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Voices

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

Writers This Month

Devon Adams
Merri Johnson
Lee Nyberg
Vicki O'Brian
Marilyn Woerth

Thank You

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Cover Photo & Others

Stephen Hassler

I hope you had a joyous Holiday season. We had a little 'whiteness' in December but not enough snow for a "White Christmas". There were one or two warm days, some sunshine, and several cold days, not below zero, but freezing. December was tolerable, all things considered, and by some measure, even mild.

During the Winter months I usually have opportunities to photograph eagles and geese. But there was enough cold early on to cause the migrating Snow Geese to keep on flying southward, except for a few at Big Lake (see page 7).

I am disappointed in the showing at the Squaw Creek Wildlife Refuge so far this year, with the exception of Trumpeter Swans. The swans have been increasing in number at the refuge for the last several years. Over 400 were counted in December. I was there on the 12th and I've included some photos in this issue. Swan photos are on pages 5 and 9). I only saw a few immature Bald Eagles (page 3), and only one adult, while driving on Interstate 29. I have had reports of other sightings in the area, so I'll keep my eyes open and my camera ready.

On the bright side, January and February are often good months for photographing eagles and geese. Happiness is having something to look forward to.

I have included one photograph of Canada Geese on Auburn's lake. See page 5.

My Christmas visitors are pictured on page 7.

May your 2015 be the best year ever!

Happy New Year from



JAMES H. CAIN

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Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

The last leaves cling to a few trees as the season of deep sleep wraps its arms around us. Some fight this season, twitching and flaying about trying to keep out of its grip. Sometimes, from sheer exhaustion we embarrass it, tumbling headlong into unconscious, inactivity for most of the season.

Then there are those individuals that redefine the season, ignoring its metaphor, we will christen them the flurry conjurors. My husband is one of these flurry conjurors and he is shaping our three grandsons into becoming one of them. He tears them from their mother's and my grasp and whirls them into the cold, snowy, harsh season. He has taught them to be fearless in the eye of the blizzard, to laugh at the tyranny of the frost king. Ah, even how to ride above the white river of foam and froth that tries to pull them deep down into its cold, dark, caverns.

Yes good people, my husband has changed these usually mild techno zombies into animated flurry conjurors. They have become his side-kicks, his buddies, his chums, comrades, and pals in the winter sport of snow skiing. Oh the shame of it all, to see these sweet, dear boys change into flying monkey's racing down a cold, shiny hillside yelling, "cowabunga".

So once again my dear friends, I will follow along (remember I have two artificial knees and am grounded), filling backpacks with extra socks, gloves, hats, snacks, water, and bandages. Grandma will dutifully pack her kindle, crocheting or whatever project she can find to while away the hours in a noisy, chilly lodge while "the boys" enjoy my least favorite season. And boy do they enjoy it. This season grandpa is introducing the two year old to his eccentricity, yes, the dear two year old will be torn from his mother's arms, strapped on to narrow sticks, and taught how to walk in them, slide down a small hill and how to make a "pizza" (term used to teach kids how to stop), knowing this child he will love every minute of it. Once the child is significantly worn out, he will be delivered back to his mother's warm arms for a much needed nap.

The boys will grow in strength, their cheeks will be rosy, their noses reddened by the cold and the sun. Their spirits will soar during this season of deep sleep and grandpa will be ever grateful for the two small ski resorts in Iowa that help change his grandsons into flurry conjurors where life is good even during the depth of a gloomy Midwestern winter.



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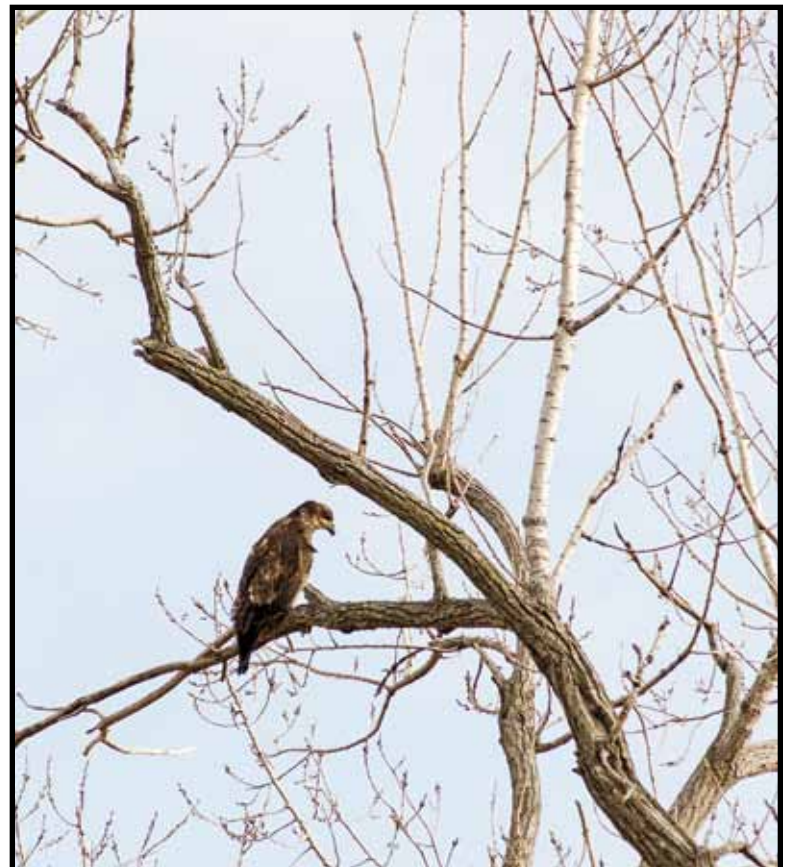
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Immature Bald Eagle, Squaw Creek Wildlife Refuge

Poetry by Devon Adams

MOON STONES

After the heavy, pocked face of the cold moon has climbed the steps into the night sky, it turns on a silver spot light that falls on the stones. Anchored as they are to the soil, the only movement among them is the slow creep of their shadows. To a viewer on a distant hill, there appear to be blue lights glimmering in this quiet place where so many have come to rest forever. In a closer view, the bright glow reveals that each stone has a name written on it's polished marble surface.

SEED CATALOGS

They will come before the storms are over. But their presence will be noted every day. Each precious page holds dreams for glorious gardens that may never become what they are in our imagination, but that isn't the point. We must have hope that spring will come to us, with perfect rain and sun and temperatures, and that all that we plant will grow, hope that we will have the courage and stamina to pull the weeds, and fight the bugs. These shiny pages aren't just paper, they are dreams to live on, and they are prayers for tomorrow.

STEEL AIR

Still air snaps with sparks as we walk across the floor, our bodies collecting static charges that bite our fingers when we reach out and connect with objects. Night offers no escape, as we crawl into bed in the dark, and see tiny blue explosions in the movement of the covers. Dry cold is bereft of damp, and it makes daily tasks feel like we are scraping our nails across the metal of angry steel.

BARELY VISIBLE

After the green life of summer has wandered over the hill and out of sight, the old hills suffer freezer burn and become neutral decorator colors, losing the lush camouflage that hid shapes and skeletons. Brown and gray trees touch their bony fingers in the icy winds, and steep ridges cut deep shadows that hold the long freeze. Stiff grasses remember being soft, before they turned to tan. Invisible until they move, deer bed down next to fallen timbers, listening to the haunting scream of a red tail hawk hovering high above his target prey. Rough contours define the weathered walls of the river valley. They are like scattered ribs from an ancient creature fallen into death before humans made up myths about their buried past.

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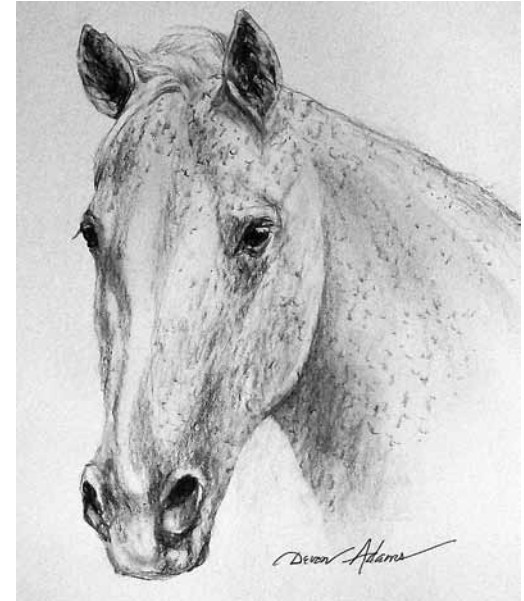
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SAVOR THE FLAVOR

Blasting through the door into the warm of the kitchen, the children inhale the aroma of chili and cinnamon rolls. After a morning of sledding and snowballs, they are a motley crew of bedraggled humans. With wet gloves and snow pants, runny noses and bright red cheeks, they have won the war of the blizzard. They will eat like there is no tomorrow, and will remember today forever.



Canada Geese on Optimist's Lake in Auburn, December, 2014



The Trumpeter Swan is the largest waterfowl in North America
Squaw Creek Wildlife Refuge, December, 2014



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Christmas Break, Eight Years Ago, Peru State College.



I had to go over to Big Lake State Park in Missouri (just east of Rulo), to get photos of Snow Geese.

Three of my Christmas visitors, December, 2014



Northern Cardinal



Titmouse



Red-bellied Woodpecker

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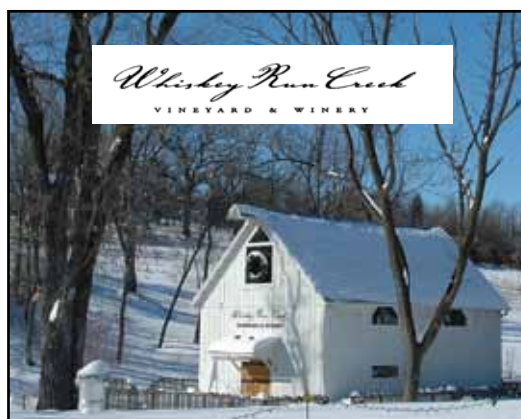
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Alzheimer's Affects Us All



Resilience: The Successful Caregiver's Secret Weapon

By Lee Nyberg

It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change. –Darwin

Darwin was talking about an organism's adaptability and problem solving in the face of challenges, about resilience. Dr. Julie Masters, head of the University of Nebraska's Department of Gerontology, recently spoke on the critical importance of a resilient approach to caregiving. Her examples summed up all the caregiving advice I'd ever received in one word, into a single concept: resilience.

Resilience is a combination of confidence, humility, hopefulness, positivity, adaptability, self-control, and problem solving ability. Sound like a tall order for Superman or Wonder Woman, let alone ordinary mortals? Anyone who has raised teenagers or learned to play golf has used resilience.

Even if you don't feel particularly resilient, you're more resilient than you think, according to the American Psychological Association. I've put the APA's recommendations for building resilience into caregiving terms, as far as possible. Here they are:

Maintain good relationships with friends, family and others who care about you and will offer help and support.

Approach a crisis without viewing it as an insurmountable problem. Recognize even your smallest forward movement. (Today, I spoke with someone at the Alz. Assoc. about my husband.)

Accept change as a natural part of life. Accept what you can't change (your loved one's dementia) and work to change what you can (the environmental conditions that bring on sundowning.)

Move toward goals with decisive action. (I bought a space heater for the bathroom so Dad's showers are more comfortable and easier.)

Nurture a positive self-view. Acknowledge you are learning and growing in caregiving skills and problem-solving. (I understand so much more about Alzheimer's. Mom's behavior is not her fault, but her disease. She's still my mom and deserves respectful treatment.)

Maintain perspective and a hopeful outlook about challenging situations. Caregiving will change over the course of your loved one's life. Being grateful for simple things helps positivity. (Does it really matter if Mom doesn't eat all her food at dinner? I am grateful I have discovered recipes for more nutritious versions of favorites.)

Encourage an optimistic view instead of focusing on fearful thoughts. Believing good will happen in your life and visualizing what you want can keep you out of the trap of self-pity. (I am willing to try adult day services to get respite instead of believing Mom will be too resistant to allow me to have some time for myself.)

Care for your own mental and physical health. Resilient people do this because they know it helps them handle challenges and emotional situations. They also believe they deserve a life of their own beyond caregiving.



Resilience is a survival skill. It helps humans survive the challenges of living, including everything from getting through the terrible 2's, to managing your work life with a dreadful boss. Call on these skills in your caregiving journey. Remember back to challenging times and consider how you handled strong emotions, the value of rest for renewing yourself for the next stressful episode, who you called on for help, how you bolstered your own confidence and strength. By maintaining perspective, bringing confidence tempered by humility, and a hopeful, positive and problem-solving oriented approach to challenges and crises, you will be a more successful caregiver. You will have a future in mind for yourself beyond caregiving and recognize the importance of taking care of yourself, too.

Lee Nyberg seeks to help families and those living with Alzheimer's through education and her company;

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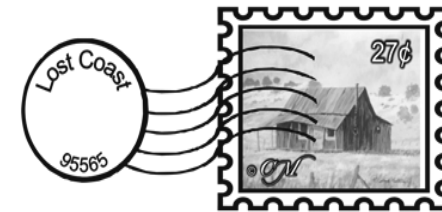
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Of January - Blues... and Greens!

By Vicki O'Neal



The pond is frozen solid and so is the dirt in the garden. A frigid wind howls outside and the mercury in the thermometer has long ago headed south with the geese. Spring is so very far away.

Like grumpy grizzlies, we go into hibernation—drowsy in our wintry doldrums. Laziness overwhelms us and we begin to drift off.

Ah...But there are so many things yet to do! The birds outside the window need to be fed. The barnyard cats, too. Somewhere the hungry cows are lowing. A swirl of snowflakes dance outside the window, inviting us to step outdoors into a Winter Wonderland.

We shiver and look away. Too cold. Too dreary. The snowflakes can dance by themselves. The birds can wait. And so can the cats and cows.

Brrrrr....! January has little to offer us. It may be touted as the beginning of a grand and glorious new year, but right now everything looks plum frozen outside. Nothing is growing but our lethargy. Nothing is green but the mold evolving on the leftovers in the fridge.

Where's the excitement of January 1st? The fireworks? The pop-whiz-bang of our New Year's resolutions?

Our resolutions have already grown stale and are tossed out in yesterday's garbage. And now we are knee-deep in the January-Blues. If only there was something stirring. Something growing. Just a bit of greenery poking up through the snow to inspire us. That's what we need. The cheeriness of green to offset the blues.

Maybe, just maybe....

A seed begins to germinate in my mind. It always does during this time of year—and on each occasion it catches me

by surprise as though this were the very first time. I get up and rummage through the cabinet. Ah...there they are! The leftover packets from last spring. I shake them and hear the stirrings of life inside. It makes me smile.

Nobody in their right mind would do it, of course. It's way too early and makes no sense—but who's gonna know?

Quickly, I get to work, resurrecting some margarine tubs and an old bag of potting soil. The dirt is soon flying and a thin layer of dust covers everything.

An hour later, I stand back and survey my work. Row after row of little tubs march across the table, filled with dirt and the promise of life. The tiny seeds buried beneath the soil begin to expand happily in their newfound freedom, soaking up the water from my watering can. Radishes. Turnips. Zukes. Little parsnips and some okra seeds. Butternuts, too.

I label the tubs carefully, then carry them to the southern window and position them where they will catch the slanting rays of a January sun. Even in the depths of winter, the waning sun works magic on seeds buried in good soil—pulling the sprouts skyward. It's a miraculous thing and it never fails to work. Never fails to make me happy, too.

I go through this same process every winter—sure as clockwork. By mid-February, of course, the little sproutlings will have become straggly plants in desperate need of more sun and soil. It will still be too cold for them to take a trek to the garden. They'll languish...And yes—they'll likely die. Then, I'll have to start all over again in April.

Nevertheless, I always plant my Margarine-tub Garden in January, and the seeds grow contentedly—albeit briefly. It is the time-honored tradition of mid-winter. It makes the howling wind seem not so frigid. It makes the southern window a place of magic and warmth.

Best of all, it inspires and makes me dream of deep rich soil and growing veggies. I know that soon I will be out there in the Garden, tending my brand new sproutlings and watching them grow.

It will indeed happen! The promise of Spring is just a few days away....In fact, it's already here. Just look at my windowsill!

The January-Blues are gone, and the January-Greens have come to stay....

Oh Hallelujah!



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