



The American Pelican Migrating Through Squaw Creek Wildlife Refuge, Nov 10, 2011

Voices from the Valleys of the Nemaha

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

Writers this month

Devon Adams
Merri Johnson
Vicki O'Neal
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Thank You

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

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Voices from your Valley

Merri's Diary	3
Devon's Poetry	4
"Where Life is Good"	4
Hunting & Fishing Report	9
Vicki's Holiday Column	10
"The Face of Drought"	11
Coupon for Valentino's!	12



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Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

Christmas is coming, and I've been following the "25 Days of Crafts" feature articles in the Omaha World-Herald. The countdown is at Day 17 as I write this. So far, I've succumbed to only one craft, which I must keep secret lest the intended recipient of said craft/gift reads this article. Mind you, I haven't actually started the project yet, so there's still a chance that I could come to my senses and just buy a gift instead.

Generally speaking, I avoid craft projects, but something about the holidays weakens my resolve to avoid wasting my time on something that I obviously have no talent for. Over the years, I've made a fabric Partridge-in-a-Pear-Tree wreath, dough-clay tree ornaments, garland and gift tags cut from recycled greeting cards, pine cone birdseed feeders, small knitted items and even origami. Most of them ended up looking like they were made by an 8-year-old wearing mittens and a blindfold.

Having opposable thumbs is touted as one of the major advantages humans (and other primates) have over the rest of the animal kingdom. But, I'm one of those people described as being "all thumbs." Not helpful when it comes to making hand crafts, or manipulating a screwdriver or a roll of Scotch tape for that matter. In fact, I'm doing good to wrap our Christmas gifts without taping my fingers together in the process.

What inner demon drives me to keep trying hand crafts? A desire to bond with earlier generations? The need to demonstrate some kind of self-sufficiency? Craft envy? Maybe I was deprived of adequate crafting opportunities as a child. Now that I think about it, the closest thing to childhood craft activities that I can recall are cutting paper dolls out of Sears and Roebuck catalogs and making wreaths out of strips of dry cleaner plastic tied onto a wire hanger frame. My own mother commented that she doesn't recall "any particular artistic achievement" by me during my childhood. Perhaps sensing my disappointment at this lack of maternal support, she quickly added, "But I do remember that you got a blue ribbon for your made-from-scratch angel food cake at the county fair once!" Yes, well, a cake isn't exactly a "craft item," now is it?

So, here I am, still pursuing success at hand crafts every Christmas. Maybe it's time for me to renounce my quest. But I keep thinking that one of these years someone will come up with a craft that's doable by the dexterity-challenged crowd. And I don't mean something that involves cotton balls glued onto a Styrofoam form. Not that there's anything wrong with that sort of thing. It's just that I don't do very well with glue and cotton balls.

I know what you're thinking: give it up already, Merri! To that I say, but Christmas is the season of hope! Hope springs eternal! Yada, yada, yada. I'm open to suggestions here, people. Send your craft ideas (with very specific instructions) to 2416 S Street, Auburn NE 68305. Help me impress my mother, before it's too late. She's not getting any younger and I'm not getting any more coordinated.

On that note, I'll sign off and wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.

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Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

We have all heard that laughter can increase your life expectancy, limit frown lines, and give you a more positive outlook on life. And most of us do believe those statements. So the question is how many of you practice what you believe in? (Hand to ear.) Hmm, it doesn't sound like many of us are indulging in the cheapest way known to man to extend our lives.

Well gee, how come? Could it be that your mother, like mine, when coaching me for the dating scene (at 15) told me, "Boys like girls with long hair, that aren't as smart as them, and that they can beat at sports, and oh yes, smile a lot". Then she told me not to ever laugh, that I have a weird laugh, to just smile, pretend to be dumb, and never beat a boy at sports or games like chess.

So, I set out to find a boyfriend who liked smart girls, didn't mind being beaten by a girl (but not in chess, he is smarter than me, wink), and loved my laugh (it is weird). Thank God, for my laugh, somehow my laugh has become my signature. People seem to identify me by my laugh.

While working at FC Head Start one year, the resident grandmother said to me, "Marilyn Monroe (she always called me that), I just love your laugh, I can find you no matter where you are at by just hearing your laugh." I tend to get that a lot. It is loud and weird. But most people seem to like it (?). I do know that I really, really like to use it.

Now, I am not generally a funny person, per se, but I do tend to find humor in things that others would not. The most humorous place I find humor is myself. I do, say, and think some pretty dumb things and find myself in some really ridiculous predicaments. I seem to have a knack for that type of thing. Now, I could be girly and use my tears, or manly and get disgusted but I prefer the old belly laugh, and unfortunately it gets used a lot.

I mean really, isn't life humorous. Just look at ABC's *America's Funniest Videos (AFV)*. You cannot watch that show without producing several tremendous belly laughs (at least I can't). Comedians like Red Skelton, Carol Burnett, and Steve Martin knew what they were doing, when they directed the laughter at themselves.

During the holiday season when statistics show that depression runs rampant, and life gets stressful, take a moment and write yourself into your own comedy. It also helps to surround yourself with babies, children, animals and other silly people, like friends who know how to laugh at themselves. Or watch a comedy, or *AFV* and *loosen* those tummy muscles, because that is where all good belly laughs come from, just ask Santa.

Now, take a page from my own comedic past: Me (Avon deliveries), Spring, first thaw, un-graveled country road, stopped car several hundred feet down the road, red dress, nylons and heels, get out of car, sink to ankles in *cold*, wet mud. With tremendous effort, pull shoes out of mud, throw shoes back in car. Start heading toward farm house at intersection, get to intersection, looked down at feet. Feet have grown three times normal, covered in mud and straw. Knock at farm house, farmer scratching head at crazy woman, with mud/straw covered feet, wearing a red dress, laughing her head off. Can you picture it?

Belly laughing all the way through my life, where life is humorously good. From my house to yours, *Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays*.



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Poetry by Devon Adams

RIVER OF SAND

The wide flood is gone, for now.
Debris is scattered randomly, resembling
the devastation of an ocean tsunami, and
the ordered lines of managed crops are
no more than a memory of past harvests.
Currents have left evidence of their course
in the dry ripples and folds of sand that
stretches from bluff to bluff. Wind lifts
and sifts the abrasive particles into shifting
dunes that cover the desolate landscape.
The identity of the river has changed,
and it has once again become the ruler
of a massive drainage system that
tilts toward the sea.

REST IN PEACE

A frost has come and gone,
but the marigold is still yellow,
and the sun has warmed the air.
The long grass is soft, and there
is silence here, away from the edge
of the wind. It is a peaceful place to be,
without a thought about tomorrow.

SUN DOGS BITE

They are snarling
at the edges of the sun.
The sharp glint of their teeth
waits to cut into warm flesh,
as they sit on the horizon.
The high cirrus clouds that
have spawned their vicious
intent ride on a wave of frigid
arctic air. The creatures wait
for prey that ignores the warning,
and their massive jaws will freeze
live bodies with surgical precision.

CEDAR SEASON

A December noon is crisp with frozen
sunshine caught in the fragile prisms
of snowflakes clinging to cedar boughs.
Gaudy crimson berries dangle from
twisted bittersweet vines that decorate
the bitter greens. Added ornaments are
alive, with the brilliant feathers of cardinals.
They vie for space with raucous bluejays
and the tiny twits that are chickadees, and
finches glowing lemon lights inside the trees.
The beauty of the season is extravagant,
but the birds seem unaware that it exists.



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One of the Bald Eagles at Squaw Creek Wildlife Refuge following the late Fall Migrations.

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Veteran's Day Parade, Leavenworth, Kansas

Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler
Photo Submitted by Author

Fishing:

The Missouri River has been slowly going down this last month. It's well in it's banks but still high for this time of year. Folks that have been out on the river by boat have varied comments about sandbars and the devastation from the flooded river flow on the banks, the vegetation, and the designed rock channel structures. Some damage will never be able to be repaired with holes of 50 ft deep - Where do you start? I think that's the feeling of a lot of folks that lost their farms and homes from the summer flooding. It's nothing that you would wish on anyone - in my opinion, "It's a National Disaster". This flood affected the entire nation one way or another. On a good note - The fishing this last month has been pretty good. We have had a couple of dandy rains that have got the fish to biting due to all the bait the rain pushed into the river from its tributaries. So if you can get to the river you have it made. Many of the roads to the river don't take much rain to make them impassable due to the saturation that they took all summer being submerged. Big ones and little ones are still hitting right now. The big ones are hitting chubs, gold fish, and cut bait. The little ones are hitting crawlers, chicken livers, and dough baits. It's a good time to get out and get a nice mess before the weather changes.

Hunting:

All kinds of small game season are open right now. Upland game and seasons are as follows:

Species	Bag	Possession	2011 Opening Date
Cock Pheasant	3	12	Oct. 29
Youth Cock Pheasant, Quail and Partridge Seasons	2	4	Oct. 22
Quail	6	24	Oct. 29
Partridge	3	12	Oct. 29
Rail	10	20	Sept. 1
Snipe	8	16	Sept. 1
Woodcock	3	6	Sept. 24
Dove	15	30	Sept. 1
Squirrel	7	28	Aug. 1
Cottontail	7	28	Sept. 1

BIG GAME HUNTING

Fall Big Game Seasons are opening one by one.

The November Firearms Deer Season caught the rut in full swing. The Bucks are active and many have fallen for that reason. The Game & Parks has started a new rule this year to get the doe population down in this area - it's called Earn-a-Buck. When you check a Buck in you must also check in a Doe (or antlerless deer). This isn't as easy as it sounds. A hunter will let the Doe go by so the Buck will follow into the shooting field. Then there is the shot on the Buck. Where do you think the Doe went? She's gone! Do you see the problem? It's a new rule that has folks buzzing this season. We'll have to see how this all plays out in future seasons or if the rule completely goes away.

Fishing is good on the river right now. And a lot of hunting seasons are open now also. You can pretty much pick the season you want to hunt right now. That's Good! It's also the time of year that you better get it in if you're going to. The weather is going to predict what you can and can't do soon. So get some fishing or hunting in while the weather holds. 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 Joe Whisler from Peru shown with a huge bodied 10-pointer taken near Peru on opening weekend of November Firearms Deer Season.



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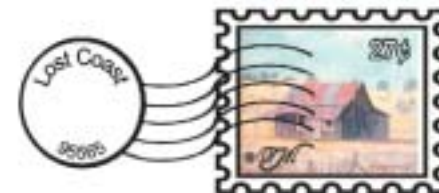
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Heck of a Heartland Holiday

By Vicki O'Neal



I couldn't believe it was happening.

My long-awaited vacation was falling apart before it had even begun. I was about to be arrested. Maybe even get thrown in jail. Then my relatives would have to bail me out, and—

But wait! I'm getting ahead of myself. You probably won't believe my story, of course...but it's true. Every word of it.

You see, my kinfolk were planning a big holiday reunion in the Heartland. Everyone would be there...People I hadn't seen for eons!

Panic set in. Here I was, ten pounds overweight. Wrinkled...with sunspots. Old as Methuselah. I couldn't go to the reunion looking like that!

I started jogging and exercising. Giving beauty treatments to my hair and skin. Home remedies, that is. One evening, my husband came home to find me working diligently on my skin.

"What now?" he said. "Why are you vacuuming your face?"

"I'm not 'vacuuming' it! It's called suction-microdermabrasion. A salon treatment like this costs \$100's—maybe even \$1000's. I've saved a fortune...See?"

He was speechless. And not at all appreciative.

"Later," I said, "I'll polish it off with a bit of vinegar and baking soda, which is better than the hemorrhoid cream I used to wear. It makes me look years younger...don't you think?"

My husband could only shake his head. "Scary..." he said. "That's scary."

I ignored him and went to get my suitcases.

I spent a week packing and repacking my luggage, finally jamming it all into my car in the usual disarray. My monkey-puppets would be going with me, as well as my pet rose plant, "Rosella."

I couldn't leave them behind with my husband for a whole month. He wouldn't care for them properly. They would all die.

I set off on my 2000 mile trek—well prepared for the journey. I had bags of celery, carrots, and zucchini. I planned on losing ten pounds by the time I got there.

The trip was long and tedious. I got halfway across the country before running into trouble. Red lights started flashing in my rear-view mirror. A trooper pulled me over. I'm not sure why. I wasn't speeding and the monkey-puppets were behaving themselves, for once. There was no reason for us to be stopped.

The officer made some flimsy excuse about a blinker. He was a young rookie cop. He took one look at my monkeys, my vacuumed cheeks and greased-up hair, and said: "I need to run my drug-sniffing dog around your car."

"Go right ahead," I said. "I'm squeaky clean. I haven't even had a speeding ticket in 35 years of driving!" The trooper and his dog walked 'round and 'round the car. They came to a halt by my trunk. Something was wrong.

"I'll have to ask you to open the trunk," the Rookie said. "My dog indicated that it contains an illegal substance—and she's always right."

I felt stunned. I was about to be arrested.

With cars whizzing past, I waited there on the roadside while the officer rifled through my suitcase. Underwear and holey socks. Bras and nighties. The rookie didn't miss a thing.

He questioned me endlessly. It was too much. After awhile, I started to laugh...it was better than crying. He stared at me, mystified.

"Sorry, sir," I said. "But I write a newspaper column—you see—and I'm thinking how my readers won't believe a word of this story when I tell them about it. It's too wild."

The Rookie smiled as if he were thinking of a few wild stories himself. Monkeys and mayhem! Carrots and roses and zucchini. Nobody would believe his stories, either.

"Oh Lord...!" I said. A sudden thought had occurred to me. A rational one, at last. "I think I know what happened. I've got money in my trunk. Maybe there's cocaine on my cash...?"

The officer frowned. "Possibly. Most bills have traces of drugs. Where is the cash exactly?"

"I stored it in a canning jar. I don't trust banks, you see, and—" I trailed off.

Right...! It sounded fishy even to me. Nowadays, everybody carries debit cards—not cash. All except for drug dealers, of course. And paranoid country-folk like me.

The trooper found the canning jar and thumbed through my money warily. He wasn't yet convinced of my innocence. Letting a person like me loose on society was serious business.

But at last, the officer made up his mind. He decided to pretend that I was harmless.

"I'll let you go for now," he said, closing the trunk. "By the way..." he said. "If you write your article about this, don't use my last name, OK? Just call me John."

"You don't have a thing to worry about, sir," I said. My readers don't pay much attention to my stories. They don't believe a word I say."

We parted on friendly terms, then. I made my escape and the rookie drove away, looking for other unsuspecting motorists to harass.

And that's how it all went down, my friends. A scary ordeal. Harassment in the Heartland! Cocaine on my cash! Not a fun way to start a holiday.

In conclusion, folks, I've got just one thing to say. When you're packing for the holidays—don't put your cash in a canning jar and hide it in the trunk. And be sure to leave behind your monkeys, rose plants, carrots and zucchinis.

For good measure, don't vacuum your face, either. It's sure to bring bad luck.

Well. Goodbye for now, my country neighbors. Here's wishing you a happy holiday in the Heartland!
May God bless you all...!

The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



When 11/11/11 dawned a century ago, our old farmhouse was almost brand spanking new: bright-colored calcimine paint covered the horse-hair plaster walls, the wooden floors were unmarred by one hundred years of feet, furniture legs, and dropped dishes.....and wavy glass still sparkled from picture-perfect window frames.

There was no heat in the upstairs bedrooms, rendering them as cold as a barn in wintertime, but downstairs the kitchen's wood-burning cook stove kept the three (kitchen-dining-living) rooms tolerable. A single sink with a manual pitcher pump provided plenty of fresh cold water...and the flickering yellow light of kerosene lamps chased away the evening shadows. Dusk came early at that time of year, and the dark evenings seemed especially long.

The family who lived there felt fortunate; a few years earlier the largest trust company in America (Knickerbocker Trust) had failed, fueling a series of bank and trust bankruptcies. Coupled with stark recollections of the 1890's Deep Depression the 1907 financial panic made folks appreciate things they had once taken for granted...a house, a job, and food on the table.

November eleventh, 1911 was just another day; within three years Europe would plunge the world into a war that ultimately gave us Armistice (Veterans) Day, but when folks spoke of war that November they were thinking blue and gray...not army green.

This morning, November 11, 2011, my life is firmly planted in that same house. Over the years its rooms have housed boys who left for war and never came home, and families of men who returned to live the American dream. Within its walls memories

abide; the silence of grief, the laughter of children, murmured prayers.

All bought and paid for by the American soldier.

Remembering all who have served.....

Thank you.

As Always

Karen

Melinda D. Clarke, CPA

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