

Your *Country* Neighbor

March, 2016

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**A Magazine for
Small Towns and
Rural America**



This Robin was among a couple dozen on the Courthouse Square in Auburn 02242016



Trumpeter Swans gliding “on final”. Feb 18, 2016, Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge.



Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge, early February, 2016; one of the few Bald Eagles that had not yet ‘moved on’ Northward with the geese.

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Cover Photo(s)

There was a reasonable amount of activity at the Wildlife Refuge in February. I managed to get some photos of Bald Eagles, Snow Geese, Trumpeter Swans, and a Hawk. I may have missed the spectacular 'peak' in the Snow Geese migration when 2 million are in the refuge at the same time. Unless they 'peak' later this month, most may have passed over the refuge on their way northward, due to the recent warm weather.

I will visit the refuge again in March as well as Kearney, Nebraska, for the Sandhill Crane migration. And with the recent sighting of Robins in Auburn, I anticipate my backyard visitors will increase, becoming active with courting, singing, and showing off their colors.

Spring is such a welcoming time for new things... again.

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
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Marilyn Woerth

Thank You!

Your Country Neighbor

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View Online Version at
www.yourcountryneighbor.com

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Bald Eagle; just off Highway 2,
East of Nebraska City.

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Life's 'Locations'

Stephen Hassler

I often envy those who 'never moved away' from their hometown. Until a few years ago, I never lived in one location for more than seven years at a stretch, during my adult life. So far I've lived in six states; beginning with Nebraska, and now I'm back in Nebraska. I don't have the life-long familiarity of one community, nor life-long friends, nor a single long-time business in one place. I can only imagine how precious those connections must be for others. Still, I am content with my experiences; I even feel fortunate having had them. I've seen a lot of the country, and not just on vacation. I've lived near the mountains, not far from the seashore, in the desert, in the scenic 'hill country' of Texas, and the New York metropolitan area, not to mention a Nebraska farm, and now a 'small' town. When I was a schoolboy, I remember reading about far off places, never imagining that I would visit such places, let alone live there. So it could be said that I never dreamed of such adventures. Sometimes reality is more adventurous than dreams.

Several years ago I got that '7-year itch', and began to think about a 'change'. But it didn't happen. I was too content. Previous reasons for relocating were employment, college, seeking to improve my life. But I've been content here with interesting friends, interesting work, and a good location for experiencing life.

Perhaps if I had stayed in my hometown, I might have longed for places unseen, might even have felt trapped, "stuck-in-a-rut". But I believe that I would have been content either way. People (un)happy in one location are usually (un)happy in another. I'm also of the notion that two places could be better than one. So I think I would like to have two residences one day, and enjoy both "worlds", especially if one world is that of a small town and the other is the "big city". Why not dream along with me? You and I still have room in our lives for a few more adventures.



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Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

What happened to January and February and all the projects I had planned for those cold winter months? Well down our way we didn't get the snowfall that helps keep you home during the long winter months. And we have had some absolutely decent days that lure one outside. Then there were the two weeks we spent in Lincoln while Steve's father was in the hospital. A few of my/our projects did get done, some half way done and others, sadly may have to wait until next winter. But isn't that the way of life. We aim high, do our best and settle for the halfway mark, not because we are settlers but more because that's the best that can happen when life is so unpredictable.

For instance, I needed to make my husband a new pair of pants for his hunter's renaissance costume. (Oh haven't I discussed that before, we go to renfests in costumes I make.) I figured it would take me two days. I usually cut out the pattern one day then start sewing the next. The pattern cutting went just fine but the next day and the next day and the next not so fine. I don't know if it's just that I'm getting old, or patterns are getting harder or mistakes are made in instructions (which has been known to happen). When I come to that point in my sewing where what the pattern tells me to do and what my eyes and brain perceive don't line up, I close everything down and walk away.

Now I suppose one might think that I have decided to table the problem and not dwell on it but that is not how my mind works. I will be mulling it over, sometimes not even quite aware that I am doing that. You would never guess that two things are constantly going on in that small brain. Or maybe you would? I am not sure how distracted I seem to others as this process goes on. Eventually I will come back to my sewing table having figured out the instructions or written my own and the work continues. I have noticed that German patterns are the worst. They seem to take it for granted that I'm a better seamstress than I am. Their instructions are like a big jig saw puzzle with some of the pieces missing.

I like to engage this problem-solving technique in my own personal life as well. When things become overwhelming I shut down the problem, work on it in my head, then try to approach it again. I have even been known to crawl into bed and take a nap and wake up ready to take on the most difficult chore, task, or reality. I have found this brings some wonderful results and keeps me from having to remove stitches already sewn in the fabric I am sewing or in the fabric of my life.

My husband will tell you I need to work on doing this more and more lately, for I seem to be short-tempered as of late. And this winter I can't even blame it on cabin fever. His pants have turned out well and so will the fabric and patterns of my life as long as I remember to stop, contemplate, and strategize before I sew things up.

Here's hoping that you all made it through these winter months with at least one project finished. I also hope that you and I have stored up enough vitality to carry us through the spring because here it comes. Thinking of my spring projects with joyous thoughts, (and shelving my unfinished winter ones) where life is good.

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Poetry by Devon Adams

A FAIR TRADE

A SPARK IN THE DARK

On a quiet night,
the wind sleeps,
and the stars come
closer. The dark is
black and deep,
an infinity of space
that holds the answers
to all the questions.
Time has no definition
in such a state of wonder.
Then a meteor flashes
across the sky, burning a
brand on the air, and we
realize that our lives are
only a spark in the dark.

ALWAYS CHANGING

Moving along, the creek gurgles
over limestone slabs and chunks
that have rolled into the ravine
over the years. Lots of years.
Moving water has cut into the
land like a cake knife slices
through layers of sugar dreams.
Now the gorge is deep, it's steep
sides hung with dangling roots
from precarious trees that will
soon pass the point of lean and
give up their grip, plunging off the
edge. Their trunks will become
bridges for the four-legged denizens
who live the wild life here.
A future century may find these plains
covered with glaciers, or wrapped
in a green blanket of tropical growth.
Or, in an instant of cataclysmic eruption,
the lovely lake in Yellowstone Park might
make way for the giant glob of magma
that seethes deep inside a devil's bowl.
We may see that one coming,
but we won't see the end of it.

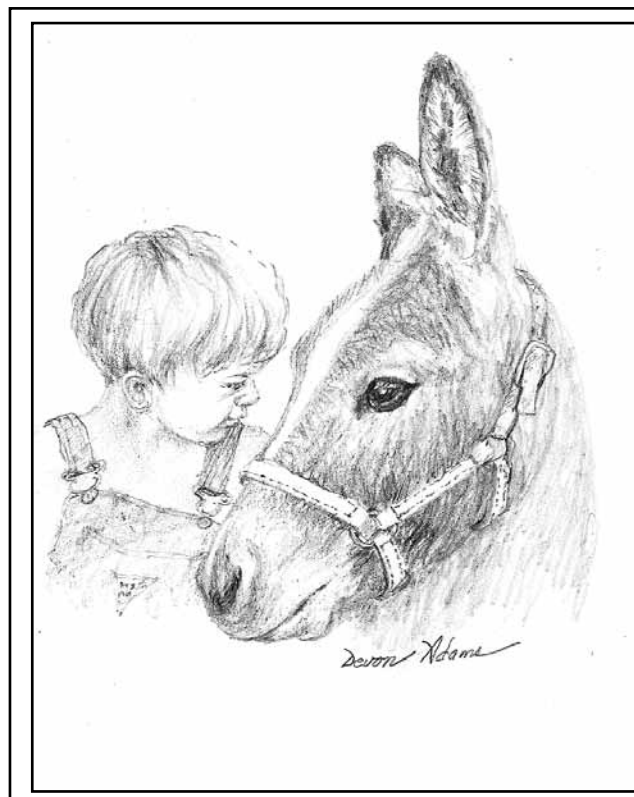
A BOX OF CRAYONS

It's time to sit at the table,
get out our crayons, and color
Spring. Cabin fever is done,
and windows want to inhale
the sweet breath that comes
from dark, wet earth and plants
stirring in their winter beds.
Songs hover, like kites, tethered
to the throats of birds. Use all the
hues and shades, scratch and
scribble, mix and match, until
you have a rainbow glow. Make
a garden, make a sky of bluebirds,
a flashing yellow finch, or cardinals
wearing stop signs. Make it spring
before it snows again!

What is it worth?
If your heart spent love
that can't be measured to
make a place your own,
and then you have to leave
for reasons that are never
good enough, how can you
walk into tomorrow?
The only place to rest is in
your memories. They're
ghosts inside your brain,
but will be real enough for
comfort, until a brand new
space seems lovely too.

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Migrating Snow Geese 'stopping over' at the wildlife refuge, February 18th, 2016.

Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

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As you know, my husband recently retired. His former job title included the word “planner.” Perhaps he did well in that career because he has a natural bent toward planning, or maybe the mind-set of planning at work gradually carried over into his personal life. Either way, hubby likes to plan, particularly where it concerns food. He does not like to be caught off guard in the matter of when and what his next meal is going to be. Tomorrow’s coffee beans are ground and the water added to the coffee maker before bed. Frozen leftovers intended for lunch are thawing on the kitchen counter before breakfast. And supper inquiries generally begin by early afternoon at the latest.

This is mostly a good thing. Because hubby was required to help with cooking while still in high school, he already had rudimentary cooking skills when we got married. But, maybe eating so much of his own cooking “set” his taste buds. I wouldn’t call him a picky eater; let’s just say food matters more to him than it does to me.

Fortunately, I have absolutely no ego about my own cooking. It doesn’t hurt my feelings a bit that hubby wants to cook the main course while I make a salad. That being said, it isn’t always smooth sailing with the two of us in the kitchen together.

Take today. Hubby planned a lunch of fried fish and potatoes. Our frying preferences differ, but again, I don’t care as much about the exact crispiness of the fish breading or the potato slices as hubby does, so I’m happy to let him do the frying. He informed me that he was going to sit down with a cup of coffee before starting to cook, so I figured I had a little time to spare before making the salad.

I left the kitchen to do a quick task in the office. But after only a few minutes, I detected the aroma of frying food. “Hey, what happened to your coffee break?” I asked. “I just decided I’d drink the coffee while I cooked,” he said. “Food will be ready in a minute or two.”

OK, then, I’d better get going on the salad! Making salad isn’t difficult, but tearing up the lettuce and chopping cucumbers, carrots, radishes and tomatoes does take a few minutes. My delay in starting the salad had put the fish and potatoes in danger of becoming either overcooked or lukewarm before the salad was ready.

Did I mention that in addition to the actual flavor of food, hubby has a thing about the serving temperature of food? That’s right: everything has to be ready at the same time so nothing gets cold. What’s up with that? Anyway, hubby offered to chop salad ingredients to help get the food on the table before the grease congealed on the fried potatoes and the fish breading turned soggy. It was the least he could do, right? I mean, it was his fault that I didn’t start the salad earlier because he said he wasn’t going to start cooking just yet, right??

I usually put more cucumbers in hubby’s salad and more tomatoes in mine. But in my haste (hubby’s fault, remember) I overlooked that distinction. Both salad bowls got equal cucumbers, which led to confusion about which salad was supposed to have more tomatoes.

We ultimately got it together and sat down to eat. Hubby took a bite of fish. “Mmmmm. That’s good,” he pronounced, with an approving nod. I took a bite. Shrug. I think it sat in the cast iron skillet a minute too long for my taste. But I won’t mention that to hubby.

Alzheimer's Affects Us All



What to Expect with Dementia

By Lee Nyberg

Imagine. You left for work as a school teacher for 43 years at 7 a.m. One morning, you wake, see it's 6:55 a.m., jump out of bed, race to your car and drive off. After 2 blocks, you're lost, in your pajamas without a coat, and it's 5°F. You decide to drive until something looks familiar.

People with dementia experience disorientation and poor decision making, along with other cognitive and behavioral changes. Challenges for family caregivers may rise significantly during middle stage dementia, which begins several years after family and friends notice changes in the person with dementia and lasts for about 4 years. During this time, a person has enough physical and mental ability to act but too little to control his behavior. Even though confused and easily agitated and frustrated, a person in this stage attempts to connect with others and meet basic needs of hunger, thirst, and physical comfort.

Here are some common situations from middle stage dementia and how to handle them. The degree and manner a person is affected depends on the type of dementia.

Repetitive questions occur because of an unmet need or a desire to connect. Look for the feelings behind the situation, as this son did:

“Mom asks me if I want coffee about 50 times when I go see her. I finally realized she wants to connect with me, but can't remember how to chat. Now, I accept her offer of coffee and we talk about her flower garden while we make coffee together.”

Verbal and physical aggression often results because people with dementia lose their filters, become unable to control themselves or act appropriately in upsetting situations. A person with dementia may resort to shouts, curses, hitting or pinching to communicate a problem or fear. Consider what led to the situation, the feelings of the person with dementia, and prevention.

George was surprised when his wife slapped him as he tried to help her change into a nightgown. Thinking he had scared her, he left for a few minutes, came back and said, “I'm George, your husband. It's time to change for bed. Please help me by raising your arms overhead.”

Disorientation means a person does not remember who or where they are or recognize familiar people. Be alert to your loved one leaving the house unattended. Some people will wander aimlessly and others will purposely try to return to work or “home” even when they are home.

A daughter placed signs on the main doors saying “Keep Out, Dark Room” for her advertising executive dad. He never tried to go through the doors alone.

Delusions and hallucinations are real to the person who has them. Respond with unruffled creativity.

One man believed his wife of 45 years was trying to poison him, so he refused to eat food she prepared. His family hired a caregiver to prepare meals and he began to eat again.

A person with dementia is acting to meet his needs, not annoy or irritate others. Confusion, fear, hunger, cold, pain, or loneliness may be driving his behavior. Use patience and be resourceful. Get help with caregiving before you become worn out.

Lee Nyberg seeks to help families and those living with Alzheimer's through education and her company, Home Care Assistance.

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Trumpeter Swan



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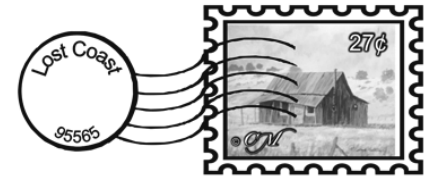
Familiar sight on H-67 southeast of Peru... looking north.



1. Grain trucks lined up at the 'elevator' east of Brownville.



2. Even more grain trucks backed up east on H-136.



It was an ordinary day...or so I thought! I had no idea that my world was about to turn upside down.

I was working online—minding my own business, as usual—when suddenly an “Alert Notice” popped up on the screen of my laptop computer. It said: “Warning...You have been blocked by Microsoft.” A phone number appeared and I was instructed to call it.

Worriedly, I did so and I got a helpful Microsoft Technician on the line immediately. She was a sweet sounding lady who ran a few online-tests on my computer, and soon gave me a diagnosis. It would cost \$248 to fix my laptop. Otherwise, my computer was essentially worthless!

I panicked and did something really stupid. Thoroughly rattled, I gave her all the money I had on a prepaid debit card. She assured me that I could add the rest of money to the card later. Then she transferred me to her ‘Manager’ to complete the transaction.

At some point, it occurred to me that I should call my computer-whiz-of-a-daughter, Karissa, and consult her before I proceeded any further. I explained that to the Manager and he immediately turned ugly and hung up on me. I was startled.

I called my daughter and told her what had just happened.

“Mother!” she said. “Those people were HACKERS. They ransacked your computer and stole your money!”

“What?!” I was stunned. “But that lady was so kind and helpful!”

Karissa sighed irritably. “That’s ridiculous!” she said. “Go get your laptop fixed at a local computer shop....and do it right away!” She hung up the phone.

I slumped in my chair and stared at my computer screen. Strange things were beginning to happen to it. An image had appeared along with the mocking words: “Hurr—Durr!” An ugly bulldog was growling and lunging at me from my screen. “Hurr-Durr...Hurr-Durr!”

The hackers were mocking me from my own computer. It wasn’t enough that they’d stolen my money and rifled through my files—leaving everything corrupted. Now they were laughing at me. I felt utterly exposed and violated.

Despondent, I prepared to leave for the computer shop. I went searching for my shoes—slipping them on mindlessly, then headed out the door with my computer beneath my arm. Clomp...clomp...clomp...I plodded down the street like I was off to the guillotine....

At the computer shop, the Technician took my laptop and told me to come back in five days. It would cost about \$150 to fix! I was upset, but what else could I do? My laptop was worthless like it was!

With a heavy heart, I left my computer at the Shop. Clomp...clomp...clomp. I plodded back to my car and sat there wallowing in my misery for a good while. Then suddenly, I rallied. Enough of this foolishness!

I might be a country gal, but I’d show them a thing or two! I wasn’t going to let these hackers and city-slickers get me down. I would go shopping!... I would shop-until-I-dropped!

And that’s exactly what I did!

I traipsed in and out of stores, shopping like mad, spending money like a true ‘Slicker. I felt quite proud of myself. I clomped here and there...in and out...up and down, and finally ended up at Starbucks to sip a high-falutin’ Frappuccino.

While I was there, a gentleman sauntered up to me and started chatting. Just small talk at first—but then I found out he was a Microsoft technician—a real one—and he proved it to me with his online credentials. I poured out my Tale-of-Woe to him.

He nodded sagely. “The really sad part,” he said, “is that the Computer Shop will scam you again by overcharging you. I could fix your laptop in a matter of minutes, and it wouldn’t cost you anything!”

I stared at him incredulously. “Seriously?”

“I’m serious!” he said. “Go get your laptop from that Shop and bring it here to Starbucks. I’ll fix it in minutes—while you wait.”

Well, folks. By now, I was fit to be tied! But what did I have to lose? I did as the gentleman advised.

Within a quarter hour, I managed to retrieve my laptop from the shop and hand it over to the helpful man. He did exactly as he said. Within minutes, he had removed the virus and restored my computer to good health—and he did it free of charge.

I wanted to pay him, but he wouldn’t let me. So I bought him a Frappuccino with lots of white fluff on top.

When he finished drinking his Frapp, we parted ways and I went home rejoicing.

It had been a horrendously long day and I was exhausted—but overall, I felt exhilarated. Flopping down on my bed, I raised my feet and heaved a great sigh of satisfaction. I’d been hacked, but I had triumphed. I’d been ransacked—but this ol’ Country Gal had prevailed! I’d shopped like a ‘Slicker. And I’d done it with graciousness and style.

I was feeling on top of the world. I wasn’t such a bumpkin after all. I was learning a few tricks along the way and—

Suddenly, my self-congratulations stopped mid-sentence. I stared toward the end of the bed. A ripple of shock ran through me as I looked at my feet. I stared in disbelief.

How could it be? I was wearing two different kinds of shoes....and I’d been wearing them all day.

I’d traipsed in and out of fancy stores—up and down the streets---acting all debonair in my mismatched shoes. I’d lounged at Starbucks with prestigious business people in 3-piece suits...Microsoft techs and ‘Slickers—chatting and sippin’ Frapps like I was some kind of diva.

And nobody had said a word to this Country Gal with her head in the clouds. Nobody!

You know, Folks—there’s nothing like a pair of mismatched shoes to bring you back down to earth....

And let me tell you....they will do it in a hurry!

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