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June 2011



Country Scene in Kansas

## Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

### Writers this month

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*Editor's note:  
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this publication are online at:*

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## THE PIN OAK

by Shirley Neddenriep

Does the College Campus really have a thousand oaks? That question was asked of the Landscape/Arboretum Manager at Peru State College when a group of us had attended a presentation on that topic.

He explained the ‘Nursery’ where more than 40 varieties of Oaks are growing. I was interested in his review of the care of the Pin oak (*Quercus palustris*). He noted that the Pin Oak likes acidic soil, which is about the opposite of the alkaline soil found at our place. Many years back and with high hopes, I planted a Pin Oak. They are known to be a good ‘street tree’ because of their pyramidal shape. The idea is that with their pointy tops they do not so easily become entangled in over-head wires.

A problem of the tree is its tendency to yield to iron chlorosis (iron deficiency). The arborist noted that in his years of observation of the tree, he has come to the conclusion that it does best in undisturbed soil.

I did not know of this iron deficiency weakness when I planted the oak; but had high hopes of a tall shapely tree. I expressed concern about the slow growth of this sapling tree to my father-in-law. “What would you do with a tree like this?” in hopes of encouragement.

“Why,” he replied sagely, “with a tree like that, what you need to do is take a spade and get down about a foot under it and take it out!”

This is not what I’d expected to hear! I quickly changed the subject. I nursed the tree along and it finally grew. Its lower limbs slope downward, middle limbs grow horizontally and the upper limbs shoot upward to a point that rounds off with age. Then, about the time it reached a height of 25’ the tree developed yellowed leaves.

First a son drilled holes spaced according to Earl May directions and filled the holes with iron plugs sold for that purpose. Next a grandson treated the tree with an iron solution and watered it in. Still the leaves yellowed and branches died.

Along came the electrical guys wanting to string overhead wires! By request, they trenched the wiring alongside the pin oak. Now, for sure, its soil had been disturbed!

Today one fourth of the tree has suffered loss of leaves and limbs. It is a kind of waiting game as to its fate. I do enjoy seeing it near the road and knowing that long ago back East, pins were made from its hard wood to assemble wagon wheels for the westward movement of civilization.

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[www.yourcountryneighbor.com](http://www.yourcountryneighbor.com)

## Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

I must sadly report that our cat, King, died in May, less than three weeks after I wrote last month's article about him. For all of you who read that article, and who have also lost pets that were dear to them, I thank you for your sympathetic thoughts. I hope you will allow me to indulge in a little sentimental remembrance one more time.

King started his life with our family when our daughter chose him from an animal shelter in about 2002. At the time, she had her own apartment here in Auburn. A couple of years later, she "gave" King to us when she married and moved away. My husband had sternly instructed her "not to leave that cat at our house." But you know, daughters have a way of getting past their fathers' objections. How could he refuse to take that great fluffy mass of feline when she simply deposited him, and all his gear, at our house and then drove off with her fiancé, confident that her dad wouldn't let her down?

As it turned out, King was as adept as our daughter at getting his way with my husband. Oh sure, there were plenty of moments when King was "that stupid cat!" when he got underfoot or disrupted our sleep. But the frustration of those moments was vastly overshadowed by King's ability to charm. I suppose it's silly to think that King's actions were motivated by anything but self-interest, but when he and my husband both stretched out in the recliner each evening, with King settled on my husband's chest and his head nestled up against his chin, it was as if that cat was saying, "I'm here now. You just relax and let me work my magic." And he did.

That cat gave so much comfort. I guess that's why it saddens me so that he died at the vet clinic while we were out of town. King had been failing rapidly for several weeks, and our trip had been planned for months. Leaving him at home with a cat-sitter responsible for him in that condition was out of the question. And while I didn't expect him to recover, I had hoped to be able to bring him back home and give him the comfort of dying in his familiar surroundings.

But if I'm honest, I have to confess that my sadness is about more than the loss of King for his own sake. It's also about the loss of the link between King and our daughter and our granddaughter. We wouldn't have had King in the first place except for our daughter. She moved away, and now King is gone, too. Of course, we haven't "lost" our daughter, but the days of taking care of her cat are over. In some way, that's the end of an era.

In the last few years, our little granddaughter has grown fond of King. The first thing she does every time she comes to our house is to look for him. She tilts her head, turns her palms up and asks, "Where's King?" We then proceed to look under the bed, in the closets and under the stairs until we find him. We won't be playing that game anymore. I know Breckin was bound to outgrow that ritual sooner or later. But I would have preferred later. She's not even three, and I have to figure out how to explain that King is not here. I suspect I will not do a very good job of it. I will try hard not to blubber, but that's a tall order for me.

I've framed my favorite photo of the two of them: Breckin is a year old and they are perched side-by-side on the ottoman in front of the living room window, hands and paws resting on the sill, watching fireflies in the dusk of a summer evening. Call me a sentimental fool if you will, but I'm glad I have that photo to remind me – and Breckin – of the fun we had with King.

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## Poetry by Devon Adams

### STAR FALL

In the dense black of a summer night,  
tiny points of light are weaving through  
the humid fields and quiet woods.  
The owl in the oak watches, as stars  
fall from the dark velvet sky and come  
to earth transformed from blazing gas  
to blinking bugs with switches that  
go on and off and on along the bank  
beside the sandy, bubbling creek.

### BITTER APRIL

Often, in the softness of the spring,  
we pause to ponder winter's memory.  
Even in imagination, we shiver at the  
thought of ice encrusted on the land,  
like clear varnish brushed with lavish  
strokes, coating roads and trees with  
deadly slicks and weights that make  
existence less than easy.  
But when the spring betrays our trust,  
and transforms into winter's younger kin,  
dropping temperatures in combination  
with cold rain, wind and grumbling skies,  
we tend to curse the calendar. The weary  
furnace runs, and we still wear our heavy  
coats, as frost coats the windshield and  
blackens the green garden sprouts.  
A question comes to mind that we don't want to ask.  
Could it be that spring won't come this year?  
Will we jump to sweltering summer with  
not a glance at normal highs and lows?  
But there are no options and no votes that  
can change the ways of the wind.

### PLAYING BY EAR

The voice is bigger than the body,  
as a tiny wren flips his tail and  
throws his notes away, like he is  
flinging confetti to a crowd at a parade.  
He is unaware of the beauty  
that vibrates in the summer air  
and lingers in the memories of  
those who are blessed to hear  
this concert in the park.

### FLOOD MUD

They say that it will enrich the land, eventually.  
But until then, it stinks, and covers surfaces  
that should be clean. It slimes into the houses  
like a monster from a film, dissolving walls with  
murk and mold, leaving lines of growth, like  
twisted childhood memories of normal yardstick  
measurement. It slowly wraps its wet hands  
around the furniture and turns the carpet into  
an obscene sponge. Possessions lose their  
value and become memories of use. Crops  
drown and rot, replaced by growing bacteria  
and swarms of voracious mosquitoes.  
Tomorrow comes with storms once again,  
but loss can only happen once, until next year.

### THE CROWDED AIR

On a sunny day, with blue  
vaulting from horizon to horizon,  
the space seems clear and endless.  
No fog, or rain, or snow to obscure  
the distance with humid curtains.  
But there is a hidden universe of  
particles that exist just beyond our  
human focal lengths. Equivalent to  
the black depths that surround our  
planet, and filled with floating motes  
of dust and pollen and moldy spores,  
plus bits of chemicals and ores or  
ashes, and even scary germs and  
viruses, this air we breathe is full  
of stuff that makes our lungs work hard.  
It irritates our eyes and skin  
and keeps us coughing and crying  
and scratching all the way to the  
shelves of the pharmacies.  
If we could peer with magnifying  
lenses into this churning mass of  
misery, we'd see tiny stars and planets,  
with asteroids and comets in-between,  
and whole galaxies configured on  
a micro scale that parallels the  
giant sky of night.

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## Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

It's June people! The month known for weddings, flowers, summer vacations, Flag Day, and of course, Father's Day. The day we all envision the iconic father behind the bar-b-que grill, or teaching a child how to stand on home base, throw a spiral, put a worm on a hook, say the Scout oath, drive a car, change a tire, and try to win at Mario Brothers (you can tell we had boys).

My man is all that and so much more. He also has his romantic side (and no, not just when he is in trouble), his messy side (he's a packrat), his "I told you so" side, and his "What were you thinking of" side, and then there's the procrastinating side (let's see how many unfinished projects there are) and his practical side (he keeps the checkbook).

As I fondly think of the son, husband and father he has been, grandfather he is and great-grandfather he will someday become, I fall totally in love with him all over again.

Just recently a grandson pointed up at the pirate fort tree house. "Grandpa there is something wrong with the pirate fort," "What is wrong?" "It has no cannons." So grandpa had the youngest six year old grandson draw out the plans for building a cannon. He did a very good job of it, drawing each part and using arrows to show where the parts will go. Then they went to the garage and picked out several pieces of wood from: the 'grandpa doesn't throw any wood away' pile. They realized they did not have all the pieces they would need, so the project was put away for another weekend.

Grandma in the mean time was sent to the nearest (an hour away) big box craft store (a dangerous place to send grandma) for certain parts. A couple of weekends went by and youngest six year old grandson came back to visit and he and grandpa started right away on the cannon; there were to be four cannons. After making three of the four it was decided to leave the fourth cannon for the oldest six year old grandson to build with grandpa.

A couple more weekends go by and the oldest six year old grandson comes for a visit, and he and grandpa finish making the fourth cannon. Now, we are very blest with creative grandsons. One really knows how to design them and one really knows how to work his imagination to make them fire. First, he pretended to put the gun powder in, packed it in really good, then the imaginary cannon ball went in, packed it in again, then the imaginary match lit the fuse and then there was a loud "BOOM" (not imaginary). Then the cannon recoils so the cannon which is on wheels is pulled backed and the whole process starts again (mom got it all on video).

Now is that cool or what? And it is all because there is this special man I know who takes the time, has the patience and love, who enjoys nurturing and spoiling his grandsons as he teaches them what being a role model is all about where life is good. Hugs to all you special role male models out there, whether you're a father or not, we thank you all.



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# Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler  
Photo Submitted by Author

## Fishing:

The River is full and has been out of it's banks several time last month due to the reservoirs west and north are filled to capacity and are letting water loose due to the large snow run off from the mountains from spring melting. The bad thing is that there is nowhere to go down stream either with the Mississippi well over flood stage also. The local thunderstorms have been adding to the mess as of late but nothing like it has been in past years. The River seems to make it just in It's banks after each storm. You can honestly say it's full- full. Fishermen have still been going out although access to the river is limited. They reported catching mostly small Channel cats and some larger Blue cats. What are they biting on you say? They are still hitting night crawlers and chicken livers with pretty good success, with the live bait coming on as the river temperature heats up. So there is some fishing out there but it's limited to where you can go. Take some Deet if you go - the bugs are moving in with all the water sitting around. But if you make it past dark they seem to lay down and let you fish.

## Mushroom Hunting:

Morel Mushroom hunting hasn't been as good as it has been in past years and the weather seems to be the key. Folks have found a few truffles this spring, but as fast as they came - now they are gone.

As described in a recent article I read entitled "Mushroom in short supply" – a member of the University of Iowa's biology department stated that the morel mushrooms are in short supply this year due to the chilly spring and that the soil temperature has to be just right for the fungi to grow. The cool weather prolonged that soil temperature and then along came the series of 90+ degree days that may have put a fork in this

year's mushroom season. In the article it stated that often the season ends after three days of above 80 degree.

But there's always next year! Right.

## Hunting:

The Spring Turkey Season is nearing it's end with the Toms still strutting, but a little more leery of hunters and their calls. Along with the wise old toms goes the cover that they have right now. The cover I'm talking about is the heavy foliage they can duck into. And believe you me 'they are gone' in a second when they go for cover. There have been several hunters with success this spring. Even though it did start slow due to the cooler temperatures and then as the weather warmed up the turkey action warmed up with it.

## DEER HUNTING

Too soon to think about deer hunting this fall and winter – think again:

1<sup>st</sup> Application period for Fall Deer Seasons is May 16<sup>th</sup> through June 3<sup>rd</sup>.

2<sup>nd</sup> Application is first come, first serve for what is left July 11 through the close of season.

You need to go to The Nebraska Game and Parks web page and check the 2011 Deer Seasons out now!

At: <http://outdoornebraska.ne.gov/hunting/guides/biggame/deer/BGdeer.asp>

Fishing has just begun and looking better all the time. Need to make time to get out there and give it a try. A reminder that Fall Deer Permits can be purchased. So get your permits and start planning a fall deer camp now. 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 myself with a 20-pound Tom Turkey sporting a ten inch beard.



This month's mushroom picture is of Joe Whisler from Peru with a cluster of fresh Morel Mushrooms found in the Bluffs near Peru.

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# The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



Late last fall, after the autumn gardening season had ended but before the ground had frozen rock hard, I lucked upon a tulip/daffodil clearance sale; at a dollar a bag the bulbs were a steal and I carried home more work than I care to admit.

I wasn't methodic about the plantings, in fact, I wasn't even careful. It was late November and I was in too much of a hurry to lay out beds, measure planting depth, or worry about color coordination.

Instead, I simply scooped out a few holes, dropped in the bulbs and refilled the dirt; a week later I couldn't even remember where I'd put them.

I remember now.

As a result of almost thoughtless action the yard is a showcase of color: red, yellow, pink, orange, and apricot tulips and daffodils bloom singly or in bunches.

Sometimes a day of 'doing' pays off better than a month of preparation.

The valley buzzes with activity...field preparation and planting are in full swing and the men work from dawn till dusk....and beyond. Relying on GPS they are as liable to plant by moonlight as sunlight, chugging through fields on a tractor with more sense of where it's going than the sleepy man behind the wheel,

I'm not so sure we weren't better off with horses....at least they tired-out and the men came home for supper.

Dale's struggling to plant our river-bottom fields before the boggy spots worsen. The Platte River is already swollen and additional water releases are planned for this weekend; the river has been out of its banks since the beginning of March and projected to remain that way most of the

summer. That's something we haven't seen in years.

Folks who took the 'We'll never see the Platte in flood stage again,' rhetoric as gospel and built homes along its banks, are hauling in dirt for low levees and, no doubt, kicking themselves for their shortsightedness; a shallow, warm-water river is one thing....a roiling snow-melt-engorged monster is quite another.

I'm not complaining. Compared to the suffering of those who live along the Mississippi and Ohio rivers our troubles are miniscule; one thing's for certain....water goes where it will...regardless of dams, levees, or man's best intentions.

I'm off to start my day. While I was able to spray thistle along a pasture fence yester-

day, it looks as if wind will have the upper hand today. When the windsock is waving hello at daybreak, it's a pretty sure bet the afternoon will be 'breezy'.

Enjoy your weekend....with rain in next-week's forecast any celebration on our part will no doubt be out-bid by pressing planting concerns, but regardless, there'll still be time for reflection and remembering, for thankful hugs and warm wishes.

As Always, Karen

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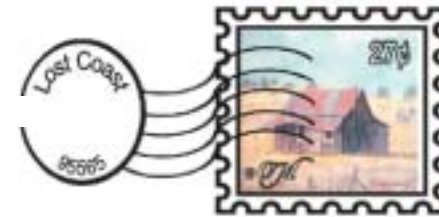
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Lost Coast

# Summertime Scribbles

By Vicki O'Neal



It's summertime...and you're thinking you need a vacation? Well. I thought so, too!

The other day, I took a mini-vacation all by myself.

My menopausal-mania had set in with a vengeance, and I decided my husband would be better off without me. I grabbed a few of my things and threw them into the car. And I was off!

Exactly where I was going, I didn't know. But soon the miles were flying past. A dozen...then two.

At last, I pulled to a stop on a bluff overlooking the Pacific. The "Lost Coast"...that's what it's called. A vast expanse of craggy rocks and endless sand. From here, I could see whales spouting and even a few sharks slicing through the coastal waters.

It was perfect. Not many people came here, and that was good! I was in no mood for company...Not even my own. I needed a vacation from myself, but that's kind of hard to do.

I took stock of my situation. Here I was, miles from civilization with little provision. I had Raisin Bran, but no milk. Numerous cans of food, but little water. I had three or four hats, but not much toilet paper.

I looked at the back seat. It was a hodge-podge of stuff I'd picked up at yard sales. Things I'd stored in my car for lack of a better place. Old Christmas decorations. Novels. Magazines. Notebooks.

One of the books caught my eye. On the back cover, it said: "Does your life progress from private messes...to major crises...to general Chaos?"

Yes. Yes. And Yes...!

I tossed the book aside and sat staring out the windshield at the peaceful scene, below. Fishing vessels churned slowly along the coast, bound for a southern port somewhere.

Seagulls and buzzards rode the breeze, following the outgoing tide.

I wanted to climb down the bluff and walk on the sand, but I knew I could get trapped against the cliffs by an incoming tide. So I sat on my bluff-top, watching the tides going in and out. Thinking my disorganized thoughts. Listening to the roar of the surf.

I felt like Tom Hanks in the movie "Castaway..." Marooned on an island of my own making. Just me and my messy little car.

I ate my dry Raisin Bran and read my books. Scribbled in my notebooks. Said a few prayers. Wished I could fly off the cliff and soar away with the gulls and buzzards. But alas! I couldn't. I was earthbound with my menopausal-mania and my mess!

I stayed on the coast for two days and nights. At last, my thirst drove me from my bluff-top perch. My water jug had run dry...and like many Castaways before me, I was forced to seek the comfort of civilization.

Sniffing to myself, I shifted the car into gear and turned the wheels toward home.

My husband was happy to have me back. At least I think so. Soon afterwards, he took me on a real vacation to Old Town Sacramento. It was an organized vacation. State-of-the-art. Lovely hotel suites. Soft beds and hot running water. Lots of toilet paper.

No Raisin Bran boxes. No Christmas decor to stumble over.

I lounged in the hotel suite all evening, nibbling on chocolates while writing endless words in my notebooks. I scribbled away our entire vacation—writing on and on, while my poor hubby slumbered nearby.

I was up early the next morning, still scribbling. Divine inspirations. Lofty thoughts. The manic drivel of a menopausal freelancer. I was writing away madly when a figure emerged from the gloom of our hotel room.

It was my husband. "Vicki O'Neal...!" he said, staring down at the reams of scribbled pages and piles of notebooks. Michael's face had that patiently impatient look.

"Oh my dear!" I said. "I know what you're thinking. But at this very moment I'm writing about your extraordinary patience with me! I really am!"

My man had had enough. Kindly but firmly, he took the pencil from my hand and stuck it behind his ear. "Let's get ready to go!" Michael said. He ushered me and my suitcases to the waiting car.

I sulked quietly, carefully...and it wasn't long 'til my kind husband relented. He gave me back my pencil and I resumed my writing...mile after happy mile.

When Michael stopped at a traffic light, my writing ceased abruptly. "Oh, Mr. O!" I said. "I need you to do your husbandly duties!"

Michael looked at me sideways. "Right here?" he said. "Right now?"

"Yes. Right now!" I handed him my dull pencil with its broken tip. "Please hurry!"

Taking out his Swiss Army Knife, he sharpened the pencil to a fine point and handed it back to me.

"There!" he said with a sigh. "Write on, Mrs. O...Write on!"

*Vicki O'Neal*  
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