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Bald Eagle Pair near Nest at Refuge



American Bald Eagle, Squaw Creek Wildlife Refuge, December 19, 2015



The Blue Jay is back for my sunflower seeds; the Robins chase him away in Summer.

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**Cover Photo**

The snow geese were back in December, and so were the eagles that 'follow the food'. There were many Bald Eagles to be seen at the Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge near Mound City, Missouri. There were about one million Snow Geese visiting the refuge and Big Lake State Park. Recent freezing of ponds have caused the numbers to reduce.

The most Trumpeter Swans I've ever seen were at the refuge in December. The visitor's center reports several hundred of those beautiful birds.

When the marshes freeze over, the birds go farther south. But the Spring migration will bring millions back to the refuge on their way north.

You may get lucky and see an eagle on a branch close to the road that goes around the marsh area. I got this Bald Eagle photo on my third trip to the refuge in December.

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## Your Country Neighbor

*A Voice and a View From the Valleys of the Nemaha*

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

### Writers This Month

Devon Adams  
 Stephen Hassler  
 Merri Johnson  
 Lee Nyberg  
 Vicki O'Neal

### Happy New Year!

### Your Country Neighbor

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View Online Version at  
[www.yourcountryneighbor.com](http://www.yourcountryneighbor.com)

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## From *Window on Fifth Street*

This article updated from 2005

Stephen Hassler

Sometimes my television screen provides a view of my world similar to that through my window on Fifth Street. I once saw a tribute to Johnny Carson and was reminded of how many people I have known who are no longer living. Lately, that list seems to be growing too fast.

I was moved to realize that a milestone in a person's life might be that day when the length of one's list of the living becomes shorter than the list of those who have passed. Who is ever ready for that milestone?

When I was a boy on my father's farm, I would sometimes cross the creek by stepping on rocks that I had tossed into the shallow waters ahead of me. Crossing a stream by stepping from one stone to another, eventually there are more stones behind than will be needed ahead. If that stream were a person's life, a clear milestone would be when one passed mid-stream. But in real life, the shore ahead is like a mist, and one never knows for certain when midstream was crossed, even as one approaches the shore. If one could increase the number of stepping stones, one might feel as if one were increasing the distance to the shore as well.

Perhaps by increasing the number of people one knows, one can become more alive; increasing the number of stepping stones, pushing the shore deeper into the mist, and expanding, if not actually extending your life, and certainly enriching it.


Think about those people you know who have many friends. Do they seem more alive than most? Don't they seem to be more engaged with living? It's a new year, an opportunity for renewal, rebirth. Plan to make contacts by phone, mail, internet, or a friendly visit. Add friends to your life, and thereby, perhaps years.



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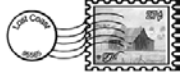
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And here we are, folks—at the start of a fresh new year!

The future stretches before us with all its uncertainty—wrapped in the mists of time—as tenuous as the wispy tendrils rising from the farmhouse chimney. We have no idea what's hiding down the old cow-trail, just around the next bend.

I don't know about you, but I'm looking forward to finding out! For me, it will be a special year—of that I am convinced.

I was born in '61, you see, and I have reasoned that anything "bad" in my life will be reversed in '16. You understand the logic, of course. I am determined that the twisted bailing-wire of my life will somehow untangle itself this very year.

It is more than a New Year's Resolution. It is a certainty that resides deep in my gut. I am declaring it to be so!

Life has a way of running away with itself if we let it... getting all wound up in its own machinery. We end up on a fast treadmill to nowhere...Running faster and faster and faster—totally enmeshed in routines, rituals and the tedious repetition of this life. Sometimes we need to step back and assess what we are doing!

The other day, I was talking to an elderly friend—a dynamic 93-year-old Social Studies' teacher who explained the perplexities of going from the slow days of horse-and-buggy to the craziness of the Electronic Age in one short lifetime.

Imagine it, folks!

One day, they were plodding along in the Great Depression—fighting for their very existence—and then before they knew it, life was transformed from poverty to prosperity in a few short decades. Folks went from fighting over bread-crumbs, to fighting over electronic gadgets and modern-day marvels in the department store aisles.

It defies the imagination! From horse-and-buggy to the moon—and then even to Mars! It all happened in just "nanoseconds," it seems. How our elders endured this wild journey without suffering "whiplash" is a mystery to me.

My dear friend managed to do it by retreating from city life and society in general for a few years.

*Continued on page 11* >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>



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# Poetry by Devon Adams

## BIRTHDAY BLIZZARDS

Oh what fun it is to have a birthday in the darkest cold of the winter. No matter how much planning and dreaming time is spent on decorations, games, food, drinks, and other entertainment, there is never any certainty that the event will happen. Even if the smiling weather guy promises sunshine and dry roads, there is almost a one hundred percent chance that a sudden storm will blast across the state and dump a foot of snow just in time to cancel your party. But if you are devious, and set the date the day before you age another year, and make it an evening celebration, then you'll have a chance to be snowed in with all your friends for a couple days of fun and frolic that will drive your parents wild with the urge to be far, far away from the group of future adults stranded in their crowded home.

## MARKING TIME

Measure the length of the days of the year with rocks set in the soil, marking the fingers of shadow reaching from the low winter sun to the orb at it's apex in June. When you see the year in the row of stones in the yard, you will remember something from each day that you measured.

## STARTING OVER

Calendars all agree that it's time to start all over again. But any day will do, if what you want is a new beginning. Today could be a thousand, if you're counting backwards, but tomorrow always starts with one.

## HOLDING ON

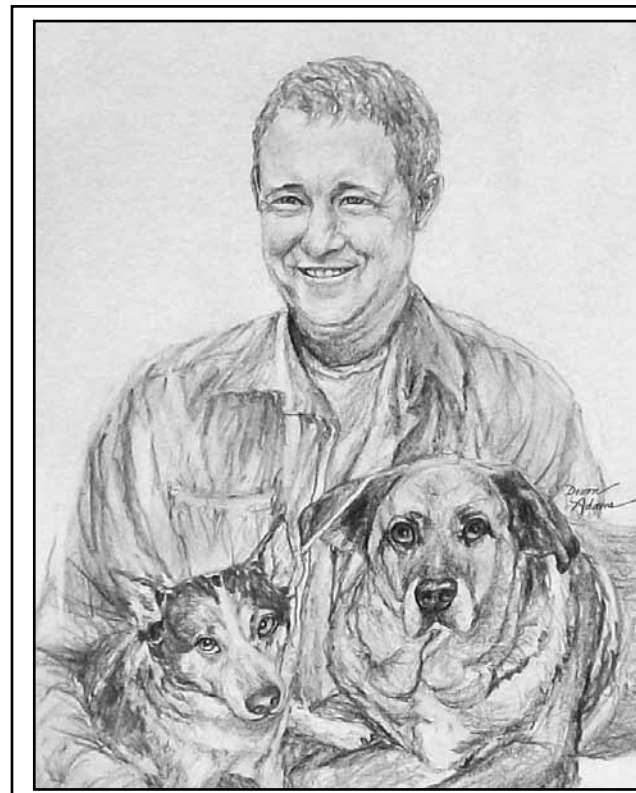
There is a strange connection between the body and the mind, beyond the rules that doctors know. In spite of pain, or facts, or numbers on a chart, living beings can wait for dates, or meetings, that are closest to their hearts. Until the goal is met and savored, the soul survives on hope. And when the time is right, it finds the peace of being free.

## BRIGHT CHILL

Although the air feels like needles in your lungs, and your feet and fingers are numb, and you wish your ears were covered, there is no way to ignore the icy crystals dancing in the dead still air. The sun is raining diamonds cut from a sky of infinite blue.

## MOSSY

The old hills shiver in wind that rattles bare branches. Shattered leaves mark deer trails through the timber, where sharp hooves cut into frozen soil. Down the slope the path descends, looking for the creek that runs with water from a spring. Not so long ago, snow was deep here, but on this day only sun rays touch the dead brown grass. Beside the icy crust of current grows a mat of moss, defiant green in spite of winter, waiting for the world to thaw.



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The Nuthatch is the “acrobat” of my feathered visitors.



This Titmouse has scored a seed and is about to take it to a branch for shelling.



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More easily seen in Winter, this is a female Downy Woodpecker (male has red cap).

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The Cardinal always looks good when contrasted against snow.

## Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

Lately, I've been experiencing something like déjà vu in my reading life. In the past month, I've checked out no less than three novels, which after reading a chapter or two, I realized I'd already read. They were good the first time, and I even re-read one of them because, although I knew it was familiar as I was reading it, I didn't remember what was going to happen next, or how it ended. But I did feel a tad guilty. With all the great books out there and nowhere near enough time to read them all, it seems a shame to re-read even one.

My husband (the genius in the family) recommended that I ask the librarian if she could produce a list of all the books I've checked out. Not surprisingly, the computerized check-out system could do just that, but only back to 1999, which is apparently when they went digital and relegated the old paper card system to the storage room. Anyway, I ended up with a list 24 pages long with approximately 24 items on each page. That works out to about 33 books per year.

Not that I've actually read that many. I have a friend who reads a book a week, but I would have to give up gardening and hiking, plus my volunteer gigs, and quite possibly eating and sleeping to accomplish that.

Some of the books I've checked out were just for reference, like the one on Feng Shui. My brother and sister-in-law are living in Shanghai for the next few years, so I thought I'd learn something about Chinese culture. At the risk of offending anyone of Chinese heritage, I have to say that Feng Shui strikes me as a lot of poppycock. It seems to be almost a religion, so I guess it would naturally sound like poppycock to an unbeliever (a/k/a, me). But, hey, whatever floats your boat. I'm not judging. If you believe that a tall tree lined up with your front door is bad luck, by all means, relocate your front door. But for heaven's sake, don't cut down a perfectly good tree!!

Some of the other books that went back to the library unfinished simply proved unworthy of my time. In that regard, I recommend you not bother with "So Wild a Dream" or "The Unfortunate Importance of Beauty: a Novel." Intriguing titles, but not so great concerning the caliber of writing or believability.

Of course, there are a few crummy books that I've actually read cover-to-cover. And I'm still mad at myself for it. A prime example is "The Word" by Irving Wallace. What a waste of my time that one was! I had hopes it would get better as I read, but alas, it did not. It may have lived up to its description as a "mystery thriller" about the origin of the Bible when it was published in 1972, but in 2015 it just seemed contrived.

I suppose one can learn as much about someone else by the books they dislike as by the ones they like. But since I have focused thus far only on the negatives, I'll end by making a few positive recommendations. If you're looking for something substantial to while away the long, cold hours of January, I recommend two contemporary novels, "Horse Heaven" by Jane Smiley, and "The Goldfinch" by Donna Tartt.

Smiley's novel explores the noble and the not-so-noble sides of the rarefied world of horse breeding and racing. Tons of research went into that one. Tartt's story is an equally complicated tale involving art theft and two teenage boys who are forced to figure out life mostly on their own in the aftermath of their mothers' deaths. That may sound like a weird premise for a novel, but I'm telling you it's a fascinating read. It won a Pulitzer Prize so you're not just taking my word for it. Many of the details about the art theft match up with those of an actual unsolved theft from a Boston museum that was featured on a recent TV program. Both novelists are masterful at blending personal stories you can relate to with depictions of lifestyles most people will never come into contact with.

For a complete change of pace, try Mari Sandoz' "The Horsecatcher." It is much shorter and should appeal to anyone who is at all interested in the culture of Native Americans of the plains. If you live in Nebraska, that should include you.

Whatever your reading taste, I recommend having a couple of good books at hand to curl up with at the first sign of snowfall.

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# Alzheimer's Affects Us All



## Dementia, Erratic Driving and Falls: The Big Three

By Lee Nyberg

The phone rang. The line cracked as my friend said, through gritted teeth, "Okay, okay, my dad is driving like a maniac. I've got to do something, but he's going to have a fit! Help!"

Recognizing trouble and knowing what to do are far from the same thing.

Problematic driving, dementia, and falls are JumboTron-sized signs that your parents need support. Your ease in handling these issues will be affected by your parent's reaction at the potential loss of control. My friend was legitimately concerned about how her dad would respond when his literal "keys to freedom" were taken away.

Before you do anything, prepare to be the calm, rational adult in all your discussions with your parents on these issues. Treat them like adults and keep a sense of humor and perspective.

When you see unsafe driving, enlist authority to help you. Find out if new medications are being taken; these might be at fault. Inform your parent's doctor; she will review the medical situation and may prescribe a driving evaluation. Suggest your parent have a driving assessment and determine if skills need to be updated. Because a vehicle is a weapon of sorts, hoping this situation will go away is not an option. Read this if you have an older adult driver you're concerned about.

Falls may indicate your parent is unsafe alone at home. Act quickly—the CDC tells us the first fall doubles the chance of a second one and the National Institutes of Health says 1 in 5 falls in adults over 75 years old results in a head injury and permanent disability.

1. In parent's home: add grab bars, lighting, hand-held shower; remove trip hazards and high storage
2. Encourage your parent to see their doctor for untreated medical conditions and medication problems.
3. Have the doctor evaluate your parent's need for assistance at home. Bargain to bring help in, if necessary.

Your parent may resent your intrusion and decorating skills, but persist. Not only do the throw rugs have to go, but they can't use the furniture as walking supports either. Aging in place is possible, and requires planning and change.

Suspect dementia? Only a doctor can rule it out. When you've observed sustained changes in memory, reasoning, problem solving, money handling, getting lost in familiar places and withdrawal from formerly enjoyed society and activities, dementia is a likely culprit. Many people are worried they have dementia long before you notice the changes and are afraid to go to the doctor. A variety of conditions can cause confusion, but only a doctor can diagnose diabetes, anemia/vitamin deficiencies, kidney or liver disease, thyroid abnormalities, or heart problems. Cajole, bribe, or by any other means, get your parent to a doctor for evaluation. If possible, send the doctor a letter prior to the appointment detailing what you have observed; many people with dementia are able to appear more capable for the short duration of a doctor's visit.

The presence of dementia means a person's independence, and therefore safety, is declining. The Alzheimer's Association recommends planning for the time when a person with this disease is unable to care for themselves.

Solutions for these serious and difficult situations should be a cooperative effort between you and your parent. Explain why you're concerned and be prepared for anger and emotional upset from them. If you need to use mediation for the discussions to move forward, do so.

Holiday visits to parents can reveal a lot. The real measure is what you do, once you see the trouble indicators.

Lee Nyberg is a partner in Home Care Assistance of Nebraska and Kansas City.

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The Snow Geese were 200,000 to 500,000 in number during December, 2015, at the Squaw Creek Wildlife Refuge. East of Rulo, NE, near Mound City, MO.



Several hundred Tundra Swans are reported to be at the Wildlife Refuge.



Rainbow colored sunrise, December, 2015, Peru, Nebraska

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## 2016...a Mysterious, Magical Year

<<<<<<<<<<< Continued from page 4

She and her husband left the city and went to live at a place they called: "Cold Comfort Farm." For five years, they lived off the land—far from the clamor of the city. They had no telephone... No real contact with the outside world, except for Snail Mail. They grew their own vegetables, fighting off the deer and the cows that wandered into their front yard.

Those years were some of the most memorable of their lives. They discovered what was most important in life. Not wealth, status, or possessions...but peace of mind and a comfortable relationship with Nature and each other.

I've found the same to be true in my own life. Even though I've been on many adventures—going from coast to coast in my travels—I've found that there's nothing quite as comforting as heading back to the Old Home Place where my ancestors lived and died—a place where nostalgia seeps from every crack and cranny.

The creaking old windmill. The haunting echo of a frog pond. The mysterious outline of a leaning barn in the moonlight. The deep dark soil of the tomato garden. And the lush, green pastures that stretch for miles.

Folks...These are the things that give us hope and a sense of continuity—propelling us from one year to the next.

Right now, we might be in the depths of winter, but in reality, springtime is just a breath away. Life will soon begin to bud all around us. The roses of springtime will unfold and a sweet fragrance will again fill our hallowed hills.

Don't get bogged down in the mullygrubs of winter, folks.

Just remember that a new year is beginning and we should make the very best of it. There may be storms ahead of us this year, but we'll rise above them.

It will be an eventful year, no doubt—full of good and bad--but what will make it a truly memorable year is our attitudes and how we determine to better ourselves in 2016.

What kind of year will it be?

Well, folks. The good news is....  
It's entirely up to us!



House Finches, and Goldfinches (Winter plumage).



I seldom see an image like this from Peru, Nebraska.



Sunset looking west from H-75 south of Nebraska City.

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