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January 2013

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American Bald Eagle Pair,
December 7, 2012, Squaw Creek Wildlife Refuge



Bald Eagle's Nest at Squaw Creek Wildlife Refuge



Juvenile Bald Eagle... I think.

Voices from your Valley

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Voices from the Valleys of the Nemaha

Writers This Month

Devon Adams
 Carol Carpenter
 Mary Ann Holland
 Merri Johnson
 Shirley Neddenriep
 Vicki O'Neal
 Karen Ott
 Marilyn Woerth

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Your Country Neighbor

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COVER PHOTO

Stephen Hassler

It's not often I see an Eagle pair on the same branch, but December is too early for nesting (I'm assuming these are mates), and this pair is probably just watching for an afternoon meal... or waiting for Spring.





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ILLUSIONS

The path was narrow, and
it twisted through the trees
like a long ghost snake.
Fog swirled in wet filaments
that wrapped the timber
in a quiet gray blanket.
Old mud held the tracks
of unseen creatures who
were hiding and watching.
On the crest of a ridge that was
almost invisible, the path took a
violent curve as it veered to miss
the feet of a bird-like monster.
Huge scaly toes held the soil in a
death grip, with sharp talons buried
deep into the flesh of the hill. Long
stiff legs attached to those toes rose
into the dense fog, leaving the body
of the apparition to the imagination.
But, in a momentary shaft of sunlight,
the illusion of feet was revealed to be
the exposed roots of a tree, which really
did dig into the soil with the great power
that it takes to remain upright and alive.

BONY FINGERS

The stark white apparition
is a skeleton hand rising
out of the earth. Bony fingers
seem to reach toward the sky
in the gray dusk of winter.
But this is not evidence
of buried secrets, nor is
it the scene of a crime.
The bones are branches
of a sycamore tree that has
grown tall and white with age.
It is a reminder that all of us
are built upon similar frames,
and that our time is limited,
before we are reduced to the
same bare proof of existence.

Poetry by Devon Adams

ALMOST LOST

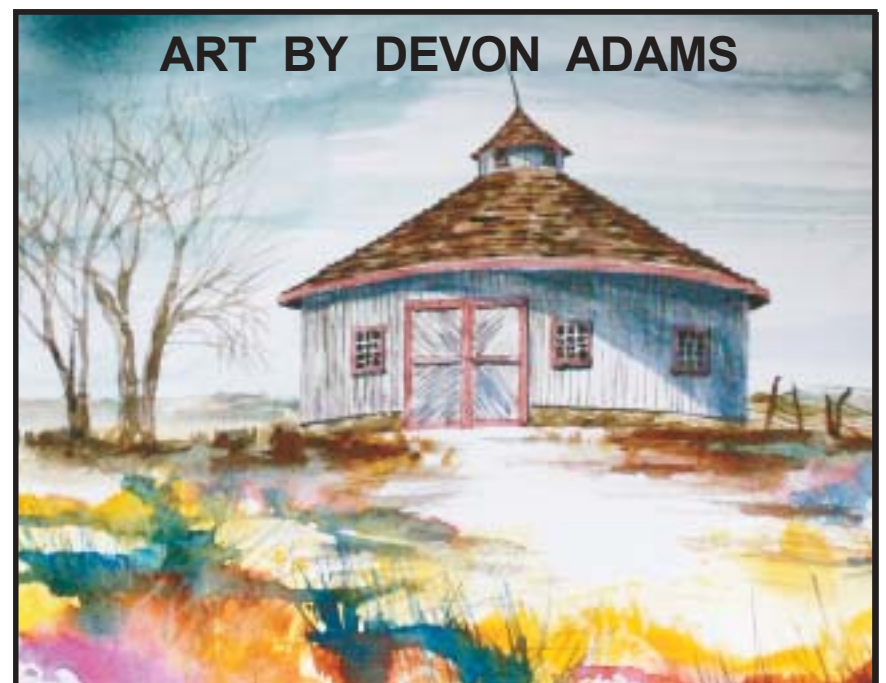
On an ordinary day,
we take for granted
the things we love.
But now and then
change explodes,
leaving us asking
for just one more
minute, or sunrise,
to spend in loving
the objects of our
intense emotions.
If luck intervenes,
there is a reprieve
that rescues sorrow,
allowing us to consider
that the longest word
we can ever hold in
our heart is almost.

OPEN WATER

The cold was deeper than
the oceans at the poles of
our spinning blue planet.
Wind intensified the effect,
and water became solid.
Thirst and ice are a mean
pair of crooks who try to
steal life from creatures who
depend on wild streams, so
open water is a savior for
critters as diverse as eagles
and mice, chickadees and
raccoons, coyotes and deer.
On a morning seared by the
icy sword of the wind, the
heated stock tank was a
magnet for thirsty throats,
whether they were people
tame or wilderness wise.

BACK SUPPORT

Like an old tree leans, so does a human body,
if it lives long enough. There are creaks from
bones and joints, and groans from vocal cords
that are similar to the song that an old tree
sings in the winds of the passing seasons.
If you are a fortunate body that is mobile,
then eventually you discover the benefits that
a cane can provide, regardless of its origin.
In a pinch, a branch from a generous tree will do,
or an umbrella, or the long handle of a rake.
Store-bought canes may be the best though, with
their padded handles and adjustable length. But the
best result of the added help is the momentary easing
of pain that gives the mind and the heart the courage
to forge ahead, to realize and accept that
it is enough not to hurt all the time.



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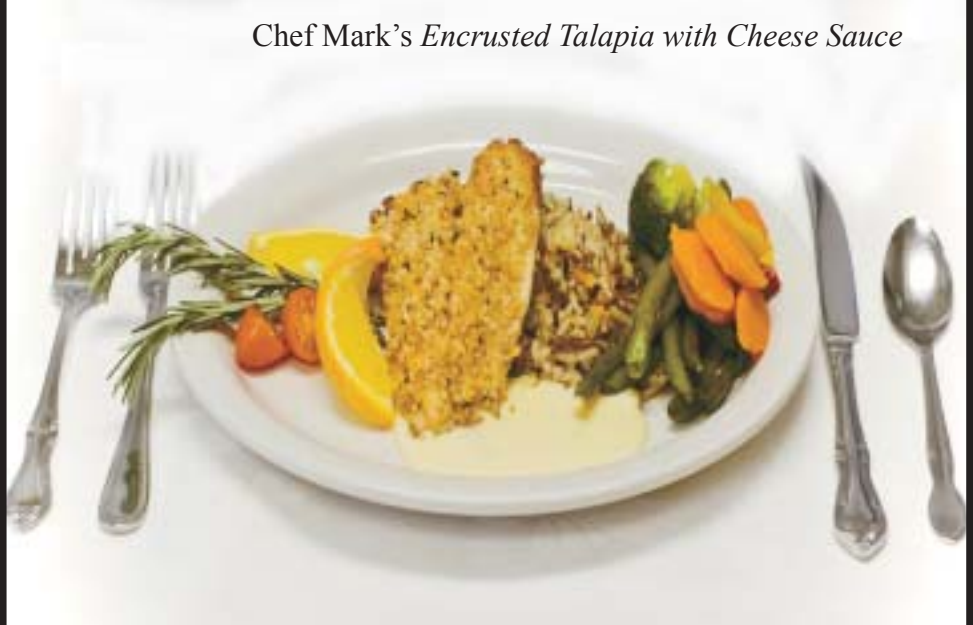
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A cold and foggy morning resulted in these frosty scenes along the roadside of Highway 67, west of Peru, December 17, 2013.



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Migrating Trumpeter Swans, December 13, just South of Rock Port



Lower left; Woodpecker sips from a make-shift bird bath. Lower right; Duck in marsh at Squaw Creek. I have to check my bird book for this one.

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Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

The world is a mysterious place. Hubby and I frequently watch nature and science programs on public television, and we're constantly amazed by what scientists are learning, or at least *theorizing*, about how the universe works and how it began. Of course, their theories on origins never quite get down to the first cause: where did the gas come from that fueled the explosion that sent the dust (which came from where?) hurtling into space, which eventually succumbed to gravity to create the planets? It's all terribly fascinating and mind-boggling.

Taking a few steps down from the dizzying heights of the origins of the universe, I find that understanding manufacturing is practically as daunting. We watched a program recently that showed a modern manufacturing plant with its huge and highly specialized and automated machinery all dedicated to making pens. Pens! Hundreds of thousands of pens! The investment in that manufacturing plant had to be astronomical, and all for the purpose of making something as lowly as an ink pen. And yet, they never showed us how the specialized machinery *itself* is made. The program narrator explained how molten metal or plastic is poured into a mold to form the barrel of the pen. But how was the *mold* made? It turns out, it was made from *another mold*! These molds seem to leap into being as inexplicably as the universe itself.

Then there are the less important, but no less befuddling, questions of how they manage to dip almonds in melted chocolate, and then get the chocolate to set without leaving any flat side or ridges on the surface caused by sitting on a drying rack. Hubby suggested that powerful jets of air bounce the almonds in mid-air to dry them. Maybe. Or maybe they put them through some sort of tumbler that buffs off the ridges. I ponder that question every time I eat one of those delicious confections.

But forget about all that. I'd like to understand why my refrigerator leaked about one-third of a cup of water onto the floor at the same time every evening, for three evenings, and then immediately after we called a service man to check it out, the leaking stopped. Naturally, I initially accused hubby of dropping an ice cube and allowing it to melt under the edge of the fridge. But even I could not accept that he was that careless three times. But, since the service man could find nothing wrong to cause a leak, and he left with apologies for not being able to "fix" it, a cloud of suspicion still hangs over hubby's head.

Prior to the leaks, hubby had been all gung ho to replace the refrigerator simply because it makes a little noise. It's been whining for quite a while and recently also began chirping intermittently. He's sure it's on its last legs. But, after doing extensive comparison shopping, we decided to postpone a purchase, mostly because I insisted that a six-and-a-half-year-old refrigerator should not need to be replaced just yet.

Then came the leaking. You can imagine hubby's consternation. We had missed out on the Veteran's Day super appliance sales. "Now we'll have to pay \$2,000 for a refrigerator!" he exclaimed in a sudden fit of fiscal responsibility. He did calm down when I pointed out that the refrigerator was, in fact, still keeping the milk cold and the freezer compartment was still keeping food frozen. If the unthinkable happens, we can put our food in a cooler and stash it in the screened porch where it will be cold and safe from marauding raccoons and cats until we can find a good buy on a replacement.

However the universe began, and whatever peculiar convergence of circumstances resulted in our natural cycle of seasons, if we must deal with replacing our refrigerator right now, I'm grateful that we live in the northern hemisphere, and can count on Mother Nature to cool our food when modern manufacturing fails us.

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Medicare Premium Increases in 2013

Mary ann Holland

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services recently announced Medicare premium increases for 2013. A premium increase can only happen when Social Security has granted beneficiaries a COLA, or cost of living adjustment. Social Security beneficiaries have been notified they will receive a 1.7 percent increase in their benefit amount beginning January 2013. Most will see only a \$5.00 change in Medicare premiums from 2012.

The premium for Medicare Part A, which covers inpatient hospital stays, care in a skilled nursing facility, hospice care, and some home health care, actually decreased \$10 per month from 2012 rates. ONLY about one percent of people with Medicare pay a premium for Part A services. If an individual paid Medicare payroll taxes for 40 quarters [ten years], or had a spouse who did, they pay no monthly premium for Part A benefits. In 2012, the monthly Part A premium was \$451; in 2013 the premium is decreasing to \$441.

The Medicare Part A deductible for 2013 will be \$1,184; increasing \$28.00 or 2.4% from 2012 amounts. Medicare Part A deductible is the cost to people with Medicare for up to 60 days of Medicare-covered inpatient services in the hospital and/or a skilled nursing facility for each benefit period. The benefit period begins the day a patient is admitted and ends when the patient has been out of the hospital or skilled nursing facility for 60 days in a row. Hospital **admission** is a requirement for Medicare to pay. The Medicare Part A deductible is not an annual deductible, rather it is per benefit period; there can be more than one benefit period during a calendar year.

The Medicare Part B premium which covers doctor visits, outpatient care, medical supplies, and preventive services, increased by \$5.00 for 2013. The new Part B premium will be \$104.90. The Part B premium is automatically

deducted from monthly Social Security deposits if the Medicare beneficiary is receiving Social Security retirement or disability benefits. Medicare beneficiaries not receiving a Social Security benefit each month are billed by the Department of Health and Human Services for the premium which they pay quarterly.

The deductible for Medicare Part B services will be \$147, an increase of \$7 from 2012. The Medicare Part B deductible is an annual deductible. Medicare supplement insurance plans normally cover deductible amounts for both Medicare Part A and B. Some Medicare Advantage, or Medicare health plans, may cover deductibles depending upon the conditions of coverage. Medicare beneficiaries who have only Original Medicare, with no supplement or health plan, are responsible for deductibles and co-insurance amounts.

This article was prepared by Mary Ann Holland, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Educator and trained SHIIP Professional. Data was obtained from a November 15, 2012, CMS news release to all SHIPS and the Aging Network. If you have questions about Medicare, contact Mary Ann Holland at the Cass County Extension office at 402-267-2205, or by e-mail at: mholland1@unl.edu. Additional information can be obtained from the Nebraska SHIIP website at: www.doi.ne.gov/shiip, or 1-800-234-7119.



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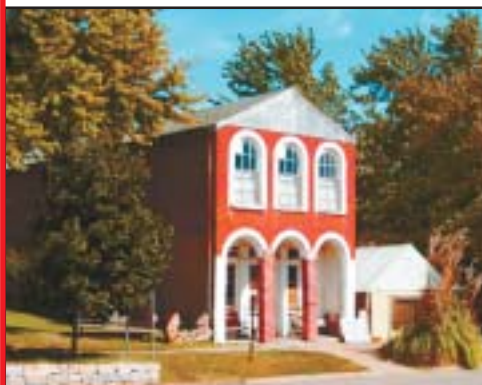
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A BOOK REVIEW
by Shirley Neddenriep

January is about the apex of basketball season and a good time to find your favorite reading place and enjoy a good story. Here is one if you like basketball or gymnasiums, never mind that the ones in this book are three states away in Indiana.

Indiana, the heart of basketball . . . basketball had its beginning there and the movie, *Hoosiers* was filmed in one (or two) of its now aging gymnasiums. Read about one hundred of those once progressive places in the book *Historic Hoosier Gyms, (Discovering Bygone Basketball Landmarks)* researched and written by Kyle Neddenriep. Published in 2010, it will be followed by a sequel, not about gyms, but concerning the rivalry existing between certain teams.

Kyle writes: "Kick snow from your shoes and step into the warmth of the old Hoosier high school basketball gym, where farmers in overalls line the court and students heckle referees from planks

above the bleachers. Revisit a unique era when nearly every town had a high school and its own basketball team."

Can you make the association with towns, schools and basketball teams in about any state in the Midwest? Brock, for example, had a gym with bleachers on both sides of the court plus seating on the stage at the east end. Because more seating was offered, tournaments were hosted in that below-grade gym with excited fans sitting on the steps that lead up to the exterior doors and outside. By today's standards, probably all the fire codes were broken.

Still in Nebraska, basketball games were played in the aging gym in Pawnee City until a new school and gym was built. One winter evening with a packed house that warmed the small, old gym, someone opened the windows up near the ceiling for ventilation. The basketball sailed right out the open window landing in a snow bank. The game had to be held up until someone recov-

ered the ball.

At Elk Creek students of the small school were gradually assimilated into nearby schools so that its gymnasium, while no longer used for basketball, stood as a center for other community events. For a few years alumni die-hard actors presented a One-Act play in the gym, nicknamed the "Antlerdome," drawing crowds anxious for this zany type of entertainment. Also at Elk Creek alumni players competed in flag football and called in the score to Omaha television stations for broadcast: Elk Creek 35; Steineur 6, when neither school existed but reflected the age-old rivalry.

Kyle continues: "Look hard enough and you can still find these old gyms, remnants of a uniquely Hoosier era . . . now they are elementary schools, community centers, fire stations, private businesses, churches, libraries and even homes." His book is available at the Johnson Community Library.

Melinda D. Clarke, CPA

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The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott

He was parked along the shoulder of our county road, his headlights reflecting swirling motes of dust, his cab lights shooting blazing squares of yellow light into the dark December night. As I turned off the hi-way and slowed to creep past the Wisconsin-plated van a large bearded man with no teeth snaked a hairy arm out his driver's side window. Waving me down he said, "I can't find the GE Electric power plant in Morrill Nebraska. Can you tell me where it is?"

He'd already stopped a small pickup occupied by a couple of men I didn't recognize, but they'd driven off the moment he opened his vehicle door. By the time I came alongside the idling van they were speeding away, the red of their taillights obscured by a cloud of powdery dirt.

"There's no power plant down this road." I replied shortly, anxious to take leave of this delusional 'foreigner' with illusions of million dollar power plants located alongside poorly maintained dirt roads in the hinterlands of Western Nebraska.

But he'd have none of that. Holding a computer generated 'map' he said insistently.... "I've got a map that says it's on this road. Where is it?"

"I'm telling you.... I've lived on this road my entire life and there is definitely not a GE power plant anywhere nearby. Your best bet is to turn around and take the highway back to Morrill."

And with that I offered my goodbyes, shoved my pickup into drive, and headed west towards home, chuckling at the foolishness of commuting all the way from Wisconsin in search of some mythical power plant.

Out of curiosity, or boredom, I did a quick computer search after supper, and to my surprise there it was....on a map...a GE Electric Power plant just yards from my front door, and another across the river near the Burlington-Northern railroad tracks....and a third, a few miles east on county road F: not brick and mortar facilities, but computer generated fantasies built bit by byte on technological errors.

In retrospect I believe he was looking for GE transportation, a local outfit with ties to the Union Pacific Railroad which operates a large switching station, and repair facility, between Morrill and Mitchell. The man wasn't delusional or crazy.... he was lost.

I tossed and turned that night, until

finally, unable to sleep, I got out of bed and reread the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). I tried to rationalize my behavior by using excuses: I didn't know the man; he looked scary; I was tired; there were farm chores waiting. But the truth kept getting in the way.... he was a stranger, and I simply didn't care.

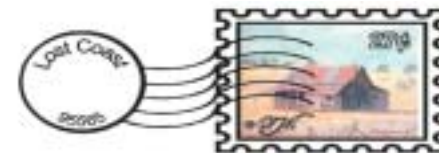
Martin Luther King Jr. once said the difference between the uncharitable priest and Levite who offered no aid to the injured man lying on the Jericho road and the caring Samaritan who stopped to help was the question they asked themselves.

The first two men asked, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me," while the Good Samaritan reversed the question, "If I do not stop, what will happen to him?" I'm not proud to say that this week I found myself in the same company as that long-ago priest and Levite. I averted my eyes and left the man lying in the road.

And while that's a hard pill to swallow the experience taught me that compassionate action is more important than good intentions.... and that 'neighbors' can be found everywhere.... even on a remote stretches of rural gravel roads in the middle of December.

Love your neighbor as yourself... you'll make the world a better place.

As Always, Karen



Life is so strange. Sometimes the big things in life are the little things...and the little things are the big things!

Remember the old saying: "For want of a nail, the shoe was lost?...For want of a shoe, the horse was lost. For want of a horse, the rider was lost. For want of a rider, the battle was lost. For want of a battle, the War was lost. For want of a War, the nation was lost."

Something as small as a rusty nail can make a big difference, my friend. This truth was driven home to me the other day when I learned of a local family who lost their lives due to a STICK....

That's right. An ordinary stick of wood that isn't worth two cents. How in the world did it happen?

It was a Holiday weekend...a happy day in the life of this close-knit family. A mom, dad, son, daughter, and the family dog were out for a walk. They were doing what they had done a hundred times before—laughing and chatting as they sauntered along the beach.

They had no idea that the beautiful day was about to turn tragic....or that they were living the last moments of their lives. They were not being careless or foolish. They were merely caught up in a scenario that spiraled out of control.

Similar things can happen to you and me. It is wise to take heed and to learn something from this tragedy.

On that fateful day, the father of the family reached for a stick lying in the sand. It seemed of little consequence....

How long the Dad held that stick of wood in his hand we don't know, but when he raised his arm and tossed the stick toward the water's edge, he set into motion a chain of events that would utterly destroy his family.

As the stick hit the water's edge the dog gave chase, and the incoming surf swept over the animal, carrying it out to sea.

The son went after his beloved dog, and soon they were both floundering in the raging surf. Dad jumped in to save his son. Mom did the same and was immediately overcome by the pounding waves.

Panic-stricken, the daughter would have gone after them all, but someone grabbed her arm and hauled her to safety. She watched in horror as her entire family perished before her eyes.

Why would I relate such a heartbreaking story to you? It's because we can all learn something by it.

Believe it or not, the lives of our own families can be similarly affected. Our tragedies may not come about suddenly, but when we view them from a distance, we're startled at our own foolish choices that end up destroying us, our relationships, our families and marriages...our entire lives.

Friendships don't disintegrate in a single moment. Family break-ups don't occur overnight. Divorces don't occur in a day. They are caused by a down-

ward spiral of offenses that go uncorrected and unforgiven.

They are caused by lack of wisdom...Unwillingness to communicate and to learn new ways of doing things...Unwillingness to go to counseling and heed others' advice. These are all serious errors in judgment.

You and I make decisions every day... Small, ordinary choices that can eventually lead to heart-break. If we take an honest look at ourselves, we'll see the mistakes we are making....

At any time during the downward spiral of events, we can say: "Stop! Time-out! If we don't do something drastic, we are going to lose what we have...and it will be tragic!"

Unfortunately, most folks don't do that... And families are destroyed as surely as the one that came to a tragic end on the West Coast.

As we enter into the New Year, it's wise for each of us to examine the choices we're making...To consider the consequences of our decisions. We don't have to blunder on through life, sabotaging our own families and our own happiness!

We don't have to become embittered, cynical people who bypass joy and happiness, while blaming others for our woes. It's not too late to undo the damage, if we are willing to make hard choices.

The consequences of our decisions will always be with us, just like the tragic outcome of that family on the Coast. When I think of that tragedy, I am stricken afresh by the irony of it all....

There at the Pacific beach, the Father threw a stick and the family's joyous holiday went from happy to devastating in just a few minutes....

The outcome was so preventable, though. If the family had decided to let the dog fend for itself, every one of them would be alive today. And everything would be fine. Just fine.

For you see....while the family was floundering and dying in the surf, the dog made it back to the shore alive.

The dog survived...But the family did not. It is a solemn warning to us all...and it is well worth remembering.

Next time you make "minor decisions" that could have enormous consequences, stop and think...before it is too late.

The lives that you save could be your own, and those of your loved ones.

To a large degree, you get to choose how your New Year turns out. You get to choose whether you will have a happy family and a blessed marriage. You get to decide whether to forgive or to continue holding grudges.

It's up to you what kind of a Year you will have....

Make it a successful and happy one....to the best of your ability!

Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

Two of my favorite old time sayings are:” Bloom where you are planted,” and “Pull yourself up by your bootstraps.” Recently, I saw a poster that questioned one of them, “How can I pull myself up by my bootstraps if I don’t have boots?”

The poster made me very sad, but also brought to mind many family stories of my ancestors who had very little including boots and how they still managed to pull themselves up and live the American Dream.

The stories my father would tell of growing up during the depression certainly answers the question about bootstraps. His father, Leo, fought in World War I, re-enlisted as a cook in WWII, and raised sixteen children with his wife, Mae, before, during, and after WWII. Depression era life was always a challenge made more so by such a large family. Money was tight and grandpa had become an alcoholic (I only knew him as a recovered alcoholic.)

My father told stories of how his brothers and he would follow the railroad tracks looking for coal to take home to heat the small, overcrowded house. If they came home empty handed, grandpa would whip them and send them out again. Sometimes clothing, coats, and shoes were scarce, and sometimes you went to school barefooted. One of his cousins (only child), would laugh at him and make fun of his bare feet and clothes.

If he wasn’t home for supper, then there was no supper. Everyone worked in the large vegetable garden. For years, as a child I wanted to plant a garden and Dad always said no, then when I

heard his stories I understood. (I begged enough he did rescind.) His birthday was Christmas Day, but Grandma Mae always made sure it was celebrated separate on Christmas Eve; a tradition we kept.

My father was a high school drop-out. He worked several jobs to help the family out. Scarlet fever and a heart murmur, kept him out of the Korean War. He was hired on at a manufacturing firm, lying about his age; he was seventeen instead of eighteen. He worked at this plant for the rest of his life, moving up to a supervisor position.

At twenty, he married my mother; she was sixteen, they started a family two years later. Six children were born over nineteen years. Dad continued to work at the plant and often held one or two part-time jobs. After their third child was born, my mother also worked at a manufacturing plant, as the oldest I became a part time mother/father/babysitter.

This often hungry, barefooted boy, became a man, who fiercely loved his family and reached for the American Dream. His dream came true; three children hold masters degrees, two hold bachelor degrees and one is very successful in her profession. My father passed away at the age of 59 from cancer. I believe that he still watches the completion of his dream from afar.

I have a picture of my father’s, maternal grandparents, standing in front of a small unpainted house, hardly wider than the two of them; it helps to keep me humble. I’m sure you all have your own family stories; make sure you write them down, it is important to pass them on. Reminiscing, with love in my heart where life is good and family history is precious.



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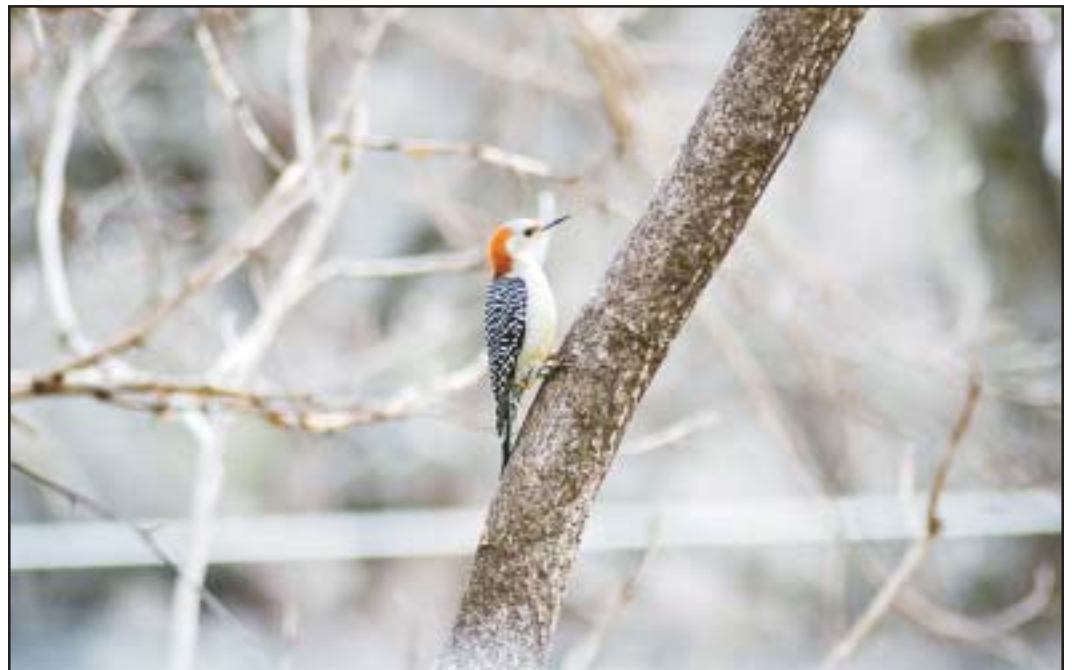
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Old Bones

Sometime after the age of fifty
I noticed the shift
knees crunch and ankles
like breakfast cereal
snap, crackle and pop
hip joints hurt and
not just at the end of
a long, hard day.

These old bones betray me and
I'm stiff and sore in the morning
before I get out of bed and
I've started to grunt and groan
making noise sitting down and getting
up
on and off the toilet and
getting in and out of bed.

The funny thing is I don't realize
I make these audible sounds until
I hear laughter from the next bath-
room stall
and I apologize, ladies,
for my aging bones and
their obvious betrayal.

These old bones that say, okay,
we've supported you all these years,
but now we're going to
make you pay.



Winter Sun

This cold morning,
sunshine pours through
my kitchen window,
fresh from the
equator like glossy
silk across my cheek.

Warmth stretches
through tired bones;
old aches melt along
rippled limbs

Crisp and new,
she rises,
from the deep south.
Up from where
the snow geese
blew away.

The room shines as
her bright feathers
tuck me tenderly
beneath long
golden wings.



Juncos

brittle hand
tosses
little slate bones
across a white
linen tablecloth

on the pearl lake
fluted rough
by cold wind
tiny grey
stones skip

See Page 3



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