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March 2011



Brownville Area, Morning of February 18



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Voices from your Valley

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Voices from the Valley of the Nemaha

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

Writers this month

- Devon Adams
- Merri Johnson
- Shirley Neddenriep
- Vicki O'Neal
- Karen Ott
- Josh Whisler
- Marilyn Woerth

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Thank You

Your Country Neighbor

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Editor's note:

More than five years of this publication are online at:

www.yourcountryneighbor.com



I know you're over there....



A frigid blizzard is reason enough to get a big evening meal.

Diary of a Part-time Housewife by Merri Johnson

Electronic communication is a fantastic convenience. It allows me to procrastinate on my monthly Diary article until the last minute and still get it emailed to the publisher on time! Of course, there's often a downside to the upside: I tend to procrastinate *longer* because I can get away with it.

Signing up for automatic emails from websites that I like puts interesting articles in my inbox with no effort on my part. But it does take a certain amount of discipline to scan the titles and delete the unwanted ones before I get sucked into spending an hour reading about every nutrition fad or health alert that just came out. Most of the time, the advice articles are just rewrites of the same common sense wisdom we all know already. And the danger alerts have become so ubiquitous that I wonder if anyone actually pays any attention to them at all. Ok, I confess I do pay a little attention: I'm going to warn *my sister* about all that diet soda she drinks, now that it's been linked to strokes.

This morning I took an on-line survey to determine if my diet is contributing to my sagging, wrinkling face. The questions were so loaded that I couldn't help but answer them correctly. *After a strenuous workout, what kind of snack do I reach for?* Number one, I don't do strenuous workouts. Number two, I don't keep Snickers or tofu on hand, so I had to choose the chocolate covered strawberries. Which is definitely what I would choose if I kept those on hand. The contents of my pantry and refrigerator apparently don't resemble the typical consumer's.

And what do I usually order in a restaurant? Salad with nutritious toppings? Pasta with veggies? Burger and fries? Veggie pizza? I'm not sure there's a restaurant in Auburn that actually includes all of those items. But if there were, I'd be gobbling the pasta.

My quiz score earned me congratulations on eating all the right stuff. So, why is my face sagging and wrinkling? You say it's because of my age? No! There must be a remedy short of a face-lift. I think it's called lying on my back. Ever notice how much smoother the skin appears in that position? Naturally, a pitch for a complexion diet plan followed the survey. I mustered the will power to decline to sign up.

Aside from the distraction of the automatic emails, there's the encouragement to join all kinds of discussions on Facebook. The one that really blows my mind is by Chapstick. The radio announcer sings the praises of moist lips and invites listeners to add their stories of "when they fell in love with Chapstick" on Facebook. Seriously? People actually exist who have nothing better to do with their time than blog about lip balm?

With various cautionary tales now in the news about the psychological and social hazards of addiction to instant and constant communication, some of the purveyors of cell phones are trying to turn that hazard to their advantage. One is marketing a phone "to save us from our phones." I guess their model is supposed to be more efficient, so the user can actually "afford" to tear himself away from it long enough to watch his child's athletic event. How noble. Another one pokes fun of a woman obsessed with knowing what her new boyfriend thinks of her. She is shown perched in a tree outside his bedroom window monitoring his every electronic communication with her own device. She admits that her behavior is "crazy," but it's really the manufacturer that's crazy....like a fox.

Most assuredly, every advance in time-saving, labor-saving technology has its dark side. By all means, take advantage of the benefits, but remember that the makers of all this technology are in business to make a buck off you. Maintaining your sanity is up to you.

PEGGY KUSER

Certified Public Accountant

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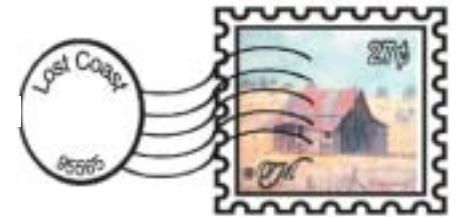
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THE "SS MINNOW"

By Vicki O'Neal



I feel most deprived. Since coming to the West Coast, I haven't gotten to go boating.

All summer long, I used to race up and down the Mighty Muddy MO, but now that I live near the lovely blue waters of NorCal, I've had to give up my favorite past-time.

It's horridly unfair. Totally ironic.

The greatest irony is that there are two big boats parked in our front yard. A seafaring V-Hull...as well as an expensive race-boat called the "PickleFork-Hydro" that goes from 0 to 120 mph in moments... When it's running, that is!

My husband has spent many days trying to coax life into these silly boats. But they are hypochondriacs—both of them. Sickly vessels, not worthy of their calling.

I loathe them. They take up oodles of time and money. They have yet to take me on a single voyage...Not one trip in three years! I resent them greatly.

After years of boatlessness, I'd nearly given up on my dream of ever boating again...Then one day, it happened.

Michael and I stumbled upon a boat at a Yard Sale...a nondescript 12-footer. A sturdy little job made of fiberglass. It had camouflage paint and was as ugly as last week's leftovers, but I immediately fell in love with the row-boat.

Michael offered the owner a hundred bucks...Not a nickel more. And the man took it.

We carried our skiff home and promptly named it "The SS Minnow," after the noble boat on Gilligan's Island. I was ecstatic.

At last, I had the real deal! Not a fat, useless V-Hull, or a hypochondriac Pickle-Fork...But an honest-to-goodness boat with oars!

"Make us a picnic lunch!" said the Captain...the Skipper of my ship. "We're heading for the River!"

I've never packed a lunch so fast in my life.

Throwing our sandwiches into the pickup, we bounced our way down to the river bar, pulling along the homely little Minnow. There were several other boats ahead of us. Sleek, shiny boats with fine paint-jobs—almost as fancy as our hypochondriac-boats sitting at home. They made the "SS Minnow" look like fish bait.

But I couldn't care less.

Let 'em have their prissy Playboy-Boats!...Useless relics that spend most of their days lounging in a marina!...Preening themselves in the sunshine!

Not so, our "SS Minnow!"

Brave and jaunty, our little dingy set out amongst the finer vessels—but soon, the fancy boys disappeared, roaring up the river. We were alone with our worthy Minnow.

Michael manned the oars. As First Mate, I rode the helm, humming a rendition of "Michael Rowed His Boat Ashore! Hal-le-luu-uu-yah!"

Such a fine afternoon. A day of my dreams. How long had I waited for this moment?

The river bluffs rose up before us: pale palace walls of the castle-cliffs gleaming in the sunshine. I gazed at the blue dome overhead...Marble blue, as far as the eye could see.

Leaning back, I tangled my fingers in the crystal waters rippling past. Hawks circled above us, their cries rebounding from the bluffs and ancient trees lining the river.

We had slipped back in time—paddling along like our ancestors before us, the oars dipping in-and-out, in-and-out. At last, we came to a sandy bar on the distant shore. Trees and trickling springs. Shadows and solitude.

Like explorers to the New World, we beached our boat and climbed ashore. We picnicked

and frolicked—exploring the little river cove, reveling in spring-like breezes.

We whiled the day away, the Capt'n, the Minnow, and I—paddling up and down the river—forging the whirlpools and currents. Michael rowed mightily and the steady Minnow forged ahead, never once threatening to dump us in the waves.

Eventually, of course, it had to end. The sun began to set and the Playboy-Boats returned, snorting their way down the river. They gulped gasoline and burped fumes, spreading an oily sheen across the waters. They sat preening themselves in the rays of the setting sun, looking down on us from their haughty hulls.

But I was unperturbed.

I had memories to take home that they knew nothing of. Gentle memories of whispering waves and soaring hawks. The breathless silence of shadowy glens. The castle-bluffs gleaming in the sun.

Sunshine and rippling waves. The flash and splash of wandering fish...And the joy of our vessel swimming among them.

I had my boat...the little Minnow. A small ship on her maiden voyage...not at all ugly to me now. A tiny Queen amongst the noisy sports-boats. She was everything I'd dreamed of and more.

We were the lucky ones. And I knew it. There was none on the river that could compare...None finer. None braver. None more adventurous...

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Vicki O'Neal
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Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

“Anticipation is driving me crazy.” It’s that time of the year, when my cabin fever has been stretched so taunt I am like a rock (actually more like a boulder) in a sling shot, ready to be launched full force into Spring.

Impatiently we wait for March to unfold, the snow to melt away, and for those perfectly scented warm breezes to edge the thermometer upwards. We wait for that first perfect work weekend to inspire and invigorate us to move forward. Each day my husband and I drift over to the pond and take mental notes of the work yet to be accomplished. The pond is 30’ by 70’ with an island in the middle of it and an earthen dam separates the two deepest ends.

During the winter months Steve places two aerators and two tank heaters in the deep ends of the oval pond on either side of the dam to keep oxygen in the water for the survival of the fish and plants. One of the major spring tasks in our garden is the cleaning of the pond. Make no mistake, this is a very dismal but unavoidable chore, best undertaken as a team.

In the past this project has been the foulest smelling, back breaking job of the whole year. Hubby would lower the water level low enough so we could rake or blow leaves and debris into a blue tarp. In the deeper areas where there was water filled with goldfish, koi, we would haul five gallon buckets of muck from the bottom of the pond. This muck contains some of the most grotesque smells to penetrate my nasal cavities. You know you are still in love when you and your partner are covered in this muck, reek from the smell, while every joint in your body aches and you can still throw kisses at each other (no touching, yuk). Then in unison you look at each other and say, “There has got to be a better way”. So after several years of mucking out the pond we had an epiphany.

We called the local septic tank guy and now he and his truck annually visit our pond every March. For just over a hundred dollars and an hour or so of work this once despised job is finished (minus a few small gold fish and an occasional frog). After changing our clothes and a brief respite it is onto the rest of the chores on our list.

After the cattails have been cut back and divided, the white, pink and red water lilies and lotus are divided, the pond refilled, pumps for the waterfall put back in, waterfall cleaned out, the roses pruned, the tall ornamental grasses cut back with the electric hedge trimmer, the dead left-over plant skeletons of the perennials have been removed, and those pesky early spring weeds pulled, we rest.

We move to the tea house overlooking the pond and sip our wine and watch Mother Nature at her finest. And when anyone says, “Boy you guys really put a lot of work into this place”. We puff out our chests and silently never deny those words. Then we take another sip of wine, confident that our hard work has rewarded us and feeling blessed for being given the opportunity to live where life is good.

WEATHER

Shirley Neddenriep

This is part of a telephone conversation I had with a driver I know. It was Monday, January 24, 2011 about 10 am. Right away, as soon as he answered his cell phone, he began with the weather. He said, "I drove 3 hours in a snowstorm so dense I couldn't see the center line at 5 mph." He was busy with his breakfast and asked if he could call me back.

It is always better not to bother a guy who is enjoying a meal. A little bit later, he called and told me that he had arrived at Estes, Idaho, at sunup after having driven in that snow. He had found a place to park the rig and there was this little cafe. But, he said, "First, I went to sleep awhile, then Carl called. He talked for 50 minutes, right through my sleep time, but had news of a window in the weather." That, he said, was good news, because he was still headed west through worrisome mountain passes on his way to Seattle.

"Why are you in the Northwest?" I wanted to know. He told me, "I found a military load and it paid good." He usually stays out of that part of our country in winter. He drives a Peterbilt pulling a step-deck, for heavy industrial loads. I had called about a farm issue, but I always ask him about the roads. "The next," he explained patiently, "is Cabbage Pass, Oregon," and after that "Fourth-of-July." He said he had a drop in Yakima and in Rosemont, and on north to Seattle to a military base. Then he could head south to California where Siskiyou Pass on the border between Oregon and California waits. In 2008 on this day the Oregon Department Of Roads required all southbound and northbound traffic to chain up. All drivers dislike having to chain up! Later I looked up Cabbage Pass. It was clear and open. As was Siskiyou Pass. The next time he called I commented that the photos of mountain passes looked wide and easy, not like mountain roads at all. He said, "If you were actually driving those roads, you would know you were in the mountains. At Siskiyou Pass there is a runaway road every mile and a half."

Runaway roads have been part of the national highway system for more than 30 years. In earlier days if truck brakes failed coming down a long mountain grade, the driver risked his life, that of other drivers on the road, occupants of roadside property or towns at the bottom of the steep incline. Runaway roads allow a truck to coast to a controlled stop most of the time. Siskiyou Pass has several 'truck escape ramps' because it has a 6% grade for seven miles. Another reason to stay in flatland Nebraska!

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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler

Fishing:

The River is running cold and low right now. The ice flows are wall to wall most the time and the crunching sounds send a tingle up your spine. You know that water is cold right now and if you were to slip and fall in, 'it's over'. Sobering to think how powerful the river really is. Soon enough the spring melt will bring some flooding and fishing will return to normal. Until then we'll just have to wait.

Lake & pond fishing:

The ice on area ponds and lakes has finally set, and I have seen as much as 10 inches in places. The rule is 5 inches for safe fishing. Local fishermen have been hitting the panfish pretty regular in the past week. Mostly bluegill but some luck with crappie. Fish are always good eating this time of year. Coming straight out of the clear icy water – not muddy tasting and white and flaky. They are hard to beat. What are they hitting on you say? Wax worms if you can find them and night crawlers if you can't. Some are having luck with gigs and power bait. A lot of that luck depends on the color and size.

Hunting:

We still have a little hunting left - the cottontail rabbit season lasting to the end of February and there seem to be a few left for the taking. Fried rabbit and 90 weight gravy over dressing doesn't sound all that bad either.

The Game & Parks Commission has set this year's seasons and it's time to look though the brochures to see what's new and when all the seasons are opening this year. This year's Spring Turkey Seasons are as follows:

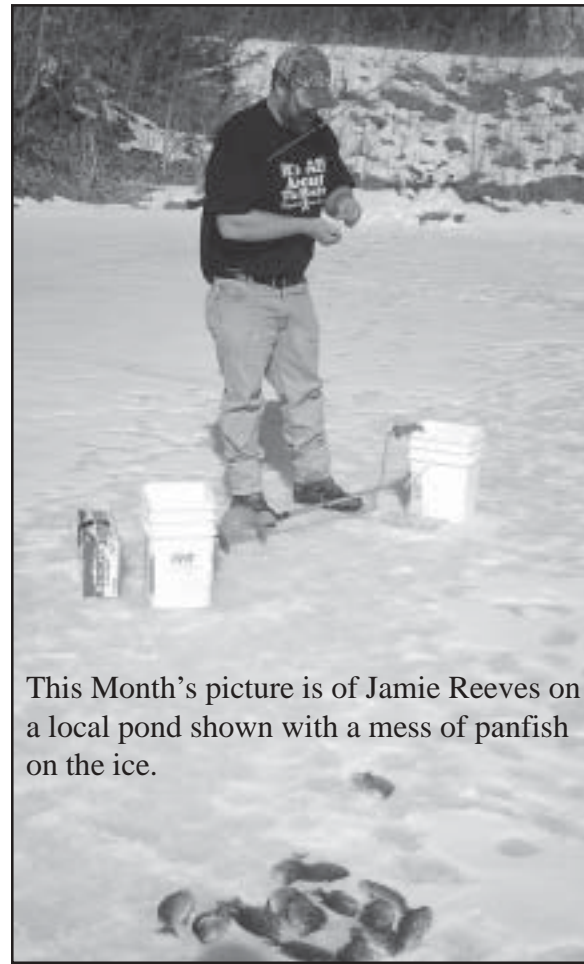
Season Dates - Spring

Archery — March 25-May 31
 Youth Archery — March 25-May 31
 Youth Shotgun — April 9-May 31
 Shotgun — April 16-May 31
 Permit Limit: Three per hunter
 Bag Limit: One male or bearded female turkey per permit

Permits are \$24 this year & \$6 for a youth permit.

Permits are available beginning on the second Monday in January.


Ice fishing is good right now but won't last for long around here. I know we always wish for warmer weather but sometimes the cold needs to stay in there for other sports like ice fishing. Soon enough the Spring Turkey Seasons will be upon us. Boy, when you see them now they're all bunched up. But they'll soon be splitting up with the warmer weather which gives you and me a better change to bag one. So get your permit 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 picture is of Jamie Reeves on a local pond shown with a mess of panfish on the ice.

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The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



A hundred year old farm house may sound romantic in a starry-eyed "I'd love to leave the city and move to an old farm house" sort of way, but those of us who live in one are acutely aware the stark realities of rural living are definitely not for the faint of heart; picking your own produce and tending a few pet chickens is one thing, thawing water pipes while stretched out on your back in a freezing, three foot, under-the-house crawl space is something only a 'thrive-in-your-element' stoic could enjoy.

Like most farmhouses of that era, ours was engineered with a central chimney and stove-pipe access holes in the kitchen, (for a wood-burning cook stove), living room, and two upstairs bedrooms. My guess is the rest of the rooms made do with a pile of handmade quilts and the body heat of a passel of rambunctious children. Today, even after several remodeling projects, my upstairs office is the coldest room in the house.

Winter work at my desk requires two layers of clothing, a large woolen blanket, and, depending on wind speed and direction, a scarf. If shivering builds character, mine must be sterling by now as I've been sprouting goose bumps since 1952, the year my parents, along with their baby girl, moved to this lovable old barn of a house.

The truth of the matter is farm homes were built for tough people and rough times, not 21st century powder puffs who interpret the constitutional guarantees of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to be a government pledge of personal comfort, including such things as a chicken in every pot and housing as warm as incubators.

Wintering on a farm was, and is hard work, especially when wind-chills hover near minus 35 as they did this week. We missed the blizzard which paralyzed much of the nation, receiving only a couple of inches of snow, but the intense cold caused troubles of its own: families with livestock spent daylight hours thawing water tanks (in our case two corral tanks and one pump), and shoveling six dollar corn to cattle which used the calories to keep warm instead of packing on sale-weight pounds.

At night the men lay awake and worried...or drove through herds of heavily pregnant cows, plucking newborn calves from the cold ground almost before the weary mothers had a chance to see if they had birthed a male or female; one enterprising cattleman used the family's motor home as a motorized barn, 'vacationing' the bitter nights away on frozen fields and pastures in an innovative approach to herdsmanship.

In the artic-like temps batteries exploded, tractors refused to turn over, feed trucks coughed and sputtered, and the used oil we burn to heat the tire-shop turned molasses-thick. In desperation we aimed an energy gobbling space heater at the containment tank and waited....and waited...and waited. For a while I was certain the only solution to our dilemma was sawing the rigid oil into logs, piling them in the center of the shop floor and burning them like wood, but a few hours later the oil-burner's igniter sparked, the whirr of the furnace motor and fan more pleasing to our ears than any symphony ever written.

The simple act of surviving such temperatures is cause for boasting.

This drafty old house has endured more than one hundred winters, and while I may, on occasion, complain about its cold floors and steep stairs it commands my respect and holds my heart. Like an old married couple we have an understanding, an unspoken acceptance of each other's flaws.

When I drive into the yard on a bitter-cold snowy night, the welcoming light streaming from its windows reminds me that this farmhouse isn't just my home....it's my oldest friend.

And that's a good feeling.

Till next week....

As Always, Karen

Melinda D. Clarke, CPA

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Poetry by Devon Adams

SUDDENLY SPRING

Out of the southern skies,
before the snow was gone,
they came riding on the wind.
Clouds were full of rain, rolling low
in billowy mounds that filled
the air with chilly moisture.
Suddenly, they burst over the tree line,
straining forward in their formation.
Necks undulating with the rhythm
of beating wings, they made ripples
in the air that whispered
from the friction of their feathers.
Their voices were deep and resonant,
and close. "We are the snows and the
blues and the canadas, and we own this space.
With our elegance and graceful courage,
we cut the path toward spring."

IDA'S IRIS

She loved them best, more than the tall stalks
that have ruffled petals and rainbows of shaded colors.
Not for her the glitzy stars of garden shows,
those hybrid plants that cost some fancy dollars.
Her favorites were only inches high,
and all the same, exactly.
In their short green jackets and
bright purple shirts, these babies
emerged first before all the rest,
when late winter sun warmed
the south slope of the yard.
They'd pop up in crowded bunches,
blooming all at once, resembling an extravagant
embroidered quilt spread out on the grass,
but instead of thread, they were alive,
and smelled like memories of grapes.

IRISH POTATOES

I remember helping Grandpa plant potatoes in the spring,
in wet, cold mud surrounded by snow drifts from a recent storm.
He said he had to plant them then,
by the calendar, on St. Patrick's Day.
That was the rule he'd learned.
A month later, when we were still wearing
winter coats and gloves, I helped him plant potatoes,
once more, to replace the first ones, which had
rotted in the wet, cold ground. He didn't comment,
much, except to mutter about the seed potato price.
And then one sunny day in early May, we met again
at the garden plot, to plant potatoes.
The second crop had frozen solid, in an April blizzard.
I'm glad to say that this planting thrived.
But I knew when to mark my calendar for next year's
planting date. You have to follow the rule, you know.

NESTING

I can't wait to find my first, tiny finch nest,
made of woven horse hair and fuzzy fluff
from who knows where. It will be snuggled
deep inside a cedar tree, and if I'm lucky,
the eggs will be there for me to see.
I have a beautiful, but sad, collection of
these lovely weavings that were found lying
on the ground. Some had blown there
after nesting season was all over, but some
were knocked loose in summer storms
that broke young lives before they lived.
In either case, the beauty and complexity
survives, as the woven wonders sit among
my china cups and saucers on the shelf.

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TIME TO PLANT

Now is the time to plan that garden
that seems so simple, as you
sit among the pillows and the
bags of chips, in front of the TV
with the fancy garden show
convincing you that anyone
can do it, and it won't cost much!
If you order now, from that stack
of catalogs, you'll have time to
clean the yard and dig up the
dirt, so that it will be so easy to
plant the plants and watch them grow.
And don't forget to save the photos
from the decorating magazines,
with just exactly the pots and planters,
and the fences and the borders, and
the flagstone walk, and the rustic chairs,
and the climbing ivy that will fit your space.
Now, wasn't that easy?



Cardinal, "puffing up" against the wind.



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