

Your *Country* Neighbor

May, 2016

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Small Towns and
Rural America**



The Spring Plumage of the Goldfinch is Golden again.



Thank you Pioneers! For a great sound during a misty Arbor Day Parade.



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Volume Seventeen, Number Five

More PSC Sports Photography Page 10.

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Cover Photo(s)

The weather was more cooperative for Peru State Baseball than for Nebraska City’s *Arbor Day Parade*. But the Pioneers Marching Band made attendance worthwhile!

And as they say in Chicago, there’s always next year!

Fans of Carol Carpenter’s poetry and photography will miss her while she takes time away from *Your Country Neighbor* to write a novel.

Your Country Neighbor

Voice and Views From the
Valleys of the Nemaha
Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

Writers This Month

Devon Adams
Stephen Hassler
Merri Johnson
Lee Nyberg
Vicki O’Neal
Walt Wenzl

Thank You!

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Fast Food, Part Time

Stephen Hassler

I only eat 'fast food' about twice a month -- on delivery days, and then just one item with coffee; usually a sausage sandwich for an early morning snack.

At one time or another in my life, I've been 'between' jobs and worked part-time. I've had a couple rotations sacking groceries, another on road construction, and two at fast food 'joints'. By the time a lot of people get to be my age, one of their experiences is having worked at a fast-food restaurant. I was pretty good with numbers, so my manager liked me to work on the registers, but I liked working in the kitchen. And I learned some additional things about cooking, including how to make one of their special hamburgers. Around here the 'rib' sandwich is popular; in Texas I liked the 'Texas style' burger. It was spicy, without catsup, but with extra mustard, extra pickles, and extra pepper, plus, one could order jalapeños on the side. I sometimes make it at home when I crave a hamburger. Having some inside knowledge as to what happens on the other side of the counter can be useful.

Once my sons were grown, and I went to visit them, they would make fun when I suggested stopping at my old employer. They are both about 6 1/2 feet tall, and burgers made with less than a third of a pound of beef don't come close to filling them up. But I had inside info. I knew how to order, having worked there before.

It used to be that food was stored in a heated display case. If not sold within 20 minutes or so, it would look gross and be thrown away. Some employees felt guilty wasting food, so protocol wasn't always strictly followed. The food was still good, it just might not look appetizing. To guarantee a fresh sandwich, I used to order mine without catsup, then after it came, asked for a catsup packet. The hamburger had to be made separate and fresh, so I avoided the possibility of a 'warmed-over' burger.

These days the equipment and "preparation lines" are such that a food bin need not be stocked in advance. Each sandwich is freshly made, special orders or not. Fast food is made more efficiently if not even faster. Now, if it would only be healthier for me, I would eat it more often. But as far as working there again, that's not on my bucket list!

Footnote: Things I like about my favorite fast food restaurant; 1. The fries taste great! 2. The coffee is good and refills are free. 3. Even if you order the *little* hamburger, you can ask for a slice of tomato (extra charge). 4. And in the more 'progressive' markets, you can get jalapenos on the side!



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'Spring' approach to the Courthouse in Auburn.

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Poetry by Devon Adams

RIVER RISING

With bubbles and foam
scraping the banks, the
current sweeps down the
channel like a giant broom,
dragging soil into the water,
snatching debris from the
banks and tossing it among
the roiling ragged roots and
broken branches. The rain
was heavy and fast, with no
chance to soak in, so away
it goes, all the way to the
gulf of Mexico

NEW BABIES

All of them are beautiful,
but they don't know that.
Too busy being happy,
and exploring all things
wonderful, the young ones
push the boundaries that
bind them to their mothers,
until the day that Mom lets
go. And then they know
that things have changed.
They have to grow and go.

A VELVET TOUCH

When we are caught
in the seething storms
of stress that crash
upon our shores each
day, it is a relief to be
able to caress the soft
and soothing velvet of
a dog's ear, or the silk
of cat hair. The whisper
touch of a butterfly that
lands on your hand is
a magic connection to
the peace that comes
from a place in your
brain that is far away
from the harsh reality
of the practical world.

WE'RE BACK

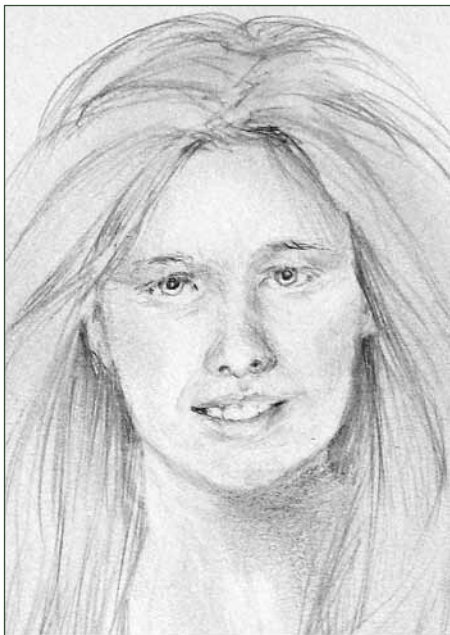
They waited all winter,
inside those little paper
packets, crowded together
with their friends, waiting
for someone to tear open
the edge and plant them
in rich, moist soil. Now
they're up and dancing
in the wind, smiling at the
sun and drinking the rain.

IN A DARK COUNTRY

Each day as we approach
the boundary between light
and dark, there is anticipation
of unknown things to come.
Once the curtain of night falls
over our eyes, we travel to a
place far away from conscious
perception. From deep within
the well of emotions, dreams
arise that paint landscapes of
our hidden feelings and thoughts.
There are no boundaries as we
roam across the rough ground
that is always just out of sight
when we are awake. During
our travels and conversations
with people we love and hate,
our bodies lose the muscle
tension that has held us tight.
Deep rest restores our spirit,
so that the new day beckons
with the promise of peace.

A FIERCE POSSESSION

At some point in life, we
realize that being alone
means that no one else
is exactly like us. We are
unique. If luck is with us,
we realize that it is a good
thing to think for ourselves,
without being smothered
by parents, spouses, or
siblings or friends, who
want you to do what they
think you should do. If
luck is harder to find, then
we lose ourselves in a maze
of overwhelming expectations
that are impossible to fulfill, in
addition to being masks that
don't fit. Taking possession of
your own feelings and thoughts
is like growing wings that let
you fly as high as your dreams.



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Graphic by Janeen Koconis of KOCO New York

Walt's Prayer

Walt Wenzl

Oh God, you know me and have known me from the beginning.
You know all the thoughts of my mind and heart, what I will be doing tomorrow and all the days thereafter.

But do you know that I know you too, and see you every day that I live. I see you in the sky so blue and in the billowy clouds that float by. I see you in the birds on the wing, who forever your praises sing.

I see you in the leaves on the trees and their mighty branches that sway in the breeze. I see you also in the flowers that bloom that I might enjoy the same as you. I also see you in the grass that grows and in every blade of it I mow. You're even seen in the weeds that grow in the garden for whatever reason you only know.

You're in the house we call home where you shield us from summer heat and winter cold. You bring us autumn that ripens fruit and grain. You're in the moisture we call rain. You're in the wind and winter's snow that makes us all so very cold.

But I see you most in the folks I meet. The ordinary people out on the street. I could continue on and on with this never ending song.

Now how do I know you? It's easy to tell. It's in all the things I see you ever so well.

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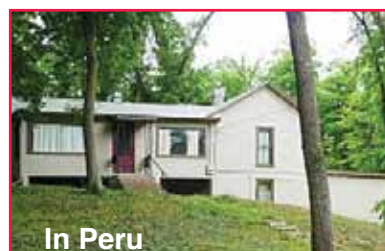
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Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

Weeds never looked so good. After enduring four weeks of involuntary leisure in South Carolina, I'm finally able to scratch my gardening itch. Ahhh, that feels good. I'm sure I'll be moaning about weeds by mid-May. But, for now, I'm eager to get some dirt under my fingernails.

If you read last month's column, you know that hubby and I spent last month in a gated golf community just off Hilton Head Island. The community was lovely, especially the two 18-hole golf courses. Alligators and exotic birds in the ponds, palm trees and live oaks draped with Spanish moss – it was classic coastal scenery. Hubby was in golf heaven. He wasn't quite as thrilled with the crows that stole his snack bars out of the golf cart while he was on the putting green. But, hey, you have to take the good with the bad, right?

While hubby concentrated on scheduling rounds of golf, I filled my days with trips to nearby nature preserves, yoga, reading, spending time with our daughter (who lives near Savannah, Georgia) and recovering from influenza. The upside of feeling lousy and sleeping for the better part of several days was that it saved me from having to think up ways to occupy myself.

By the time I was over the flu, I was "over" being on vacation. I was beyond antsy: I was downright grouchy due to lack of purposeful activity. We couldn't head home soon enough. We checked out of our rented house a day early and spent two nights at our daughter and son-in-law's home before turning the car northwest.

After driving for a day, we made a two-day stopover in Tennessee to check out rental cabins for a short trip next year. The Great Smoky Mountains are captivating. It's no wonder there's a cabin perched on every tiny piece of level ground around Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge that's big enough to turn around on.

The road system connecting all those cabins is more frustrating than captivating, however. It appears to have been modeled after a gigantic pile of spaghetti. Finding one's way around is challenging in daylight. Heaven help the tourist who attempts it in the dark.

We left the Smokies behind in late morning, and by noon the landscape began to open up. By the time we hit Lexington, Kentucky, things were feeling familiar again. Southern Indiana and Illinois and northern Missouri rolled past, and then before we knew it, we were home.

Pulling into the driveway felt like returning from a quick trip to St. Joe. How is that possible, that feeling of having never left even when you've been gone for weeks? We slip back into our everyday routines and wonder (just a little) why we bothered to go away in the first place. Maybe we just need a little change of scene and pace to make us appreciate home, weeds and all.

Alzheimer's Affects Us All



Alzheimer's Research: 3 Reasons for Hope

By Lee Nyberg

Alzheimer's disease is the 6th leading cause of death in the U.S. It kills more people than breast and prostate cancers combined. One in three people over 65 has Alzheimer's. And yet, there is hope.

Hope comes from researchers like Dr. Daniel Murman, a geriatric neurologist and head of the Memory Disorders Clinic at Nebraska Medicine. He leads the Nebraska portion of three national, clinical trials for new Alzheimer's medication. The last safe and effective drug approved for Alzheimer's came out 10 years ago. While it helps manage symptoms in the early stage of the disease, it doesn't change the process of destruction of brain cells or slow the disease's progression. New drugs seem to inch their way to market with trials lasting from 18 months to 5 years. Trials have three main phases: determining safety, evaluating whether a medication works in the target group of people, and studying effectiveness of dosages. At each phase, subjects are recruited and assigned to either take the medication to be tested or receive an inactive substance (placebo), data is collected and analyzed, and finally, results are reported. National trials, like the 3 at Nebraska Medicine, are simultaneously conducted at 50-100 sites around the U.S.

Current research at Nebraska Medicine focuses on changing the underlying process and progression of Alzheimer's. Two of the trials focus on the drug Solanezumab's ability to attack Amyloid at different stages of Alzheimer's. Researchers know Amyloid protein fragments build-up and create plaque 15-20 years before a person shows signs of impaired thinking. The plaque masses interfere with information transmission in the brain and cells eventually die, causing cognitive function loss. Researchers believe if the Amyloid can be detected and removed early, the possible onset of Alzheimer's can be delayed by 3-5 years. Studies with people who have moderate dementia reveal the possibility of slowing the progression of Alzheimer's by 30-50%.

Details of Nebraska Medicine's trials:

- A4, trial for drug Solanezumab, due to be completed in 3 years: Looks at delaying onset of Alzheimer's disease in those with increased risk. Researchers are accepting participants who are 60-65 years old, have normal cognitive activity and have been determined to be at a greater risk for Alzheimer's due to a special brain scan indicating the presence of Amyloid. Inquire at A4Study.org or 844-A4STUDY.
- Expedition 3, trial for Solanezumab, due to be completed in 2016 and reported 2017: Looks at developing a medication which would slow the progress of the disease in people with mild Alzheimer's.
- Noble Study, trial for an oral medication (T-817MA), due to be completed in 2016 and reported 2017: Evaluates medication to slow the progression of the disease in people with moderate Alzheimer's.

Dr. Daniel Murman knows what it takes to bring a new medication to reality. He understands the intricacies of neurology and complex trial analysis. He is a part of this research process as few others can be. He has hope—so can you.

Sources: Nebraska Medicine, Clinicaltrials.gov, Alzheimer's Association (Alz.org)

Lee Nyberg, a partner at Home Care Assistance of Nebraska, focuses on education on aging issues, co-leads a Parkinson's support group, and is a Legislative Advocate for the Alzheimer's Association. She can be reached at 402-261-5158 and www.HomeCareAssistanceOmaha.com



South of Nebraska City; early Spring farm scene.

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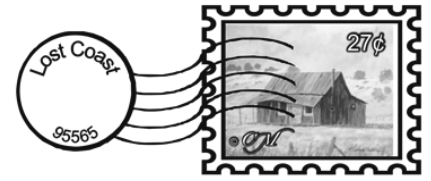
Spring Football Scrimmage, Peru State College



Old Home Place
390 Memory Lane
Lost Coast

What an Adventure It has Been!

By Vicki O'Neal



Believe it or not, Country Neighbor, it's been a whole decade since we first met!

We've shared many a cuppa on a cold winter morning... We've rejoiced over the first hint of springtime. We've laughed over the pratfalls of Life, and have cried together as we bade farewell to old friends who have crossed over. We've endured a lot of hardship and have learned to be open and honest with one another!

We first met as Neighbors in the Spring of 2006 and we've been friends ever since. Ten years' worth of words scribbled on the back of napkins and envelopes... Notes penned from the porch swing at the farm—the Old Home Place... Notes written from the Indian Cave... from the River Bluff of the Mighty MO... from the shadowy glens of the Barada Hills....

And of course—lots and lots of postcards sent from the Lost Coast of Northern California! I've been your "Western Correspondent" for many years as I continue to crisscross the nation with my carload of stuffed monkeys.

What a journey it has been! The good and the bad... the ugly and the sweet... Hope and sorrow. Laughter and tears, all cobbled together in this thing we call "Life".

If we could remember the last ten years with clarity, we would be amazed at our own resilience—at what we've endured... What we've gained and lost, and where our dreams have taken us.

You see how quickly the last ten years have gone? The next ten will go even faster, my Country Neighbor.

We are saddled to a runaway horse that we can't rein in... galloping... galloping madly toward the Finish Line. The pace is quickening. Faster and faster we go... And at the end of that race, it will be determined if we've "won or lost"... Whether we've lived a profitable life or not!

Will we be surrounded by friends or foes at the end of Life's Journey? Will we be cherished... or will we be shunned—living like narcissistic Hermits on a "Mountain of Madness"... only concerned with Me, Myself, and I?

You know, folks... In my line of work as a Caregiver, I've seen a lot of people on their deathbeds. They've lived nearly a century, and now they are facing their final moment. It's crunch time—a deadline like none they've ever seen! Some people go into eternity peacefully, with joy on their faces....Just tickled-to-death! But some of them go scared-to-death!—with gritted teeth and clenched fists. Wishing for just one more day... one more hour... one more moment. One more chance to make things right.

They had so many decades—almost a century—but somehow they didn't make peace with themselves, with God, or with others. They didn't stop and smell the roses! They didn't tend well to their Garden of

Life. They let the weeds take over and destroy their marriages, and their relationships with families and friends. They were neglectful and unwise... and so very stubborn!

What is growing in our own little gardens, my Country Neighbor? Are they bristling with thistles, or are they blooming with love and fragrant blessings?

When I think of who I was ten years ago, I realize that I needed some serious "weeding" (and still do!) I wouldn't want to relive those years over again, but I wouldn't want to give them up, either! I've learned so much.

The old Rose Garden might have some thorns, but there are some beautiful roses, as well. They are relics of our Age-of-Learning. Medals of Honor...even Badges of Courage—especially when we can admit to our own mistakes and inadequacies! Through this growing season, we are learning to be flexible, teachable, and forgiving... not rock-hard and ugly. We're letting the spring waters bubble up from inside of us—watering our own gardens and others' as well.

The choice is ours, of course. It's time to let go of the things that hinder us and make us crabby ol' Neighbors—fighting over the backyard fence. It's time to grow up and let go of all the foolishness... to stop micromanaging other people's lives! To stop all the enabling.

Remember, my friend. "Only God can unfold the Rose"... so don't try to do it for Him. Just breathe!... Be grateful for each new day of Adventure, and allow others the freedom to "breathe" as well. That's my motto for life, and it's a good one, if I do say so myself!

I've enjoyed each and every day of our friendship, my Country Neighbor... each and every passing Year! What do you say—shall we go for another TEN...? That will put us at the Year 2026. Wow. It's a long ways off, it would seem. But in the blink of an eye, we'll be at the end of another decade... And only God knows what will be happening in our world ten years from now! Let's do our best to make it a good decade, folks!

And now I've got to sign off. It's going to be a busy day.

I can see that my stuffed-monkeys have all fallen off the bed. The place is a quite a mess... But I can hear the bees buzzing outside my window and the morning sun is just beginning to peek through....

The roses are starting to bloom, folks! My fragrant Garden is awaiting me!

Love you all!

Vic

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