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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

Thank You

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Your Country Neighbor

P.O. Box 126
Peru, Nebraska 68421

countryneighbor@windstream.net

Editor’s note:

More than five years of this publication are online at:

www.yourcountryneighbor.com

Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson

My marriage is now as old as Jack Benny. If you're too young to understand that reference, or even to recognize his name, all you need to know is that he always claimed, in his characteristically droll way, to be 39 regardless of his true age. When you add my age to my marriage, I'm waaay past Benny's 39. But I'm still kickin' and he's not, so there you are.

At any rate, my husband and I celebrated our anniversary a day early – on Labor Day – with a daytrip to Kansas and Missouri. We knew if we hung around home we'd just end up doing home improvement projects, yet we didn't want to commit to a big deal, either. We're getting a little lazy about things like that.

A few days in advance I got on-line and checked out attractions in Atchison, Kansas. I'd been there once and figured they had enough shopping and dining choices to fill a couple of hours, satisfy the road trip itch, and still leave us enough time to return home via St. Joe, where our son and his family live. I made sure to check each restaurant and shop's website for hours of operation, expecting that some of them would be closed for the holiday, but also assuming some would be hungry enough to stay open for customers like us.

So much for checking in advance. Each place that was supposed to be open on Labor Day was closed, including the visitor center, whose site specifically listed hours of operation for Monday holidays. After about 20 minutes of fruitless driving around a very quiet downtown Atchison, we crossed the river and headed for Weston, Missouri.

The road from Atchison to Weston snakes through the river bottom and along the bluffs. We encountered a detour that took us onto a dusty rock road that appeared to have been cut right through the fields. In places we could have actually reached out the car window and touched the corn as we drove by. I know that isn't unusual in river bottom areas, but it always makes me feel transported to a more isolated, and somehow more authentic, rural culture than what I observe from the elevated grade of the interstate highway.

My husband speculated that we'd find some kind of surprise on that detour. A flat tire, I predicted, caused by some piece of metal dropped by a farm implement. The detour proved uneventful, but shortly after returning to the main road we passed the tiny burg of Iatan, where I spotted something through an open barn door that I hadn't realized existed in these parts.

Was that tobacco? I asked, looking back over my shoulder. Here was our surprise! We turned around and drove into Iatan for a closer look. I think I would have been less surprised to find a barn full of marijuana plants. But sure enough, tobacco leaves, looking a little like rhubarb, were hanging from rows of racks mounted overhead. Talk about feeling transported. Had we entered a parallel universe and ended up in Kentucky? But where were the fields? The barn was up against the bluff and there were no tobacco fields tucked among the corn and beans in the river bottom.

Our questions were answered fairly soon in Weston. If you've never been there, think Brownville, multiplied at least five-fold. Downtown we found a tobacco store and at the edge of the business district, another large tobacco barn, its doors open to the breeze. A local merchant told us where to find a tobacco field, on high ground north of town. Unfortunately, the local tobacco industry is struggling. We were told that the long-time mainstay of the Weston area now supplements its dry tobacco sales by growing and selling tobacco seedlings.

We browsed Weston's four or five blocks' worth of antiques and collectibles shops, making a couple of small purchases and enjoying the energy of all the other visitors in town, not a few of whom were motorcycle enthusiasts. By three o'clock we were ready to head back north, stopping off to refill our "grandparent tanks" with hugs and laughter from our two-year-old granddaughter.

It occurred to me that our little excursion was a metaphor for our nearly four-decade marriage. You have your temporary detours for better or worse, your surprise discoveries of interesting things that were practically under your nose all along, maybe the itch to see what's on the other side of the mountain once in awhile, and probably a few course changes.

If you're lucky, you end up back where you started: holding hands with the one you pledged to love 'til death do you part, and still meaning it.

PEGGY KUSER

Certified Public Accountant

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Poetry by Devon Adams

TIME TO CHANGE

Sometimes our habits outrun us,
and we continue to pursue our lives
in the style to which we are accustomed.
We don't notice, or choose to ignore,
warning signs that certain activities
are no longer in our best interests.
Gray hair, creaking joints, screaming
muscles and comments from friends
are caution flags waving in the wind.
If luck is with us, we will heed wise advice
and change our patterns of life and work.
Otherwise, we may find ourselves taking a
very long nap, buried under a lonesome tree.

SUMMER NAP

On a sleepy summer afternoon
the trees are talking with the wind,
as they dance and sway beneath
the passing cotton clouds.
The peaceful house listens,
as lace curtains flutter
in the open windows.
I'll just rest a minute, I tell myself,
as I lie down on the cool quilt.
My eyes fall into slumber softer
than a floating butterfly, taking
me in dreams to those childhood naps
that were so simple and complete.

LETTING GO

The night wind wasn't kind.
It was a vicious club that hit
the trees with rising violence,
as a storm screamed in the air.
Some of the oldest residents
of the little town realized that
their time had come. Their age
became the factor that brought
them down, revealing hollow trunks
and rotten spots, and tired roots, and
massive size that made them
targets that couldn't dodge away.
They fell like brave soldiers, fighting
until the end, crashing in glory.

PUT AWAY TODAY

Sometimes it is hard to settle down
and follow the sun into the night.
Every busy word and thought hangs
across your conscious feelings,
keeping sleep away, like blinking lights.
Dark rooms don't help any more than
bowls of ice cream, or slices of pizza,
or late TV shows, or counting sheep.
Before you know it, you're talking to the
sheep, and they're talking back to you.
Try writing out each thought, one at a time.
Then put away the paper in a book and
close the cover, until tomorrow.

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Continued from page 2

could not have been a comfortable situation for him, a farm lad, there in strictly academic surroundings.

One of those bright blue October days he came for me as usual. We would spend the afternoon at a movie or driving the countryside or visiting home. On our way up the hill past Delzel, with the car windows down, a group of men who lived on campus yelled out in unison, "Hi, Shirley!" They had to have orchestrated it ahead for the timing to be so perfect.

I sang in the choir and rode along on the tour to small schools in the area. We sang, "Linda," "Ezekiel Saw de Wheel," "The Lord's Prayer," and others which if you gouged me long enough, I might remember. Our director advised us that usually people would not applaud after hearing "The Lord's Prayer," and not to expect applause. But small towns are made up of small town folk, who applaud for sounds they like from people they love. So they applauded and we graciously acknowledged their thanks. A little peek back in time this October.

Where Life is Good

by Marilyn Woerth

This is my time of the year (oh yeah). How does that saying explain it? "Autumn is a virtual cornucopia for the senses," (oh yeah). And when you live in an area with rolling hills and numerous trees your senses become a little more heightened.

Come October, I am in seventh heaven when I am riding down I-29, and I look to the east to see the rolling splendor of the Loess hills blanketed in their tapestry of gold, bronze, emerald and ruby. I could just sit there and study that area all day (deep sigh). All the state parks seem to be teeming with more activity during this time of the year, and rightly so. Just feel the coolness, smell the loam and look at all those designer colors. Who would not want to co-mingle with nature?

My garden is one of my all time favorite places to be during this time of the year. It can also be the busiest time for me, (unlike my husband who prefers to watch football this time of the year.) I really don't understand why the garden nurseries aren't as busy during these fall months as they are in the spring. I really wish homeowners were more tuned into the many plant options there are for this time of the year. Many of these specimens carry through to the next season as winter interest, as well.

For instance, take a look at ornamental grasses. Their tall stalks crowned with rich seed heads that last through the winter. You can't get more winter interest than that, unless it's the red twigged dogwood (cut this bush back in late winter for a deeper red coloring). Both of these grace the outer edges of our pond.

Down in the woodland the petite, delicate toad lilies always await my "ahhh"; they are just so darn precious. I now have quite a few varieties. And my darling Japanese anemones dangle their pink and white heads so soft and alluring. During the autumn months for Nebraskans there is the state flower, golden rod, which cultivators have done some wonderful work with. For Kansans, there is the cheery sunflower and all of its relatives. Isn't it wonderful how they spill over into the neighboring states to enjoy?

If I were to give new gardeners some common sense advice it would be to not clean up too much this fall, leave some for the birds and critters (i.e. cone-flower seed heads) and for spectacular winter interest. Then take a cool deep breath and just enjoy the good life.

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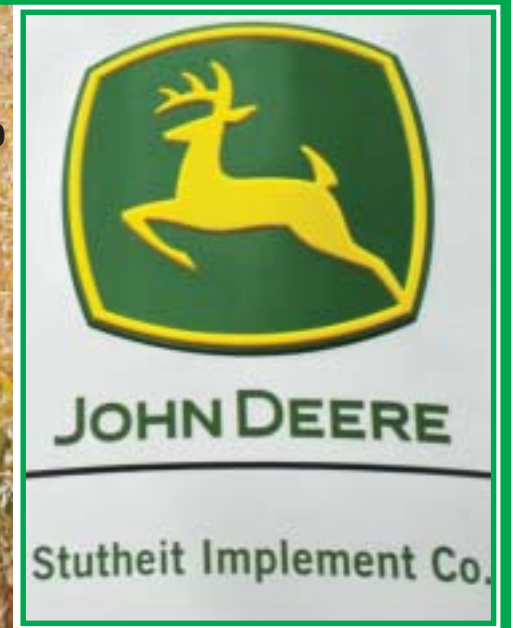
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Medicare Drug Plan Changes What You Can Expect for 2011

The Affordable Care Act passed by Congress and signed into law by the President is designed to bring about changes to Medicare in 2011 and beyond. Medicare beneficiaries enrolled in the prescription drug plan—Part D—will see benefits from the beginning of the year. Sixty-four percent of people with Medicare have Part D coverage, according to CMS [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services].

The Part D standard benefit is largely the same as 2010. Medicare established the maximum annual deductible at \$310; the initial coverage limit is \$2,840—unchanged from last year. There will be 33 stand-alone drug plans [PDPs] to choose from in 2011, which is fewer than 46 available during 2010.

The average premium price for 2011 will be \$30—a \$1 increase from the current year. However, 98% of Nebraska Medicare beneficiaries with Part D can pay a lower premium in 2011 than they did in 2010. Premium amounts for 2011 range from \$14.80 to \$106.40. Thirteen plans have a \$0 deductible.

Providers selling Medicare Part D plans must be approved by the Nebraska Department of Insurance and be subject to all state and federal guidelines. Insurance providers offering drug plans are allowed to establish premium rates, co-pay and co-insurance amounts, the number and type of drugs covered under their plan, and claims procedures.

The biggest change in Medicare Part D for 2011 is help paying drug costs

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in the Coverage Gap, or 'donut hole' which begins when total costs reach \$2,841 [the 25% the beneficiary pays out of their own pocket, plus the 75% the insurance plan pays toward the cost of medications]. Starting in January 2011, Medicare beneficiaries [over the age of 65, or disabled Americans under the age of 65] who fall into the Medicare coverage gap will receive a 50% discount on covered brand name prescription drugs while in the donut hole. Some Part D plans also offer coverage for generic drugs in the Coverage Gap.

General information about premiums and benefits for each drug plan available in 2011 will be coming soon. Your *2011 Medicare & You* handbook will be mailed during the month of October. CMS requires drug plans to notify currently-enrolled beneficiaries by mid-October of the changes for next year; information includes premium amounts, drugs covered and any other changes pertaining to levels of coverage. Some beneficiaries will be notified the plan they are enrolled in will not be available in 2011. All beneficiaries will have the option to change to a different Part D plan during the annual open enrollment period between Nov. 15 and Dec. 31, for coverage beginning January 1, 2011.

Mary Ann Holland, Extension Educator and trained SHIIP Professional will be assisting Medicare beneficiaries in doing a drug plan comparison during the annual open enrollment period. Contact your local Extension office for dates and locations to make an appointment. If you have questions about Medicare Part D or other areas of Medicare, Ms. Holland can be reached at the Cass County Extension office, 402-267-2205.

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Whisler's Hunting & Fishing Report



by Josh Whisler
(photo submitted by author)

Fishing:

The River has stayed inside its banks the last month, not that it wasn't challenged by a couple of thunder storms rolling through that brought heavy rain to the area. For the most part the passage ways to the river have been passable and fishing has resumed. Although it's not the easiest to get a boat in and out, the determined fishermen are managing. And from reports it has been well worth the wait. There has been great success in the number of fish along with the size of fish being taken as of late. Blue cats have been a common site this fall with the Flatheads coming in a comfortable second and the small channels action kicking in also. "What are they biting on you say?" They have been hitting chubs, Goldfish, Carp minnows, and Leopard Frogs - with the small fish hammering the crawlers pretty hard right now. You can hardly keep the bait on the hook. Keep in mind this time of year to follow the Missouri River Creed, "Big Bait, Big Fish". If you want one, now is the time to get a monster on your line. Tackle up and give it a try.

Hunting:

Fall hunting seasons are all coming back around and it's to the point you can pick one one day and another the next.

DUCK season has started for early Teal. And the local boys have been having some pretty good luck on the Peru Bottoms Wildlife Habitat Area north and east of Peru. The flocks have been flying through and staying around allowing hunters to get into them a lot this fall. Low Plains Duck Zone season this year is September 4th through the 19th, with a bag limit of 4 and possession of 8.

Other upland game and seasons are as follows:

Species	Bag	Possession	Opening Date
Cock Pheasant	3	12	Oct. 30
Youth Cock Pheasant,			
Quail and Partridge Seasons	2	4	Oct. 23
Quail	6	24	Oct. 30
Partridge	3	12	Oct. 30
Rail	10	20	Sept. 1
Snipe	8	16	Sept. 1
Woodcock	3	6	Sept. 25
Dove	15	30	Sept. 1
Squirrel	7	28	Aug. 1
Cottontail	7	28	Sept. 1



Fall Deer Season Permits are still available over the counter or on-line until the close of deer season.


Fall river fishing is good right now as the weather cools off. The fish and early hunting are available right now. The bugs are getting their last bites in, so take plenty of repellent. And don't forget there is still time to plan your fall deer hunt. Permits are available 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 and his son Arthur from Peru showing us a real nice Flathead cat taken Labor Day Weekend.

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The Face of Drought

by Karen Ott



When first released from the chicken hoosegow, Fred, our red-feathered free-range rooster, rarely strayed beyond the perimeter of our behind-the-house lawn. Content to spend his summer days chasing grasshoppers, eyeing comely feathered females through the hen-house fence, and snoozing in the shade of the quaking aspens he was the epitome of rooster-refinement.

As he grew more comfortable with the notion of freedom he took to exploring the farmyard's nooks and crannies, and now, completely emancipated, performs his morning adulations to the sun from our east-facing front porch, cock-a-doodle-dooing to a bevy of sleepy, we-could-care-less, black and white cats who've learned to respect his sharp beak and flapping wings....but not his singing.

His travels beyond the backyard were prompted by the parole of a skinny young bird which escaped "The Ax" because our oldest grandson tearfully begged for mercy.

Last spring Devon picked a tiny black fluff from a sea of yellow chicks and adopted the little fuzz ball; when it came butchering/dressing-out time the notion of turning the adolescent into drumsticks and white meat was more than a seven year old heart could bear. Sixty-eight roosters went into the freezer while 'Spike' was set free to roam the backyard alongside Fred, who took one look at the youngster and promptly scampered off in search of greener pastures.

Spike, a leggy teenager who until recently was securely locked inside a chicken wire fence, didn't quite know what to do with himself. He spent a good part of last week cowering in the elderberry bushes bordering the hen-house, darting in and out of his hidey-hole at the slightest provocation. Lately I've noticed he's spending more time out than in... that's a good sign.

Regrettably the glory days of Free-Range Autumn are fading, and Fred and Spike will need winter accommodations beyond elderberry bushes and an overturned wheelbarrow. (Fred's favorite roosting spot.) The hen house is out of the running as two (nameless) resident

roosters have made it clear they're not keen on sharing their hen's affections with a fancy-pants footloose Romeo, or a James Dean with feathers. The brooder house is also out of the question as it will be busy housing twenty or so fall chicks which will take all winter (and spring) to mature into egg laying pullets.

That leaves us with two, maybe three, alternatives: find a heated dog house, buy a couple cargo-hold plane tickets for the Bahamas.....or (GASP) soup, the last of which would surely prompt a fresh shower of little-boy tears. A plate of fried chicken can bring on the "I Can't Eat a Chicken Leg Cause it Makes Me Sad," blues; no doubt a bowl of homemade chicken soup would do the same.

Real death, real grief, real life...served up farm style; nothing on TV even comes close.

Today's bean harvest was interrupted by a Wednesday evening rain shower; It's been so dry and dusty I'd almost forgotten how good rain smells. While waiting for bean fields to dry

the men began hauling the last of our 2010 corn to a local feedlot. Sometimes procrastination pays off...in this case a \$1.45 per bushel above our last sale.

The world's wacky weather is playing havoc with crops, and shortages are becoming common. Even natural rubber... used in the production of radial tires....is in short supply because of erratic weather. Just another reason tire prices are taking a hike come October 1.

On that note I leave you with the question of the day: If, as economists assure us, inflation is under control, why are the items I purchase most frequently more expensive than last year?

Karen

Postscript:

Item from Thursday's newspaper: "Dix man killed in farm accident"

For Mercy's sake....stay alert this harvest season.

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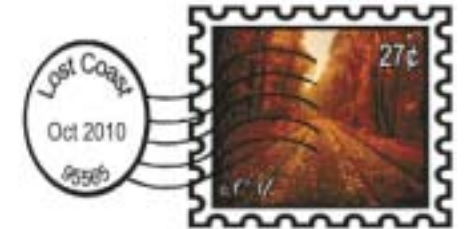
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Old Home Place
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Going...Going...Gone!

By Vicki O'Neal



The last of Indian Summer slips away....the days passing all too swiftly.

We want to savour each moment—but how do you store up the scent of apples turning crisp in the autumn sunshine? The smell of marshmallows toasting on a campfire? The silky softness of creek-water slipping between your toes?

Days ago, it seems, the corn in the fields was young and tender—just knee-high. Now it's old and arthritic...Dry, raspy cornstalks whispering to themselves in the autumn breeze.

The drone of honeybees will soon be lost—just an echo in the corridors of our minds. The stain of juicy blackberries will fade away...Our purple fingertips becoming lighter as the stains turn to winter's whiteness.

I sit by the river, today, picnicking in the sunshine while scribbling words in my notebook. I am alone—except for the pesky ants. They scurry and hurry...no doubt looking for their own relics of Indian Summer. The crumbs from my banana bread and fried chicken are of major importance to them. Each morsel is carefully gathered and carted off.

“Go to the ant, thou sluggard!” the Good Book says. “Consider her ways and be wise!”

I toss the ants an apple core to nibble on, and reach in my bag for another apple. It is bruised. In fact, it has a worm hole in it...but what does it matter? It's an apple from our tree. A remnant of the past summer. Even with its bruises and worm-holes, it still contains the warmth of a summer sun. The sweetness of the season. Summer encapsulated.

I take a bite, savouring the sweet tartness of the summer months. I nibble away at June, July and August...the sweet compilation of an entire summer.

It's a shame, really. So much of our summer was spent in the hustle and bustle of plain ol' living. Complaining! Sweating! Swatting skeeters! Trying to meet deadlines and schedules while our plans went awry.

But in October, these things suddenly seem unimportant. A different kind of urgency descends upon us—a hunger to hold onto those things we ignored during the thoughtless days of summer. We should've done more camping and boating and berry-picking...Should've spent less time complaining about the heat and bugs and humidity.

We try to compensate for the wasted hours now, regretting the days filled with carelessness.

See the bright orange on the back of a ladybug? How many spots does she have, and what does that number mean? Is it her age? Does she have a husband or is she a single mom?

“Ladybug, Ladybug—fly away home! Your house is on fire, your children are gone...!”

Old rhymes from childhood drift through our minds. Snatches of this and that. Random thoughts that we never think about during other seasons. Every color of autumn is highlighted in our minds. Every scent magnified. Every emotion explored as we feel our way through the final days of the season: touching, tasting, hearing, feeling.

Pretty pebbles that we didn't notice in the high-noon of summertime now become rare treasures—to be gathered and exclaimed over. The buzz of a hornet becomes music to our ears, because it means that the warm season is still with us—to be explored and loved and treasured.

Memories. Dreams. Sunny fantasies...How do we hold onto them?

A daily journal suddenly seems important to us. So does a camera. A picnic basket. A fishing rod. And a half dozen of those corn-on-the-cob-holders. Warm-weather paraphernalia. We gather up the items swiftly—like chipmunks gathering crumbs—prepping ourselves before the long winter comes.

Everything's been stored away in the back closet 'til now, awaiting a lapse in the dizzy-tizzy bustle of summer...It's almost too late,

now, but we rush about—scrambling to make memories before it's all over...hearing the tick of a great clock echoing in the back of our minds. Hayrides! Bonfires! Camping parties!

Where is my tent? Lighter fluid? Lantern? And where did someone misplace my Summer? It is gone. Simply gone!

With a sigh, I lay back on my blanket, watching two young girls play across the river. They cavort with their dogs—making the most of the warm weather, splashing in the river...playing in the sand.

Life's tender moments. The memories. The friends we store up. The relationships that we treasure... Like pretty pebbles on a riverbank, these things need to be gathered while the warmth of the sun still shines. All too soon, the coldness of winter and old-age will settle upon us.

We need to hug our loved ones and family close to us—cherishing the warm memories as the winds of time sweep on and the chilly twilight settles. No bitterness and regrets and hard feelings. They are cold comfort in our hour of need. Hold to the good and get rid of the bad, lest the blizzards come and sweep it all away!

Faith and families and friendships. Like summertime—they can be fleeting. Here one moment and gone the next. So soon it will be over. So soon it will all pass away.

Every season has moments of nostalgia, but none is as priceless as Indian Summer. It reminds us of our own mortality. It's the kiss of farewell from a dear friend...

A final wave as the old locomotive pulls out of the station...The wail of a train echoing across the prairie as the twilight of winter sweeps toward us.

It's going...going...going....

Gone!

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