

Your *Country* Neighbor

September, 2016

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Thank you!

Cover Photo(s)

I missed the Fair, but I made the Rodeo! I like the Broncs.
More Rodeo photos on page 9.

School’s in session now, but Peru kids will not forget cooling off on hot Summer days at the water park.

Your Country Neighbor

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

Writers This Month

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Mary Holland
Merri Johnson
Lee Nyberg
Vicki O’Neal
Marilyn Woerth

Thank You!

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Living in a Small Town

Stephen Hassler

I have the impression that many of us take small town living for granted. I don't know if we're better off than living in the city (although some might say that). And I would acknowledge that there are benefits to big city living, speaking from my own experience. But I can't say which side the balance scale would 'tip' in favor. Anyway, I want to focus on the "small town" right now.

Even if a person doesn't think they take things for granted, they would not be surprised at some of the observations I have made. For instance, a trip to the post office might take half an hour because we often meet people we know. And that can happen on a trip to the grocery store or bank as well. Speaking of which, small town banks will count your change, and not require you to "roll it". That's a rare, if not a nonexistent service elsewhere. And speaking of rare services, the service station has 'free air' for your tires.

A small town "traffic jam" is when folks driving in opposite directions stop to chat, blocking both lanes. What's remarkable is that any traffic that's backed up waits politely for the conversation to end.

"Rush hour" on my street in Peru, Nebraska, amounts to the several minutes it takes the Peru State College football players to empty the parking lot after 'practice'.

And our lawnmower repair guy makes house calls!

One thing we don't take for granted is Peru State College. It might seem odd to learn that the number of students living on campus and the number of residents in Peru are about the same. But I don't think anyone notices.

One memorable event of my first year in town, was when the post office phoned on the afternoon of December 24th to inform me they had a package waiting. A relative had sent gifts, and being new in town and far away from relatives, it was a blessing to have those gifts to open on Christmas Eve.

Sometimes I miss the big city's amenities, but among my blessings is life in this small town.



Due to the rainfall this year, I didn't notice much irrigation.



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Sing goodbye to Summer, little guy.

Where Life Is Good

Marilyn Woerth

The second Monday of August found my husband and I canoeing on the Niobrara River with my siblings and some of their families. It was a fantastic day, cloudy after ninety plus heat the days before, just enough wind to keep the bugs off a fab-u-lous August day. Canoeing was great and only two canoes out of six tipped over. My sister Kathy always tips their canoe over according to my brother-in-law when she tries to get settled in the canoe. The other tip over was their son-in-law after pushing off from the shallows and attempting to get back into the canoe. Of course hubby and I never tip our canoe over, at least not all the way (knock on wood). Although, it has swayed a few times over the past 45 years.

I love the stretch of the river with all the wild flowers, Joe Pye weed, the Nebraska State flower golden rod, sunflowers, compass flowers, asters, stag horn sumac are just a sample. The Niobrara is one of those rivers that are distinguished for being the common ground where the western and eastern botanicals merge together, especially the deciduous trees. I think I took more plant pictures than anything else. Missed the one of the finch on the Joe Pye weed, which would've been a prize.

The five little ones age's four to nine had a wonderful time. Even the four year old, except when his dad tipped their canoe over. I remember hearing him earlier saying faster dad, faster. The rest of the four rug rats were girls who enjoyed splashing anyone that came even close to their canoes. Luckily each one was in the middle of a different canoe and the direction of the canoe was not their responsibility. Of course, this family is highly competitive among themselves and the girls never wanted anyone to get ahead of them. Since Steve and I were the most experienced on the river (four times for me, Steve ten times) we hung back just in case anyone needed our help.

Then came the bragging rights, well how many rivers have you canoed? Brother Ed probably can claim the furthest away, the Russian River in Alaska (not the one in California). Our furthest was from our Navy days, the Thames River in Connecticut. My hubby got the award for the scariest trip, although it was not a canoe but a rubber raft on the Snake River. Steve and his scout troop were enjoying the ride when according to Steve they hit a bump and he was in the water before he knew what happened. He went over a stretch of rapids under the raft, good thing he's a strong swimmer.

We all get to claim having gone down the prettiest river, which belongs to the Niobrara in my book. (Do love the Current River in Missouri as well.) The Niobrara in August is wonderful for young families, the river is low and you just meander down and take in all the varying scenery. Sigh, blood pressure down (check), heart rate slowed (check), smile on face (check) just doesn't get any better than this. Family, Mother Nature, memories... where life is good (check).

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One of many butterflies enjoying a patch of red clover along H-136.

Poetry by Devon Adams

HAUNTED HARVEST

Harvest days make
haze a constant curtain
in the days of fall.
Cutting down the crops
is dusty work and what
the wind blows away, it
brings back the next day.
The sun falls every evening,
glowing eerie rose, like
crazed cats' eyes. Moon
rise is a bloody echo,
haunting the fields with
it's spectral hover.
There is an unspoken
prayer, drifting through
the days, that begs for
crops to come in before
the winter wizard stamps
his foot. If he does that, the
corn will still be standing
while the bins wait.

LOSING CONNECTIONS

Simple things are hard,
when the wiring in your brain
is tangled into knots.
When you are fighting
to maintain connections,
and losing them, confusion
starts all your sentences.
You can't think, and the
harder you try, the more
lost you become.
Prompting and criticism
cut like tiny knives,
making your heart bleed
and your soul cry.
The you that used to be
has left the building
and won't come back.
Every day becomes
a minefield of mistakes
and embarrassments.
Your hope is that
compassion will walk
with you in the form
of someone who
understands how lost
you feel, who will help to
make your shadows lighter.

BATTLE FIELDS

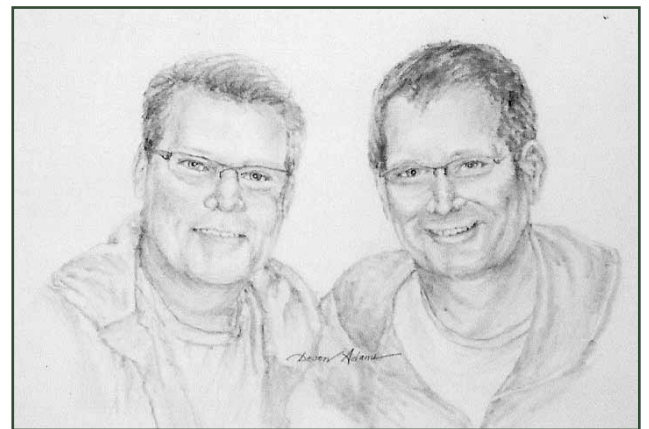
They are solid soldiers,
wearing armor to the field,
and their loyalty is part of
winning, and of losing.
Their commanders give
the orders and all of them
will follow. Practicing is
part of learning how to stay
in sync, so things won't
unravel over random acts
outside the rules, and so
they toil each day, getting
stronger, growing in their
understanding. These
warriors play for sports,
not on killing fields. But still,
the training is for living life,
which can be war, and more.

DONUTS IN THE RAIN

Wind came gusting, pushing
dust ahead of it, until rain came,
in tiny drops at first. Thunder
cracked behind the lightning
flash, and then there was the
pounding on the roof, like
thrown stones. The noise
was hail in little fists of ice, not
large enough to crack a windshield
into spider webs. I sat inside the
cab and watched the show, as
my old truck got a free bath and
I ate a donut from the deli.

RUNNING COLORS

There before you is a blank
sheet of white watercolor paper.
It is waiting for the hidden emotions
that lie inside your heart to show
themselves. As water and color
kiss each other, the brush takes
you to a world apart. There is
the freedom to let go and let live.
Boundaries here are elusive, as
the damp paper talks to the colors
in a secret language. You cannot
control completely the interaction
that is going on before your eyes.
Even with years of practice, there
is an element of "accident" that
happens without your conscious
choice, and the end result can only
approximate your plan. It is a lesson
in how to be courageous and flexible
enough to use mistakes, instead of
crying over them.



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Bird Rescue:
“The Loon and the Lunatic”
by Vicki O’Neal



During their lifetime, most folks get a chance at “15 minutes of Fame”--or perhaps “15 Minutes of Infamy”--as in my case! At one time or another, we all end up on local or National Television, and it is supposed to be the highlight of our existence here on the planet. Right?

Well, folks--my “shining moment” came and went last month, and it didn’t turn out to be as shiny as I expected. In fact, every time I think of it I am quite mortified. I was in Northern California, beachcombing on my favorite stretch of sand near Eureka. I’d wandered far down the beach to an isolated area and was about to turn around when something caught my eye.

There in the sand was a big loon flopping about on the seashore. He was entangled in fishing line from his beak to his feet, and there was a large fish-hook embedded in his chest.

Being the Good Samaritan that I am, I knew I had to help him out.

All I had on hand was a dull pocketknife, but I set about trying to free the flapping Loon. It proved to be much more difficult than I imagined.

Good Samaritan or not, I was no match for that wily Loon.

He quickly discerned that he was being dealt with by a novice -- and he went into a wild frenzy, pecking and flapping and scratching for all he was worth.

Sand was flying and I was screaming and the Loon gave me the What-For. It went on and on for an eternity and a half, at least.

The Loon took off flying several times and there I was holding onto the end of his fishing line for dear life. The bird flapped skyward, straining at the end of the line like a maniacal kite thrashing in the wind. I reeled him in and tackled him once more--all the while screaming and hollering at the top of my lungs.

I cried. I beseeched the Lord for help. I rubbed sand from my eyes and tried again. He bit. He screeched. He cursed me out in bird language until he couldn’t screech any more.

What should have been a 2 minute Rescue turned into 15 minutes of Hell on Earth. It’s a wonder my eyeballs weren’t pecked from their sockets.

I’m happy to say I survived the ordeal and finally set the wretched creature free... but he wasn’t done tormenting me, of course.

I made a serious mistake at the beginning of my rescue attempt. For some unfortunate reason, I turned on the video on my cell phone and recorded the whole thing. And when my friends got ahold of that Loony Bird’s video, they went nuts. Before I knew it, thousands of people had viewed the dumb thing and were sharing it with their own friends on Facebook.

My mortification knew no bounds. My friend, Kathy, insisted that I get the video copyrighted by putting it on a “YouTube” account in my name... but when I did, it only made matters worse.

Within days, a National TV agency discovered the video and decided they wanted to air it. And the rest is History.

Now my 15 Minutes of Fame reveals me before the whole world as a raving lunatic. And the wretched Looney Bird got his final revenge.

He is ungrateful and I am plum mortified.

I will never live down such bizarre behavior. I have out-done myself this time for sure, my Country Neighbor... and now without further ado, I will quietly make my exit...

Vicki O’Neal

P.S. If you should look up the above title on YouTube, you will see the extent of my shame. It is absurdity at its worst. Don’t say I didn’t warn you.



Humming Bird at feeder outside the “Dogrose Studios” in Brownville.

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Diary of a Novice Naturalist

Merri Johnson

This article originally appeared in the Lincoln (NE) Journal Star (Outdoors page) on August 21, 2016. It is re-printed here with permission.

If this summer's heat, humidity and insects have kept you indoors, take heart: cooler, drier days are just around the corner. I encourage you to plan a woodland or neighborhood expedition this fall to identify an ash tree. Even if you have never given much thought to specific trees – or perhaps, especially, if you have never thought about a particular tree species – now is the time to see an ash tree up close. In the same way that an artist achieves greater recognition after his or her death, the praises of the ash tree will be sung most poignantly as these giants succumb to the Asian emerald ash borer.

An abundance of information regarding the emerald ash borer is available online, from County Extension offices, and from the Forest Service, to name just a few sources. The emerald ash borer was identified in July 2002 in southeastern Michigan. Evidence suggested that it had been established in that area for at least six to ten years before discovery. Competing tree experts are now advising both for and against treatment. The cost of treatment and eventual removal of large, dead ash trees is no doubt troubling many private and public owners of these worthy trees.

But the impact of the predicted death of a significant portion of our nation's mature ash trees reaches far beyond the short-term cost of tree removal and replacement. A quick Internet search on the chestnut blight of the early 1900s is instructive.

According to information on the American Chestnut Foundation website, prior to the chestnut blight the tree "grew straight and often branch-free for fifty feet. Loggers tell of loading entire railroad cars with boards cut from just one tree. Straight-grained, lighter in weight than oak and more easily worked, chestnut was as rot resistant as redwood." The tree was used for nearly every wood product of the day - utility poles, railroad ties, shingles, paneling, fine furniture, musical instruments, even paper. The nuts fed squirrels and other small mammals, birds, livestock and people. Ultimately, the blight killed nearly all the American chestnut trees in their native range of the Appalachian Mountain region.

For an engaging description of the chestnut tree and its role in 19th Century New England, I recommend David R. Foster's book, "Thoreau's Country: Journey Through a Transformed Landscape." The section on the American chestnut in the chapter titled Losses and Change quotes Henry David Thoreau, who wrote about the chestnut decades prior to the blight. His journal entries and Foster's commentary truly bring the tree to life in one's imagination.

And today, researchers are making headway in developing blight-resistant chestnut trees that may yet lead to a resurgence of the American chestnut, perhaps even in our lifetimes.

The ash tree is similarly useful today, being a primary source of lumber for furniture and baseball bats. Even the ash trees that have already died are being cut into lumber.

I don't pretend to be able to predict if the ash tree as a species will follow the same path as that of the chestnut. But I do know that one does not need to be a tree geneticist or other scientist to make a contribution to the future of the ash tree, or any other species, for that matter. We can all imitate Thoreau and record our observations of the natural world. That is what it means to be a naturalist. Who knows what valuable lessons or historical context our journals may reveal to future generations?

So, make those plans now to seek out a mature ash tree on your street or in a park or a farmstead grove while there is still one to be found. Take a photograph. Make note of its surroundings and the animals that live in it. Have a picnic under its spreading canopy. Pay homage now to its stature and contributions to our world. Don't wait until all the ash trees are dead to notice them.

 The author is a Nebraska Master Naturalist volunteer. For information about training and activities, visit the website at <http://snr.unl.edu/naturalist>.



Calf Roping; (above and below).



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Medicare Marketing Coming Soon

Mary Holland

Very soon the news will be focused on important information about Medicare benefits. The annual Open Enrollment for Medicare Part D and Medicare Advantage Plans will begin October 15 and continue through December 7, 2016, for coverage which begins January 1, 2017. Medicare beneficiaries not only will be seeing more and more television and newspaper ads focused on this issue, but may also be inundated with information arriving in their mailbox.

Mary Ann Holland, retired Nebraska Extension Educator and Certified SHIIP Counselor, wants you to be aware of the increased emphasis on Medicare marketing and what you need to know. "Many of the media ads and written information you will receive urge you to take advantage of "New Medicare Benefits." Please be cautious as you sort through the information in advertisements. "There aren't necessarily any 'new' benefits, but should there be, Medicare would be making those announcements, not an advertisement," Holland said.

Once you are enrolled in Medicare [Parts A & B], your enrollment is continuous. There is no need to 're-enroll' once a year; the same is true for your Medicare Supplement insurance. Your initial enrollment into a supplement plan is continuous from year to year; there is no annual enrollment period.

Both Medicare Advantage plans and Medicare Prescription Drug plans do have annual enrollment periods [Oct. 15 to Dec. 7]. Medicare Advantage plans encompass Medicare Part A and B benefits, and in some cases the prescription drug benefit. Advantage plans are sold by county of residence and are not available in all Nebraska counties. If you are enrolled in a Medicare Advantage plan, you do not need a Medicare Supplement, or a Medicare Part D insurance plan, providing your Advantage plan has the drug benefit option. You do not need to re-enroll in your Advantage plan each year provided the plan is still available in your area. If you are satisfied with your current Advantage plan coverage, you do not need to take any action. Should your plan be leaving the local area, the Plan will notify you in writing that you must make other Medicare insurance decisions before the end of December in order to have coverage beginning January 2017.

Once you are enrolled in a Part D plan, you can continue coverage with your plan from one year to the next provided the drug plan continues to be offered in Nebraska. Drug plans will notify you about changes to your drug plan for the next year. You should receive a letter/booklet detailing those changes about the 1st of October. Nearly all drug insurance plans have changes each year usually in the form of premiums charged, deductible amounts, co-pay/co-insurance costs, medications covered or stipulations required before your drug plan will cover a medication you may need. The only way to be sure your current drug plan is your best option for next year, is by doing a drug plan comparison. A SHIIP professional will sit down with you to assist you in gathering information and making a decision about 2017 drug coverage. Enrollment event schedules for southeast Nebraska will be announced in the October issue of Your Country Neighbor.

The Nebraska SHIIP is an unbiased resource for questions related to Medicare benefits.

The SHIIP office in Lincoln has a **toll free number: 1-800-234-7119**

website is: www.doi.nebraska.gov/shiip

You may leave messages for Mary Ann Holland at any of the area Nebraska Extension offices, or by e-mail at:

mholland1@unl.edu.

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Alzheimer's Affects Us All

Communication—At the Heart of Dementia Care

By Lee Nyberg

Your husband, who has Alzheimer's, might respond to the anger and frustration you're telegraphing by thinking: "You're upset; I don't understand what is wrong. Because you're scaring me, I'll struggle if you hold my arm."

People with dementia may have heightened perceptions for emotional tone and body language, but their understanding is impaired, ultimately hampering communication.

Dementia damages abilities to pay attention, to understand and create spoken and written language, and to store and recall information (memory). Caregivers see a person who cannot learn new things, forgets the immediate past, sometimes uses the wrong words for things, and occasionally responds automatically as though they understand. Simultaneously, the person with Alzheimer's may be drifting backward in time and/or be stuck in an emotional track, further reducing communication. When the able-minded don't get the message of fear, anxiety, or loneliness, agitation (e.g. rocking or shouting), may be the result.

These tools ease communication with a person whose ability to send and receive signals is badly damaged, yet still has needs and a will of their own.

Engage multiple senses to increase connection. Approaching her mother from the front, Michelle waves and uses a low, pleasant tone when at an arm's length away, saying, "Hi Mary, it's Michelle." Next, Michelle touches Mary gently on the arm and establishes eye contact.

Use simple, short and concrete phrases. While many people with middle stage Alzheimer's can follow visual and auditory cues, they miss 1 in 4 spoken words and process language at slow speeds. Dementia strips nuance from language, leaving a concrete understanding of words. On hearing "let's run out to dinner," your loved one might try to run. Try, "Mary, it's dinner time; let's sit at the table." (Point at the table.)

Watch body language for clues to feelings. Offering your cold-looking loved one a robe might mean the difference between a peaceful bath and a fight. A loved one's routine actions may be communication, too. One reason for evening agitation or "sundowning," is excluding a loved one from the evening routine. Maybe dinner preparations take your mother to a time when she nightly prepared dinner, welcomed a

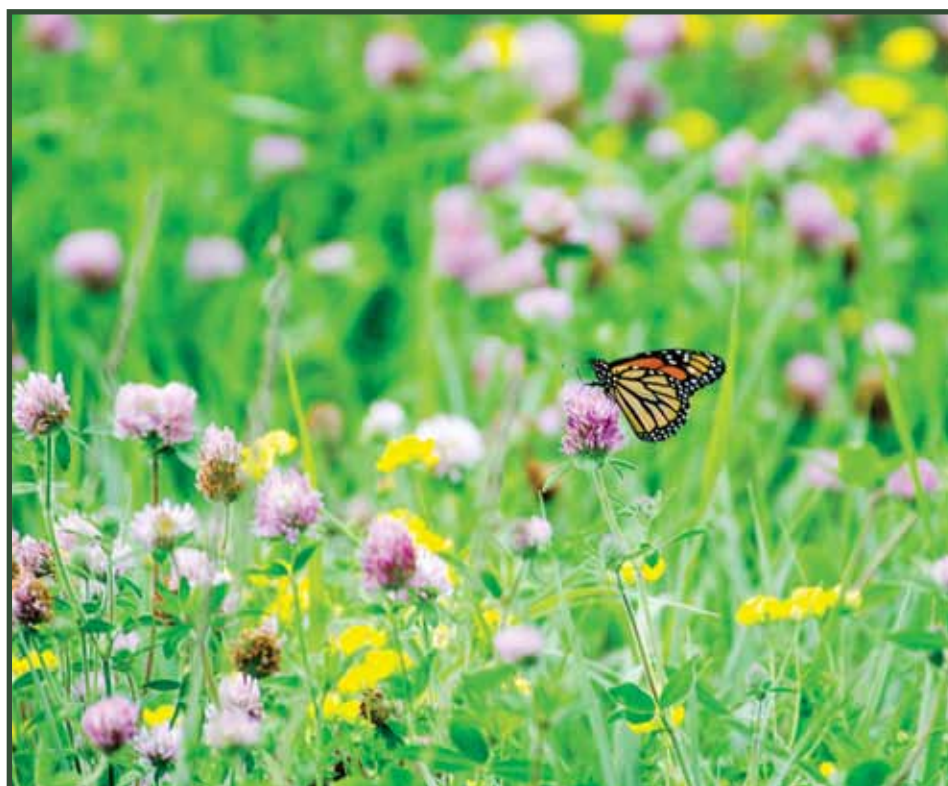
husband home, and monitored a child's homework. When you tell her sit and watch TV, she resists because she can't do her "work." Give her a kitchen job sorting plastic ware.

Slow down and stay calm; you'll transmit calm and also be in a better position to read your loved one's emotions. Asking to "go home" expresses a need for the comfort and purpose of the old days. Connect with positive assurance, saying, "John, I hear you; this is hard. Let's go to the kitchen to eat a snack (make an eating motion) and you can tell me about your court room days as a judge.

Use positive phrasing and forget these words: Don't, Can't, Why, Remember? Try "Here's sugar for your coffee, Dad," rather than "Dad! Don't put salt in that!"

Long into their disease, people with dementia retain their desires to connect with loved ones and have emotional and physical needs to communicate. We need to pay attention to receive our loved one's signals.

Lee Nyberg serves older adults and their families through education on aging issues, and her company, Home Care Assistance.. She 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 at; www.HomeCareAssistanceOmaha.com



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