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Country Neighbor

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March 2007

Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha



My favorite barn presents itself in a lovely scene with every snowfall, and the cover this month is just one view out of many in my photo files.

After a few weeks of Winter, late February warmed up into the forties and fifties, and even a couple days in the low sixties. But as this March issue is being published, we are receiving several inches of new, wet, heavy, beautiful snow.

Robins were sighted migrating as early as late January, and February saw flocks of other varieties. As soon as the ponds are free of ice, I'll be watching for the Snow Geese.

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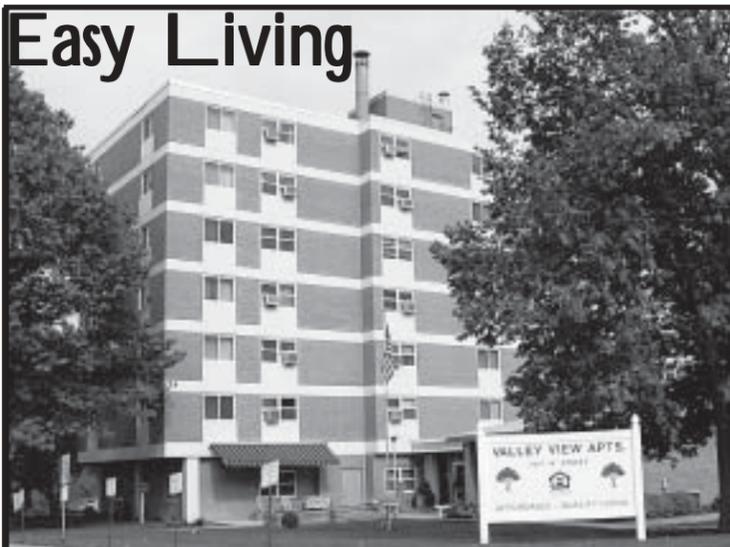
When are you going to plant the wheat?



From my Window on Fifth Street, Midnight, February 25

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by *Your Country Neighbor* Photographer,
Stephen Hassler

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are three by *Your Country Neighbor*:

Two photos of Nebraska windmills, each 16 x 20.
Photo of White Egrets at Nemaha Wildlife Area, KS, 8 x 10.

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Your

COUNTRY NEIGHBOR

Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

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Thank you!

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In Missouri: Mound City, Rock Port.

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In Iowa: Hamburg, Riverton, Sidney.

Talking to Your Kids About Saving for Retirement

By Mary Ann Holland, Extension Educator, UNL

Parents are the greatest teachers about many areas of everyday life. Teaching children about money, its purpose, value, how to earn it, save it, and how to spend it, are ongoing lessons parents teach their kids from a very young age through young adulthood.

It is important for children to begin to think about the concept of "retirement living," especially the need for income to support living expenses after the paychecks and career have ended. Today, it is more important than ever for consumers, especially young people entering the workforce, to realize they are primarily responsible for planning and financing their own retirement.

The economy has "morphed" traditional retirement savings [formerly called pension plans] offered by employers into "do-it-yourself models". "You"—the consumer—must take an active role in providing income for your own retirement.

Income from a pension plan is used to supplement benefits paid to retired workers by Social Security. Rarely is a monthly Social Security check large enough to cover all living expenses. Additional income from some source is necessary.

Learning some "basics" about planning for retirement savings and tax implications will help parents convey knowledge to their young "savers."

What is an IRA? An "IRA" is an "individual retirement account." There are several kinds of IRA's, but most common are: Traditional and Roth IRA's. You would set up an IRA through a financial institution such as a bank or a credit union. Young wage earners should consider opening an IRA at the point when annual earned income means they owe the IRS on April 15.

Currently, you can contribute a total of \$4,000 per year toward a traditional IRA [the amount increases to \$5,000 in 2008]. Doing this provides a tax break for wage earners because they deduct the amount contributed to an IRA from taxable income—reducing the amount of taxes owed now on yearly earnings. A Roth IRA on the other hand, provides tax benefits at retirement rather than up front. Wage earners continue to pay taxes on funds contributed to a Roth IRA during their working years, but do not pay taxes on that income when reaching retirement. Funds from either type of IRA cannot be withdrawn until age 59 ½ without a substantial penalty.

401(k) plans are employer-sponsored savings plans that permit wage earners to set aside money for retirement; all money you save through a 401(k) is tax-deferred. You only pay taxes when you start to withdraw the money, after age 59 ½. Some employers contribute an amount [usually a percentage of salary] toward an employee's 401(k) plan as part of their benefits package. Most, however, have provisions about the length of time an employee must stay with the company in order to be "vested." A period of five years or longer is not uncommon for a "vested" retirement account.

Being vested means the worker is entitled to not only to their own contributions but that of the employer as well. Frequently changing jobs complicates ownership of a 401(k) plan. However, a 401(k) plan is "portable" meaning you can take the amount you contributed to your account plus earnings when you change jobs. Depositing that amount into a new employer's 401(k) plan is known as a "rollover". In other words, you do not declare the amount as "income"; it is deferred to after-retirement when your annual income is generally lower which in turn means you pay less in taxes.

Saving money for retirement like any other financial goal can also be done by investing in traditional financial products such as savings accounts, certificates of deposit, the stock market, bonds, annuities, and life insurance. Consumers receive no tax break for doing so, and earnings are subject to tax as well. Significant wealth can be accumulated and invested through these traditional financial products providing a generous after-retirement income.

Parents may want to seek out the advice of a trusted financial planner to assist them in understanding various financial products and help them work with their children in setting long-term financial goals which could include preparing for after-retirement living. A financial planner may also be helpful to parents as they assess their own retirement outlook and identify steps to increase retirement savings and reduce taxable income.

Resources:

"A simple guide to what everyone needs to know about Money & Retirement," Hounsell, C.; Exec. Director, Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement; a project of the Heinz Family Philanthropies.

"IRA Basics," University of Illinois Extension, printed from website, 2006.

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Time to Gather Wood

By Joe Smith

When I was just a young whipper snapper, I stayed with my great aunt and great uncle in the summer-time. I think just to get me out of my mother's hair. Harve Dooley was his name. They were both in their seventies around that time. They lived out on a homestead ranch, 40 miles northeast of Roswell, New Mexico. At this time they had no electricity or propane for heat or cooking. They cooked with wood and heated with wood in the cooler months. Down in that country they didn't have woods like we do around here and the only wood came from the mesquite bushes, and all that came from the roots of the plant. The only way to gather wood was with a team and wagon.

No running water and no bathroom. Just a path and an outhouse, with Sears catalogs. The cistern was probably 150 feet from the house and we carried all the water in a bucket. They had lots of chickens, so we had eggs, eggs, and more eggs. Aunt Laura would cook them in rancid bacon grease, If it hadn't been for biscuits and honey I would have starved to death. It took me years before I could eat fried eggs again. Every Saturday we would go to town, sell eggs and buy a few groceries and pick up ice at the ice house in 50-lb blocks. They used an old icebox to hold the ice. Dooley drove an old '38 Plymouth. He went through a clutch every so often and Dad would fix it for him. Dooley's neighbor about three miles north had a team of mules that we borrowed. We went over to get them one day and Bill Farlander told Dooley to keep them yoked together when he turned them out at night or they would come back home. The next morning Dooley said for me to go get the mules. I looked and looked, but they weren't there, so Dooley saddled up old Snip and we went back out to look some more. He taught me how to cut sign and follow the mules. Their track was smaller than a horse. It wasn't long before we found where they crawled under the fence, still yoked together. They went straight to another fence and did the same thing. When we got over to Bill's place they were standing in the lot like nothing had happened.

We brought them back home and harnessed them up to the wagon. Aunt Laura fixed us a bite of lunch and we took off in the wagon to the breaks of the Pecos River country. Down there it was sandy and the wind had blown a lot of the roots bare so we could cut the wood loose and load it on the wagon. I think we got a couple of loads in the next day or two. Then before we took the mules back, we went all the way to Elkins, which was about ten miles over, and we went up and down the railroad tracks and picked up ties that had been replaced. It didn't take too long to get a load of them. That is the wood they burned in the wood stove in the Winter. He was just stock piling it up while he had help.

There were WW II bombing targets out on my uncle's place which was a couple of miles south of Dooley's ranch. The government had bladed a fire guard around the targets and they had dug out some mesquite roots also. We went over there to get the roots for cooking firewood. By that time Dooley had me



Joe Smith on one of his tractors at his farm west of Johnson, Nebraska

driving the team, or learning how anyway. He was throwing on the wood and I would drive. All was going well until one of those practice bombers came over and dropped a bomb about 100 yards from us. That scared the mules and they started off in a run.

I was trying to stop them with darn little luck and here loped up old Dooley and he climbed on the back of the wagon. He got in the seat next to me, took the reins and put one in each hand and started pulling one and then the other. He said to me that that was the way to do it. It must have been, because they stopped. We went back and finished the job. I still think that bomber did that on purpose. I can remember that like it was yesterday.

Aunt Laura cooked with the mesquite wood and it was one of my jobs to keep the wood box full of the right sized wood; small wood for a small fire, breakfast time. Baking took larger wood that would burn longer. And then there was Friday night when all of us had to take a bath in a wash tub. We went to town on Saturday and needed to smell better, she even made me wash behind my ears. Sunday would come and we might have friends over and Aunt Laura would chop the heads off of couple of nice pullets. As soon as they stopped flopping we would dip them in hot water and pluck all the feathers. She could sure cook fried chicken and make good cabbage slaw. That I remember for sure. Those were good times to remember, growing up on the ranch, in the summers and also Christmas vacations. The rest of the time I was stuck in town and going to school. It wasn't long until my Uncle started taking me every weekend to help him on the ranch. He had a mechanic's shop in town and also had a ranch near Dooley's.

Well, this is enough remembering for one night. At my two-finger typing speed, it kills a lot of time while it is snowing. Good way to spend Saturday night though. Joe Smith

WORK, ALL KINDS

By Joe Smith

There are many kinds of work, some complain about it, others can't do without it. Some even enjoy work. I guess I come into that class as long as it is something challenging and new. The everyday same old production line stuff, I don't think I could hack that. There are lots of people that do and I think that is great. I just don't follow that style, I love the challenge. I have had customers come in with a problem and I would have to sleep on it to come up with an answer to the problem. I had a friend out here working on my computer the

other day and he thought he had it fixed, but he didn't. I called him the next morning and he said he woke up with the answer. I did what he said and it worked. So your mind works while you sleep. Wake up in the morning and you have the answer. When somebody says they need to sleep on it that is the reason.

I am retired now and still look for things to do, customers come over and want something fixed. That is good, it keeps me from worrying about things I can't change any way. I don't have any deadline to meet and that is nice in a way but again the deadline is what keeps you young. Just to know, "Yes" I can still do it. The challenge is an important part of aging. Of course there is a physical limit to some of this. Our old bodies don't stand some of the hard work that a younger man can do. This said, I haven't found that limit yet, I'm sure it is coming, maybe in 10 more years.

Of course when you're retired you are supposed to find a rocking chair and sit on the front porch, aren't you? The retired people nowadays even take another job just to stay busy, regardless of the pay just to have some where to go and something to do. They don't want to stay around home, the wife might find something to fix, another honey do. I see a lot of retired people working in Wal-Mart, I guess just to pay Nebraska Property taxes, I just had to throw that in and it is probably very true. But these old folks, (here I'm 74 talking about old folks,) probably need the chance to feel needed and useful. Nobody wants to feel worthless. So you can criticize Wal-Mart for hiring these old folks, but the people are happy to be doing something, somebody needs them. The people that I feel sorry for are the ones that sit on their rears and wait for the next check. They get fat and lazy. They lose their health and feel sorry for themselves. So if you are in that class, go out and go to work. Find a job doing something, You will feel much better after you do. Many more retired people are working nowadays than ever before and that is good and good for them. They stay healthy doing something, besides sitting around in that rocking chair. Then the Lord put us down here to help our self and others, not sit there with our hand out waiting for some one else to take care of us. Just my 2 cents worth. Joe Smith

Lots more of Joe's articles can be found in the back issues of Your Country Neighbor online at:

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Click on "Publications"



Farewell to Albert Austin ... King of the River Bluff

by Vicki Harger

It's fitting, I suppose, that his last full day on earth was Groundhog's Day—a fun and fanciful day devoted to those spring-forecasting critters from the wild—the kind of critters that Albert Austin loved so much.

Surrounded by birds and wildlife, Mr. Austin had enjoyed life amongst the groundhogs and other critters for almost twenty years, there on top of the River Bluff. Indeed, Albert loved all of God's creation—with one possible exception.

The old gent was suspicious of scavenger buzzards. How often he'd pause to squint up at the sky above his house, eyeing the circling buzzards warily. "They're waiting for me," he'd say. "Just waiting for me to die."

But there were no circling buzzards when Albert Austin came down to his final days. There were no groundhogs or other wild critters, either. Just a finch or two, perhaps, outside his nursing home window.

I sat beside my dear old friend in Room 313. He lay back in his recliner with his eyes closed—his breathing rapid and shallow, his pulse pounding in his veins. My friend was nearing the end of his journey. This old King of the River Bluff was getting ready to head across the river for a final crossing, but this time it would be the Jordan River, not the Mighty MO.

The old man's eyes opened briefly, and he looked at me with his intense blue gaze. "H-H-a-p—Hap...?" He tried to say my name—the nickname that he's given me.

I squeezed his hand. "Yes. Happy's here with you. Now just relax, okay?"

He stared at me a moment, his eyes trying to convey what his mouth couldn't say. But there was really no need for conversation. The words that might've been spoken, had already been said many times over.

I remembered the conversation we'd had, just days before.

"You'll come to visit me in the cemetery...?" Mr. Austin had said. "And we'll sit under the trees and talk and sing like we always do...?"

"Yes..."

"And we'll sing that song...? 'When-you-come-to-the-end-of-a-perfect-day-and-you-sit-alone-with-your-thoughts...?'"

"Of course."

He'd fallen silent, then, and we sat thinking about all the times we've sung that song. How many Perfect Days we'd had, sitting there at his bluff-top retreat—there on his big, tree-lined deck—watching the beloved birds flutter about his feeders. It didn't seem possible that those days were over, and that we'd finally come to the last line of that song... "Well, this is the end of a perfect day, and the end of a journey, too."

No more boat rides on the Mighty MO. No more fireside chats while the snowflakes fell outside his windows. No more song fests and *Tra-la-la-BOOM-dee-ay's!* This was the end of his journey.

I held his hand, and Mr. Austin drifted into a fitful slumber. Occasionally, he'd give a sudden jerk as he surfaced in and out of sleep. I wondered what he was dreaming about. Was he seeing a glimpse of eternity just ahead? Was there a death angel nearby, waiting to escort Mr. Austin along the final steps of his journey?

A breeze wafted through the partially opened window, stirring the curtains like the invisible hand of an angel. At the bird feeder just outside the window, chick-

a-dees fluttered about, but Mr. Austin no longer saw his beloved feathered friends. The sun sank lower in the west. It wouldn't be long before the silent ushering of a soul into eternity would begin.

The door of the room opened and someone came in. I looked up startled, half-expecting to see the death angel standing there, but it was only a friend from the nursing home, pausing to say farewell.

The good-byes had begun.

For the next few hours a procession of people showed up at the door of Room 313. Dear old friends who had known Mr. Austin for decades...Newer friends that he had made there in the nursing home. Each one of them paused beside his recliner for several moments, to squeeze his hand, or to give a salute. Mr. Austin returned the salutes and handshakes—looking at each visitor mutely, fondly—unable to say what was on his heart.

It was a poignant process—this uttering of final good-byes. The laughter and tears and long conversations that had been woven throughout the course of his life had now reached their end. The only thing left were the final threads, to be tied up and snipped off one by one. It's the tapestry of life, a panorama of one's lifetime spread out for all to see. Mr. Austin's tapestry was a beautiful one—a fact attested to by the multitude of friends who stopped by to say farewell.

At last, the door of his room closed and the curtains were drawn. The sun had set, and the time had come for me to say my own good-bye. It wasn't an elaborate one. It was the same farewell we'd been uttering for several months, now. Ever since his health had begun to decline, we'd said our good-byes very carefully—acutely conscious that each time we saw one another, it could be our last.

"Good-bye Carefully, Mr. Austin," I said to him. It was our customary farewell, but this time it had greater meaning. He squeezed my hand one last time, looking at me with his intense blue gaze.

"Good-bye Carefully," he whispered. There was so much more we wanted to say, but the end of our long conversations had come.

I blinked back the tears and walked out the door, leaving behind my dear friend.

Outside, the full moon rose higher on the horizon, a shining beacon in the night. It led me down the road and up the long driveway toward Albert Austin's house on the bluff.

I drove past the buzzard tree—the big dead elm where the scavengers loved to park on damp evenings, draping their wings outward to dry. But there were no buzzards tonight. Just the dead, bare branches silhouetted in the twilight.

I stared at the ranks of dark trees surrounding the house. They stood like sentinels, guarding the acreage that Mr. Austin loved so much. Far below the house, the Missouri River ambled on through the twilight—a pathway of darkness, lit only by the lantern of the moon. I gazed at the far ridge just to the west of me. There I could dimly make out the evergreen trees that grew in the cemetery where the King of the River Bluff would soon lay in repose...The beautiful graveyard with its gentle slopes and towering trees, not far from the Mighty MO.

Shadows lengthened.

Somewhere out there, the feathered friends of Mr. Austin were settling in for the long night. All the critters of the wild were nestled into their dens and dark places. The 'possums and coons and groundhogs.

And somewhere out there, the King of the River Bluff was preparing to go underground as well—preparing to go to his place on yonder cemetery ridge.

The night wind sighed through the bare branches of the buzzard tree. And I sighed, too, as I took a last look around Mr. Austin's house.

I can't understand the mysteries of life and death. I don't know why on this Groundhog's Day my wonderful friend had to be dying, when the promise of spring was just around the corner and a season of warmth and renewal was just ahead. But one thing was certain...as certain as the moon on the river, and the stars in the sky...As certain as the sun that would rise again tomorrow.

On resurrection morn, when the graves give up the dead—like the awakening groundhog, Albert Austin will come forth from his den overlooking the Missouri River.

And he won't see his shadow at all...Because all shadows will be gone, all darkness will have passed away...And the eternal spring will have just begun.

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Country

Scenes



You'll soon see this guy along the road where the ditches are deep, singing his territorial song with a ricochet sound.



Foot bridge at Waubonsie State Park (Iowa).



Prairie sunset in Winter.



Between Falls City and Rulo.



Although this scene brings up fond memories for me, I appreciate today's version of plumbing.



On one of seven hills in Brownville.

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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report

by Josh Whisler
(Photos provided by Author)



Fishing:

In the last issue I stated, “It’s time to look for some place north or south if you want to fish,” because it wasn’t cold enough for ice on ponds and the icy river was definitely out. Well, since then, north came to us. Ice on area ponds and lakes got to 10 inches or more, with bitter cold weather so you need to brave the wind and below freezing temps to get the ice fishing in. Then there is the problem of finding bait this time of year. It’s not easy to ice fish, but well worth the effort.

“How do you ice fish,” you ask? Well, this is my angle on it. Looking the pond over and finding deep spots can be challenging (i.e. you have drill holes and check the depth). But when you find the holes, usually by the pond spillway, it’s time to figure how you’re going to fish it. There is basically three ways to ice fish. 1) There is the Jig Technique – you basically drop your bait to the bottom and slowly raise the bait towards the surface accompanied with short jerks (jigging). When you see a hit on your rod tip you then set the hook and reel them in. 2) Using a bobber – your bobber is a slip type that slides up and down your line and is set by a pin when desired depth is achieved. Basically you let your bait to the bottom with the pin out of the bobber then raise the line off the bottom to a desired level and set the bobber with the pin. In this technique you watch for the action of the bobber and set the hook. You then take the line by hand and pull the fish to the surface. After the fish is removed you re-bait if needed and drop the bait right back to the same depth since your bobber has set the depth. This works for fish that school together like crappie and bluegill. Many times by the time it hits the depth you have action again. You simply set the hook, pull them in, remove the fish, and get it back in while the school stays in the area. 3) Using Pop-ups – pop-ups are, for a lack of other words, a “mouse trap” that works on fish. These are devices that are placed over the hole in the ice and while the bait is suspended at a desire depth. The spring loaded arm of the device is lowered and latched. The trigger sensitivity can be set so the lightest tug on the line actuates the arm that rapidly swings up thus hooking the fish. The arm has an orange flag on it so when a fish is on, the fisherman can see this and remove the fish and re-bait. Many times you will see dozens of these over a pond and the fisherman moves between them removing fish and re-baiting. Basically, flag up – fish on. Limits for panfish are 30 bag (on the ice) and possession 60 (in the freezer).

Hunting:

The only hunting season open recently was cottontail rabbit season and it lasted to the end of February. The recent frigid temps and snow cover kept them holed up, except for morning and evening when they came out to forage for food.

NEWS FLASH – NEW for 2007 Spring Turkey – Starting January 10th you can purchase your statewide Spring turkey season tag. There are unlimited permits (if you want one —buy one). And for the first time in you can obtain up to 3 permits. Permits can be obtained from now through May 20th over the counter or online.

Seasons start as follows:

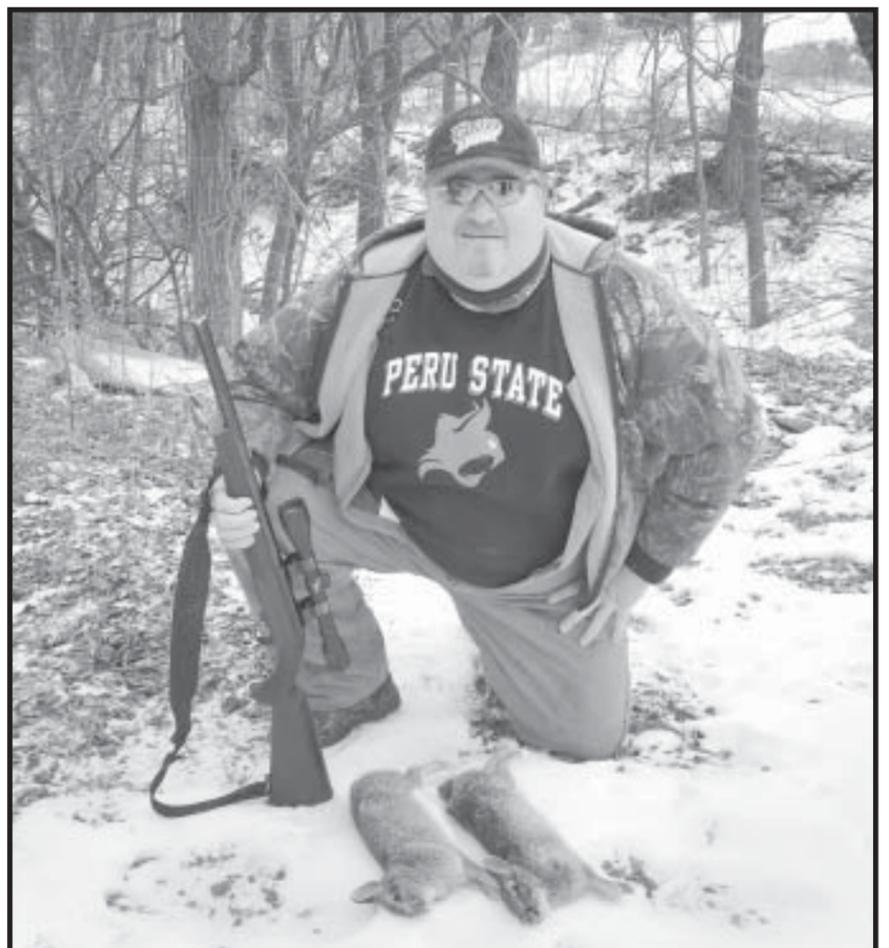
Archery – March 25th

Shotgun — April 14th

This Fall and Winter hunting is about over but next year’s seasons are now being set for the 2007-2008 seasons by the Nebraska Game & Parks. You already can obtain your Spring turkey permits if you want. It may seem cold and gray until the weather warms up, but now is the time to clean the guns up or re-string your fishing poles for the upcoming year’s adventures. You can never be too ready. 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.”



Jay Moran from Peru jigging for panfish on a local farm pond.



Josh with a couple cottontails taken one snowy morning.

Bea's Flower Buzz

"The White Lily"

by Bea Patterson

My Missouri granddaughter Kaitlyn and I are birthday-mates in the month of March. First comes her day (this year #14) and the next day is mine (#?).

Not surprisingly, I have loved Kait even *before* she sprouted – from the moment her father/my son told me about the little seed that was germinating and due to arrive in the spring. Each stage of her growth has been delightful

to watch and ponder. I say "ponder" because I see her blossoming before my very eyes, drawing strength and personality from the soil mix in which she is putting down her roots. Granddaughters become hybrids, metaphorically speaking, and the process is amazing.

So, this issue of B's FB is dedicated to Kaitlyn Margaret, who blooms in my heart all year around, and whose favorite flower is the "white lily."

"To create a little flower is the labor of ages."

William Blake



The lily has a long and historic past. Even the Bible refers to "...lilies of the field..." and throughout art history, the lily was often featured in religious paintings, especially of the Virgin Mary. In today's culture, the lily remains a symbol of purity and peace, of womanhood, hope and life. Especially popular in spring and during the Lenten season, I read where

it is the fourth largest potted plant crop in the U.S.

What is a "lily?" A true lily belongs to the family *Liliaceae* and genus *Lilium*. *Liliaceae* are identified by blossoms with six petal-like parts (three of which are actually transformed sepals) which arch backwards, seed pods hidden inside, and leaves with parallel veins.

Kait's choice is most likely either what has become known as the Easter Lily, which came from the Orient and

introduced in the late 19th century, or the Madonna Lily. These represent the white trumpet group and are sweetly fragrant, grown from bulb or seed, and have lots of leaves which walk up the stem. Blossoms last several days.

The highly recognizable Tiger Lily is a close cousin in genus *Lilium*. Other genus cousins under *Liliaceae* are day lilies, tulips, Lily-of-the-Valley, Star-of-Bethlehem,

hyacinths, Solomon's Seal, asparagus, yucca, and yes, the onion.

In today's market, because of extensive hybridizing, lilies come in a wide range of colors, heights, and blooming seasons. Generally, they prefer sunny locations with fertile soil that is well-drained. Plant in fall or in spring after the soil has warmed up. Keep roots cool by covering with mulch or ground cover, stake tall blooms, and dead-head spent blooms to prolong attractiveness.

Should you purchase or receive a potted lily, keep the spent blossoms and leaves pruned back. To water, remove the pot from its decorative paper wrapper, water thoroughly (letting water drain out of the hole at the bottom of the pot), give the pot a few minutes to "breathe," and return it to the wrapper – don't let it sit in water trapped inside the wrapper. Also, I usually clip off the

stamen anthers because the powdery pollen grains can make a mess and stain.

You may want to plant the bulb outdoors after blooming is finished. Either cut stems to 2" above the bulb and plant in the ground to where just the tip of the foliage is visible, or place the plant about 3" in the ground and then cut stems and leaves back to ground as they wither. Proceed as stated above. New growth will appear soon and may yet bloom again later in the summer.



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Happy Birthday, Sweet
Kait!
Love, Grandma Bea

Diary of an Unemployed Housewife

Merri Johnson

We've all seen those TV ads of dogs and their owners, illustrating how uncannily some pairs resemble one another. The Irish Setter and the red-haired woman with the long face. The Bulldog and the jowly man with a large head. The Cocker Spaniel and the woman with curly, shoulder-length hair. I don't believe that our dog Annie actually resembles me, except that she has thick, wavy hair like mine, including on her face. Sadly, excess facial hair is something I can relate to! At least I don't have her rheumy eyes to go along with it. Yet.

The comparisons don't end with the physical appearance of man and his best friend. Consider the human vs. dog life-span calculation. Conventional wisdom says every year of human life translates to seven years for a dog. Annie's going on fifteen now. Holy Cow! That's a hundred and five for you or me. Unless you take into account that smaller dogs like Annie live longer than the big breeds like Great Danes. In that case, maybe she's only about 80. Either way, she's elderly. And showing it.

I look at Annie and see my future. And sometimes my present.

She has her good days when she still frolics around the yard like a puppy. She comes bounding back up onto the front porch full-speed until one of her front legs buckles and she crashes head-first into the step. You'd think she'd yelp in pain, but she just takes it in stride and picks herself up. Then there are the days when her arthritis is evident in her wobbly, three-legged shuffle down the stairs. Ditto that. If I've been sitting for more than half an hour, my hips tighten up like rusty hinges. I'm glad I haven't had the opportunity to see myself on video taking those first few steps after an hour in the car. Too depressing.

Some days, for no apparent reason, Annie just doesn't have an appetite. I'd probably be better off if I imitated her on that score, but I generally manage to eat my share.

I'm pretty sure her vision and hearing are impaired, too. Although without medical confirmation, it's hard to say if she really doesn't see and hear me calling her, or if she's just exercising the prerogative of the elderly to ignore what they don't want to hear and get away with it. She naps a good deal of the day, like most dogs do. But she used to hear the back door open and come flying downstairs to escape outside before the door closed. Now, I frequently have to go upstairs and wake her up to take her out after I've been away.

And once she gets outside, she doesn't always seem to understand what she's supposed to do. Dogs get senile, too, you know. I can almost hear her pondering. *Hmmm. Am I supposed to chase that squirrel? Do I need to wee-wee (my grandmother's euphemism)? Maybe we're going for a walk. But where's my leash?* Sometimes she begs to be let outdoors, and then just stands on the edge of the porch, staring into space and sniffing the air. Maybe that's all she wanted to do, after all.

It's difficult, sometimes, to be patient with Annie when she clumsily gets in our way or doesn't respond to our commands. I've chided my husband a time or two about his short fuse. "I certainly hope you'll be nicer to me if I get senile someday, and have to rely on you." He assures me that he will be. In fairness, I have to remind myself to be understanding, too.

Years ago, my husband taught Annie to perform a series of tricks to earn a dog treat. Beyond that, she's never learned to do anything particularly useful, like fetch slippers or the newspaper, and she isn't big enough to be much of a guard dog. Today the tables are turned: she's teaching us a lesson in compassion. I think we're getting better at it, day by day. Thanks, Annie.

Poetry, etc.

ETERNITY BURNING

Devon Adams

How long is a life?
When is it over?
Are we sailing on a runaway ship
or will we return to our harbor?
Will the blue sky burn away
as our sun explodes
and melts the green frosting
on this tiny cake of earth?
And will we then pop up,
like a piece of toast,
in another dimension?
Or is life limited to breath,
lasting only long enough to love
the signals from our senses,
and learn to think about tomorrow
and the long gone past
that used to be tomorrow?
Can we be satisfied
if today is all there is,
or may we hope to exist
as embers burning in eternity,
ghosts glowing on the edge of time?

WALKING ON QUICKSAND

Devon Adams

Sometimes we have to take a stand
about issues that cause us to fear
the results of our actions.
Making your voice heard and understood
can be a complicated and calculated risk.
People who wear the suits of authority
exist behind invisible barriers.
Often, they hear only what they want to hear.
Walking in someone else's shoes is not their habit.
Out of a group of a hundred people,
there may be only one or two, or none,
who have enough courage to step away
from the anonymous crowd and speak.
They don't enjoy making waves.
But important issues will simply be ignored
unless we jump into the cold water of reality
and splash it far enough and loud enough
to make a difference.

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Poetry, etc.

HUMAN RELATIONS

Devon Adams

Humans are thinking animals,
and we are made of chemicals.
We are the same, but we are all different.
We share characteristics and DNA
that makes us a species distinct from other forms of life,
although we are apparently close cousins
of the ape family, some of whom
appear to be smarter than some of us.
However, we do stand out in a zoo
as being particularly human.
Comparing us as individuals can be
as confusing as it is fascinating.
Siblings raised in the same house
by the same parents, in the same time span,
may physically resemble each other,
but from a psychological perspective,
these brothers and sisters give such divergent
accounts of growing up that they sound
like they came from separate families.
Each child perceives the same situation
in different ways, so that your memory of
the Christmas dinner when you were eleven may sound
like it took place at someone else's house,
compared to your sister's version.
Parents really don't treat their children equally.
They do that because kids are like snowflakes.
No two are alike.
Sometimes we can get along well with Susie,
and we can't say, "Please pass the salt," to Jim,
without a conflict exploding.
Growing up can be hard on kids and parents,
even when life is easy, which is rare.
Often, the most difficult relationships
are between a parent and child
who are most like each other.
Neither can step back far enough to realize
that they are fighting with themselves.
We humans vary so much that communication
between us can be catastrophic.
What I hear you say,
and what you mean when you speak,
aren't always the same thing.
Man speaking to woman is not the same
exchange as woman speaking to man.
Carrying on a conversation can be compared
to walking across a mine field, because,
although you can see the point
that you want to make, you can never be sure
that the other person will see the same point,
let alone agree with your conclusions or opinion.
Sometimes a nice heart-to-heart talk
with your dog is the best way to end your day.



Midnight Snow

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The Face of Drought

A Farm Report from Western Nebraska

by Karen Ott

In any other part of the country the local newspaper would have buried the story, but here at drought central, where anything to do with water is news with a capital N, it was front page material.

“The Wyoming Pipeline Authority is trying to determine whether it makes sense to develop a network of pipelines to carry coal-bed methane water away from the Powder River Basin and discharge it into the North Platte or Big Horn rivers” said the supervisor of the Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation commission. “By the end of October 2006 the industry had already produced more water (680 million barrels) than it did in all of 2005.”

At the present time methane-water, which ranchers and landowners say kills trees and grass, is discharged into rivers that flow into Montana, but environmental regulators of that state recently sued Wyoming over the discharges, forcing energy companies to look elsewhere.

“A system of pipelines could carry an estimated 100 million barrels of water per day to treatment-and-injection sites...OR....to the Big Horn and North Platte Rivers”, said Brian Jeffries, director of the Pipeline Authority. “At 30 cents a barrel the cost of a pipeline is on the high side of some of the current alternatives but the system would take away some of the uncertainty the energy industry faces because of litigation between Wyoming and Montana over water issues.”

Methane water, a novel approach to reducing Russian Olive infestations along the North Platte....along with everything else.

Remnants of December's Christmas snow linger in the shade of my backyard spruce trees and our cold butter-milk mornings are bitter. But some afternoons, when the conditions are just right, the sun will caress your cheek with kiss so soft and warm it takes your breath away. It's always a brief encounter, a few moments at best, but it leaves behind a promise of spring, a treasured, time-honored pledge to all who work the land. It's still winter.....but not for long.

I ordered several packets of seed last week; common vegetables and some flashy zinnias. I was tempted by an ounce of 'Autumn-Wing' gourd seed from the Rocky Mountain Seed company out of Denver, but upon discovering the cost was \$19.95 I decided a few everyday, run of the mill gourds would look just as good in a fall arrangement as Colorado's Cadillac version. It certainly puts the price of a bushel of corn in perspective doesn't it?

I've spent the dark evenings of winter working on a quilt, a red and green combination of patchwork blocks and flower appliqué. I dislike machine sewing but enjoy handwork, measuring my progress by snippets of thread and rows of tiny stitches. I wear glasses where once I was able to thread a needle in the dimmest of light, and my fingers aren't as agile as they were when I was 25, but I'm more patient now and my work is better; that's some compensation.

Like my grandmother before me I've vowed to hand-stitch a wedding quilt for each of my grandchildren. It's an old fashioned notion I know, after all, there are more unmarried couples now than ever before, but I'll make them just the same. My grandmother wasn't given the time to fulfill her dream; my red and white gingham check quilt was one of her last...and I was only eight.

I'm determined to start early; because you just never know.....

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Disease Susceptibility: The Stress Connection

Ursula Waln, N.D.

Not so long ago, most of the medical profession maintained that stress had little or no effect on people's health. However, burgeoning frontiers of research into psychoneuroimmunology have improved our understanding, and now it is widely agreed that stress does play an important role in disease susceptibility. When people talk about stress, it is usually understood that they mean psychological tension caused by unpleasantness. This is the stress that wears us down. It is interesting to note, however, that other types of stress can also impact our health. Psychological stress can be pleasurable (eustress) or taxing (distress). For example, getting married, starting a new job, or buying a new home can be stressful though viewed as positive and desirable events. On the other hand, interpersonal conflict, financial worries, and disappointed life ambitions are generally viewed as negative stressors. Stress can also be physical in origin. Fighting an infection, dealing with toxic exposure, or healing damaged tissues, for example, places stress on the body, resulting in many of the same physiological events associated with psychological stress. Additionally, stress can be of short duration (e.g., having a heated argument, suffering a severe chill), or it can be long lasting (e.g., grieving the loss of a loved one, managing a chronic illness).

High levels of stress increase our susceptibility to infectious diseases. Most of us have noticed that we are most likely to catch a cold or flu that's going around when we are feeling unusually stressed. The same holds true for other infections, whether viral, bacterial, or fungal. This is largely due to the fact that when we are under stress, our brains signal our adrenal glands to increase production of cortisol, and cortisol inhibits immune function. Cortisol is the active hormone derived from the precursor cortisone. Both are corticosteroids. Most people are familiar with the use of synthetic corticosteroids to suppress the immune system and its inflammatory processes – as in organ transplants, autoimmune diseases, and painful inflammatory conditions. These drugs essentially mimic the effects of our own natural cortisol, a stress hormone that reserves energy for “fight or flight.”

By the same token, chronic stress is often an underlying factor in the development of chronic illnesses. Our bodies do not absorb nutrients, detoxify, heal, and regen-

erate optimally when we are chronically stressed out. Our suppressed immune systems may fail to detect and dispose of mutated cells that can lead to cancer. Stress-induced high blood pressure can place strain on the cardiovascular system. Anxiety and/or depression may interfere with our circadian rhythms, disrupting hormonal balances and depriving us of much needed sleep. If we are genetically predisposed to a particular condition, chronic stress will often increase the likelihood of the condition manifesting and/or increase the severity of the condition.

Stress is an unavoidable part of life, so what can we do? Here are some suggestions:

- Identify those stressors that are within your ability to control and take steps to manage them. Stress often results from reluctance to act, to do what we must to change a situation. Sometimes we have to take responsibility for bringing about our own happiness.
- While we may not be able to control all of the stressors in our lives, we can control our responses to them. Pay attention to your own thoughts and emotional reactions. Strive to keep your reactions in proportion to the importance of the event or situation. Strive to accept those things that you cannot change.

- Find effective means of relieving stress, such as exercising, doing yoga, using relaxation techniques, talking to a trusted friend, engaging in activities for enjoyment, meditating, or praying. Avoid resorting to self-destructive means of suppressing feelings, such as abusing alcohol or drugs, smoking, overeating, or ‘cutting.’
- Pay attention to the bright side of things. You don't have to pretend that the negative doesn't exist in order to notice the positive. Learn to value the positive as much as you do the negative.

We all have a threshold for healthy levels of stress in our lives, and within this threshold we thrive on stress. Stress keeps us alert and makes us strong. Our bodies require the stress of immunologic challenges to build healthy immune defenses, the stress of gravity and exercise to grow strong bones and muscles. Our minds require the stress of mental challenges to learn, the stress of psychological disturbances to mature. The more we embrace the stress that is a natural and necessary part of life and learn to manage it effectively, the less we allow ourselves to be victimized by that stress, and the greater our threshold for it becomes.

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Summer Dreams



A recent snowfall and a feeder of black oil sunflower seeds brought this guy within range of my camera lens.



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