloader) and Nov 13-21 and Dec 26-Jan18 (firearm)**

Deer Season Permits are still available over the counter or on-line till the close of deer season.


There is a lot of hunting seasons open right now – you can almost pick what species you want to hunt now. The days are already getting shorter, so the critters are out there feeding up for the long days of winter. You need to pick one out and get out there before the weather gets too harsh. 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 hunting picture is of Sam Carman from Peru showing a nice 10-point whitetail buck taken opening weekend of firearm deer season.

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# The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



I think I'd like new kitchen chairs...and a table to match.

About eight years ago a razor-clawed house cat (God rest his soul) mistook the scrolled legs of our sturdy oak chairs for scratching posts, and ever since the unsightly grooves have virtually shouted to all visitors, "Bad Cat!...Bad Cat!" From the seat up the chairs look great.....from the seat down they look like varicose-veined fireplace kindling.

It's been fifteen or twenty years since Dale and I found the set at a Denver furniture mart...and that's a story in itself. As far as store employees were concerned Nebraska might as well have been a foreign country. Delivery was out of the question; we left a deposit...and a promise to return in two weeks time.

But the weather unexpectedly warmed.....and Dale went to work in the fields.

So.....I drove to Denver with a friend, who graciously agreed to ride along even though there would be no opportunity for recreational mall-hopping. We cruised into the furniture store parking lot about mid morning, and after I'd helped load the table and four chairs into the pickup box, lashed everything down with a combination of cow rope and baling twine, we headed home on I-25.

You haven't lived until you've hurtled along a busy four-lane with a load of furniture precariously perched in the back of a farm-pickup; if there'd been a rocking chair up-top we'd have looked like the Beverly Hillbillies.

The new table and chairs replaced a 1970's fake wood, chrome plated, plastic-upholstered, swivel-chair cheapie...which had, in turn, taken the place of a 1950's hand-me-down; a built-to-last, chrome and Formica kitchen set given to us by my parents, a table where, until I married, I'd eaten almost every meal of my life.

My mother didn't have the luxury of a separate dining room; she rolled out cookie dough, kneaded bread, cut out dress patterns, and did paper-work at the same table where we ate our Thanksgiving turkey and Christmas goose. Around that table she entertained friends,

relatives, cattle-buyers and ministers, served early morning coffee to my field-bound father, fed birthday cake to neighborhood children, and after-school brownies still warm from the oven to two famished kids.

Our days began and ended in the kitchen, around a table where we gathered as a family; each meal a strand of yarn in a finely knitted sweater, a visible link in a chain stretching back to my grandparents, great-grandparents and beyond. A line from Joy Harjo's poem 'Perhaps the World Ends Here' says it best, 'It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.'

We don't do much of that any more.

I was fortunate to grow up during a time when families still sat down together to eat....a time before Fast-Food and Happy Meals reduced 'family time' to the miles traveled between McDonalds and home. Perhaps the saddest commentary on modern life is that we have willfully cheated our children, and ourselves, for

the sake of convenience.

I'm as guilty as anyone, blaming throw-together suppers eaten in front of the television on a hectic schedule and fatigue, when in reality it'd be just as easy to insist on a sit-down-together meal where prayers are offered, and thanks given. The words "Come Lord Jesus be our guest." have the power to make any meal, home-cooked or brought home in a sack, that much sweeter.

Perhaps it isn't new furniture I need but a renewed commitment to family togetherness, a pledge to make our kitchen table, not the TV, the center of our home, and our kitchen a spot where old traditions can be harvested and new ideas planted.

It worked for our parents...it can work for us.

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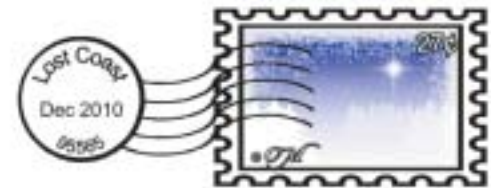
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## A Magical Christmas

By Vicki O'Neal



Lovely. Magical. Inspirational. That's what Christmas is supposed to be....

But so often, we find ourselves fussing and fuming. Mall-mania. Bumper-to-bumper traffic. Credit cards, calories, and chaos. Our "Silent Night" has become a "Noisy Night-mare." We're searching for happiness in the fast lane, when it's not even on the map.

You know, folks. I think we need to take a detour, this year, and head for the Hills!...See where the back-roads lead! That's what Michael and I are doing for the holidays. We're heading for our vacation home in the snow-capped hills of the high country... Far away from the rumble of 18-wheelers and rush-hour traffic.

The honking horns fade away, muffled by falling snow. A gentle countryside unfolds around us like a soft quilt, all stitched together with rail fences—embroidered with windmills. Old mailboxes. Leaning chimneys.

Silence settles. We breathe deeply of the icy air, reveling in the scent of pine and spruce.

This is the America of yesterday...Norman Rockwell's World, nestled deep in the ancient hills...A lasting heritage preserved in canning jars, lard soap, and wax candles. The coziness of this world tugs at our hearts during the Holidays. It makes us yearn for sleigh rides...Chestnuts roasting on an open fire...Christmas caroling.

"Silent Night...Holy night. All is calm...all is bright."

Onward! Onward through this winter wonderland, we go! It's evening when we pull to a stop on our hilltop. The sun is sinking behind Sleeping Giant Mountain. Like a golden coin, the sun slides down...down...down...disappearing into the Giant's pocket.

Dark shadows are beginning to creep in from all sides. The howl of coyotes echoes in the valley, spiraling along ravines and canyons until it fades into the dimness beyond Pilot Rock.

Hidden in the gloom is our cozy little niche. It's still a bit primitive. No electricity. No indoor

plumbing or running water, but that only adds to the charm of our holiday getaway.

It's our Home-Sweet-Home, away from Home!

We light a fire and the lanterns. A soft glow fills our little homestead. Somehow, we've managed to step back in time. We've been transported to another age, another dimension.

Flickering firelight. The scent of candles and burning lamp oil. Memories emerge from the shadows, coaxed out of hiding by the dreamy lantern light. Memories of Christmas in the past: Granny and me, decorating the tree. Making Christmas pie while a cold wind howls outside the window.

I look at the calendar on the wall. It's a Norman Rockwell calendar with pictures of yesteryear. Potbelly stoves. Church steeples and old country stores. Our modern conveniences didn't even exist back then—yet the people were smiling and happy. They thrived on adversity—defying hardship.

Thumbing through the calendar, I marvel at the passage of time...It's such a strange thing. Time—moving faster and faster in a headlong rush toward eternity. Here we are, nearing the end of another year...another decade! 2010. Where has this decade gone?

I stare out the window, gazing at the myriad of stars. The Milky Way spills across the heavens—millions of stars cascading into the vast blackness. Those stars have been observing the inhabitants of Earth for a long, long time. They are the same stars that saw the Baby Jesus at the first Christmas!

In the east, Jupiter has risen—bright as the Star of Bethlehem. It seems to be our own guiding "star" this Christmas, directing our attention to the Christ child—the reason for the season.

I feel awe-struck at God's plan and His handiwork in the heavens. It's a magical, orderly universe.

"Oh Holy Night...the stars are brightly shining...."

Suddenly, a streak flashes across the heavens, a shooting star heading west—following the path of the vanished sun. It's in a hurry...a renegade star

with a fiery tail.

"Star-light, star-bright!" I say quick as a wink. "Shooting stars I see tonight! I wish I may, I wish I might...have the wish I wish tonight!"

The meteor vanishes—a bright splash of light disappearing behind the Sleeping Giant.

I stare after the renegade star. I wish for Peace on Earth...for a Norman Rockwell World where charity and neighborly kindness prevails. A place where everyone lends a helping hand. I wish for love and harmony for the inhabitants of our planet. Homes for the homeless. No more war and stress and misery.

Even in these turbulent times, there is a balm in Gilead—as the Good Book says. And somehow, we must find it.

Across the room, the lantern light flickers. It dips. Wavers. Then goes out. Darkness descends on our little homestead.

I feel my way through the dimness and curl up on the couch. There, I bow my head and pray to the Creator of stars and swirling galaxies, above.

I pray 'til sleepiness overtakes me, then I drift to a land of peace and harmony...a land that's magical...where children make Christmas pie with their Grannies all year 'round. A land without a cold, howling wind...without wars and strife and heartache.

On the far horizon, the Sleeping Giant slumbers, and so do I—cozy and warm in the quilted countryside.

The moon rises. The Big Dipper slides lower in the west.

And our little "Star of Bethlehem" shines on.

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*Vicki O'Neal*  
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