

# Prairie Times

February 2025

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## Goosey Visitors

Frances Grande

**Someone was at my backdoor.** Cued by the scuffling sounds and strange knocks, I rushed to the kitchen. The screen door framed an untamed yard and two gray heads bobbing and weaving in the lower half of the screen. “Well, hello, Ladies,” I said.

My visitors tilted their heads sideways and, in their sweetest tone, queried, “Peep, peep? Peep, peep.”

“Hmm... something wrong? Rooster a pest? Hens hogging your nest?”

No, they reassured me. This is purely a social call.

It wasn't the first time in their seven-year residence that Miss Thelma and Miss Louise had come to my doorstep. Usually, they came after one of their raucous baths in the plastic kiddie pool. After a session of boisterous splashing, they'd primp and preen on the lawn. Then, after a muted conference, as if to agree they were now socially presentable, they'd waddle over to the porch and wait quietly by the back door.

For what? Did they wonder what I did in here? Did I have a nest box in which I, too, laid eggs?

I'd gently shoo them off the porch. They'd waddle away with reproachful, backward looks, then resign themselves to napping under the elms. Here they were once again! What would happen if I let them in? Would they panic and flap through the house, breaking glassware and overturning furniture? I'm at least curious as a goose, though, so I opened the screen. “Well, Ladies, come on inside.”

They didn't hesitate to clamber across the threshold. Having gotten the permission they'd sought, they ignored me and focused their attention on the interior of my low tech, rustic kitchen. Like stately dowagers on a home tour, they tilted their heads to take in every trinket and utensil as they circled the kitchen. The two engaged in a steady commentary, occasionally directing a remark and glance at me.

They stood side by side in front of the fridge, heads almost touching, and discussed the yellow and green dragon cookie jar atop it. It contained freshly baked raisin-oatmeal cookies made that morning from their own huge white eggs. Yes, I baked with goose eggs. One goose egg replaces three chicken eggs and wonderfully improves taste and texture.

I really shouldn't have expected inappropriate behavior. Miss Thelma and Miss Louise never acted with anything but grace. And, so, in their mannerly fashion, they continued their thorough inspection of my kitchen. The pantry didn't interest them long. But their last stop, next to the back door, held their attention for a considerable time—so much that I inched closer with paper towels, just in case.

Just as the kitchen is the center of my activities, my kitchen hutch is the repository for mementoes of those upon whom my life centers. My visitors stood side by side, stretching their necks to appraise the pieces of my past that landed there. As my visitors' fluffy behinds swayed toward the door, they craned their necks back in unison, as if to linger on these simple treasures. Little did they know they also would become one of the treasured memories of my life.

Thank you, ladies, for a most memorable visit. ♦



Katie Martin

## A Truckload of Jewelry

**Our good friend Barb adored jewelry**, particularly costume jewelry, in its over-the-top magnificence. She always had the perfect piece for each outfit. Barb had her favorites, like a simple cross and a new watch, but the rest changed with her outfit and the seasons.

She loved to go to garage sales, estate sales and antique stores, where she found unbelievable “treasures.” One time it might be a cookbook. The next time, a knickknack for the house or a small piece of furniture. Barb would call me up and tell me all about it, with unmistakable joy.

One day, Barb went to a small antique store and found an assortment of jewelry boxes and plastic containers full of costume jewelry. Excited with her find, she asked the gentleman running the shop what he wanted for all of it. He named a small amount. Of course, she agreed.

He told Barb he had more of the same in the back. His mother had died. She had both an antique dealer and a buyer of entire estates, which came with large amounts of costume jewelry. It didn't sell as fast as it came in, so over the years she accumulated an enormous amount of it. He asked if Barb wanted to purchase the entire collection.

She said yes. They deliberated a little before agreeing on \$250. Both of them were happy.

The seller loaded a lot more boxes into her truck than Barb expected, telling her he felt sure his mother would feel pleased the jewelry went to someone who liked it as much as she did. She couldn't believe what a wonderful purchase she had made. With the bed of the Ford F-350 pickup full, she drove home slowly.

Not too long after her purchase, she came to visit us and brought me a shoebox full of plastic jewelry. What a lovely gift? I found it beautiful and couldn't believe all the colors and designs. The pieces were unusual. Though it has been years now, when I take out the perfect piece to go with that special outfit, I realize how lucky I was to have a friend like Barb and could share in her “Truckload of Jewelry.” ♦





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TRACKING YOUR PROGRESS

Charity Bishop

A wise soul once said, it's important to look back once in a while, so you know where you've been. I think this is particularly vital to track personal growth. Sometimes, we get so busy with whatever we are working on today, we forget to glance into the past to make a good comparison. Once, our drawings were not three-dimensional. We lacked as much quiet compassion. Our parenting skills weren't great. We were an enthusiastic new writer, but now are a lot better at it. When we started, we did not know how to do the things we know now.

Who did you used to be, and how do you compare now?

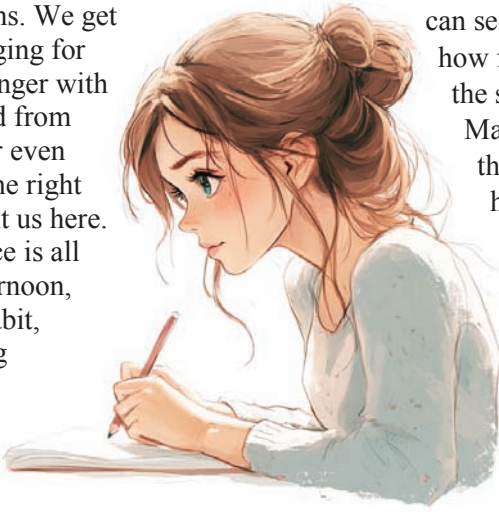
Often, we forget about this until we find an old sketchbook or a diary, and it shows us in vivid detail how much we have changed, for the better or for the worse. (Were we more optimistic once? Were our dreams bigger?)

I sometimes wish I could go back and relive passages of my life, but with the wisdom gleaned from twenty years of experience. I would make different choices, choose different friends, and aspire toward different things... but the friends I had, the mistakes I made, and the pursuits I chased were what made me into who I am today, so I can't regret them. They are just a part of "me." Lessons I learned, that gave me wisdom. Like many young people, I thought I had all the answers despite not having lived at all. Life soon taught me wisdom comes with age, not youth. That you learn, grow, and mature by discovering you know almost nothing and by being open to it!

I love to write, and I love to edit stories. Both have the boon of many years of experience. I can look back ten or fifteen years, and see how I had not yet learned how to eliminate "was" from sentences to make them sharper and read cleaner. I can

look back at my early plots and see how little mastery I had compared to now. The characters were good, but I had much to learn about good writing, streamlining ideas, and foreshadowing. It's much the same with other novelists. They either start out strong and get too long-winded (because nobody is editing them anymore) or steadily improve with each book.

Sometimes, when we look back, it's not for useful comparisons. We get stuck in the past, longing for people who are no longer with us, a life that changed from what we preferred, or even wonder if we made the right decisions that brought us here. That kind of reminisce is all right for a single afternoon, but if it becomes a habit, it stops us from living where we are, right here and now. I believe in looking back to review my



mistakes and learn from them, or to see how far I've come and how much I have grown. Are there regrets back there? Sure. But my job is to make sure I don't carry them into the future and repeat them. I want a perfect life, blemish free, but that's not what living is; and we learn the best lessons from the ugly patches.

Once in awhile, go back. Confront your early work and do the same piece over again so you can see how much you have improved, or how far you have come, and appreciate the skills that take years to develop. Maybe you're a wiser parent today than you were ten years ago, or you handle situations with a lot more patience at work. Find out in what way you have grown as a person, and celebrate it. Because life never holds still. It moves forward, and takes you with it. Celebrate both who you were, and who you are, because both are the story of "you." ♦

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# The Hen Who Liked Earrings

Belle Schmidt

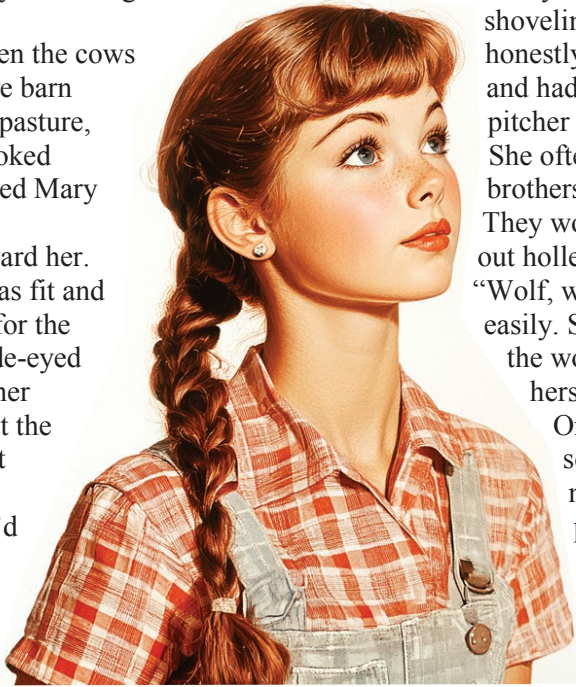
By being raised with four brothers on a farm, Mary grew up a farm girl and tomboy through and through. She helped in the kitchen, baked bread in an outdoor clay oven, and milked the cows: Rosie, Bossy, and Bessie. Her chores had to get done before school. She loved all creatures on the farm, from work horses, cats, dogs and hens. Mary especially enjoyed feeding the baby calves.

One day, when the cows were exiting the barn headed for the pasture, something spooked them. They spied Mary in the yard and stampeded toward her. Luckily, she was fit and swift. She ran for the house. The wide-eyed cows were on her heels. Mary felt the mini-herd's hot mooing breath and feared she'd get trampled. She reached the small farmhouse, grabbed for the front door handle, pulled it open and entered in a flash. The door slammed in the lead bovine's face. Mary thanked the Lord for her safety. But the cattle didn't give up. They ran around the little farmhouse, mooing in the windows. She never figured out why.

One of Mary's many chores involved collecting eggs from under the hens. One day I asked her about the scar on her earlobe. She told me she'd been gathering eggs and her earrings glinted. The hen made a grab for the sparkle and did not let go when Mary pulled away. Blood gushed from the ripped ear and left a scar. But it didn't deter Mary from wearing earrings after the earlobe healed.

Although small in stature at five-foot two, she could stack cordwood as fast as

any of her brothers. And she did an excellent job. Manure shoveling did not daunt her either. Mary came by shoveling honestly and had the arm for it. She was the star pitcher on the farm girl's softball team. She often told me of the mischief her brothers caused by trying to scare her. They would hide in the bushes then jump out hollering, "Bear, bear!" Sometimes, "Wolf, wolf!" But Mary didn't scare easily. She knew how to walk quietly in the woods. She felt ready to defend herself if need be and could run fast. Once she fired a warning shot to scare off at a bear loping across the near field. When her brothers practiced target shooting, she insisted on taking her turn. Mary's parents' farm was their livelihood. More than once, her father scolded her for riding one of their workhorses to school.



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She rode bareback and endured her father's ire. The pleasure was worth it, not to mention the time saved.

The expansive backyard near the house had a large flower garden. Mary and her mother cared for it with pride and joy. The white alyssum border enclosed many perennials planted according to color and height. There were berries of every variety: strawberries, raspberries, blueberries and gooseberries. Roses wafted their fragrance. Flowers and gardening became Mary's joy throughout her life. She never considered hoeing, weeding, and watering the vegetable garden work. Mary had a pleasant disposition and a positive attitude about chores. She thanked God daily for his blessings. When she had her own home, geraniums filled every window. House plants became her passion.

Mary became a caregiver to her little sister, who had a disability. She carried her around from chore to chore, since the child did not walk until later in her development. Mary definitely had a nurturing spirit. She later helped care for her mother, who got Parkinson's. Mary was always available to comfort the sick with a healing touch and a get-well prayer. She was a firm believer in the Lord.

Although happy living on her parents' farm and believing it a good place to raise a family, she ended up in the eastern part of the country when she married. Her life had begun a new chapter. Her years on the farm became sweet memories. The hen who grabbed her shiny earring and left a permanent scar is one of the many stories my mother told me. ♦

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# My First Experience With Country Living

Linda M. Gandy

When Lee and I were married in 1955, his job with the Signal Corporation of a railroad kept us on the move. We moved fifty-four times in seven years. The corp installed railroad crossing signals and train signals. Normally, it took two to three weeks to complete a job, then they sent us to another assignment for the railroad. For the last four of those seven years, we had our own house trailer, eight feet wide and thirty-two feet long. We enjoyed having our house with us everywhere we went instead of spending hours looking at apartments. The trailer provided comfortable living for Lee and me and our two-year-old daughter, Dawn.

In 1959, I gave birth to our second child, Brian. The four of us were still comfortable in our trailer. The children's bedroom had bunk beds. Lee built a side rail for the lower bunk to make it safe for Brian.

In 1962, Dawn was six and would enter the first grade in September. It would be a busy month with our third child due on September fifth. Lee and I knew we could not change Dawn from school to school, so the children and I settled down in my hometown, Mena.

My grandmother wanted us to stay with her until after the baby came. Our family doctor told me to be back in Mena no later than the end of August. In the last week of August, Lee moved the children and I to her house. I did not like the idea of our family being separated, but for the present time, we couldn't help it.

I got Dawn enrolled in school just before Susan arrived on September 4th, weighing eight pounds, seven ounces. After a few weeks with my grandmother, the children and I moved back into the trailer. Having a new baby and all the things they require really made it crowded. Lee built on a one room addition, which helped a lot, but we still needed more

space. Lee and I began talking about finding a house.

Lee had to do most of the inquiring and going to look at houses while I took care of sick children. Dawn had come down with a serious case of Chicken Pox. Right on schedule, Brian got the pox from Dawn. Just as his spots were fading, Susan got it. At only six months old, she could not understand that she must not scratch her itchy places. I kept a pair of socks on her hands to prevent her from making the sore places worse.

Finally, the children recovered. Lee took us to look at several places. We

moved on a Saturday. It fell on Susan's first birthday. Even amid the hectic day, I got a picture of her and her birthday cake adorned with one candle.

We carried boxes into the house and unpacked some of them. Dawn and Brian helped by carrying in smaller boxes. From time to time, I saw Susan taking something out of a packed box. I ignored her but came to regret it. For the next few weeks, I found "missing" items in the most unlikely places. At first, it puzzled me how they got in such an unusual location. It slowly dawned on me that Susan had become an accomplished pack rat.

We spent a long, exhausting day moving. By bedtime, we had a clear path through the house and a stack of empty boxes on the back porch. With the children sound asleep, Lee and I collapsed into our bed. The next morning came at least six hours too early. The squawking of twenty-eight chickens woke us. It seems we forgot to feed them the day before and they were not happy. Knowing any more sleep was out of the question, Lee bounded out of bed and headed for the bathroom.

Since my side of the bed lay against the wall, I had to scoot to get to the edge. One short scoot brought me to a quick stop. Every inch of me felt sore. It took me considerably more time than usual to get up. Once standing on the floor, I thought, *I do not want to move anything. I think I will just fall backward onto the bed, pull the cover over my head and be still.* A lovely thought, but the children would wake up any minute so, I slowly made my way to the kitchen to prepare breakfast.

I thought cold cereal would be nice, but then remembered the wire basket full of fresh eggs in the refrigerator. Unless I missed my guess, there would be more eggs to gather that day, so I decided on fried eggs for breakfast.

I dug around in the packed boxes until I found the cast iron griddle. Greased it and placed it on a lit burner. Got the eggs from the refrigerator and set them on a side table. I set the table, started the coffee brewing, and poured milk into the children's glasses. Now to fry the eggs! I took one from the wire basket, cracked the shell, and eased it onto the griddle.

Turning to the basket, I picked up another shell, broke it, and started to drop it into the griddle. My hand stopped in mid-air. The first egg had vanished! I stood there and thought *I know I am tired, and my mind has been racing ahead to think of all we need to do today,*

*but I know I put an egg on that griddle.* Oh well, no matter, time was wasting. We would need to get ready for Sunday School and church before long. I dropped the second egg



considered one house in the country. I had strong reservations about this, as I had grown up in town. But Lee had spent a part of his growing-up years on a farm. One big plus influenced us to take it. The retired couple owning it wanted a smaller place to keep up. In fact, they were looking at house trailers and were very pleased with the design and size of ours. This made an ideal arrangement for us since we had bought no furniture or appliances, and they did not want to take any furniture with them into a trailer.

For me, taking the house had one big minus. I knew nothing about a water well and pump, a vegetable garden, chickens, and ground rattlers. I comforted myself by thinking, "Oh well, if we decide to take the house, Lee will solve any problems that arise." We bought it, but seldom would a problem present itself on a weekend when Lee would be home.

The house was an old one and had no sub-flooring or insulation. In the past, the former owners added two additions, which were not made by skilled carpenters, which resulted in the un-level floor in one room.

Since Lee only came home on weekends, we

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# Miss Merryfield's Mystery

from its shell onto the griddle. As I reached for the third egg, I took a quick sideways glance at the griddle. Empty. I turned off the burner. Where had the eggs gone?

Lee entered. "Where's breakfast?" I replied, "I don't know. I can't find it." He had a puzzled look on his face as I exclaimed, "There they are!" Lee looked in the direction I pointed. Sure enough, there were the two missing eggs on the floor, clear across the room. They had slid off the griddle and across the un-level floor. I don't know what would have happened to cold storage eggs, but these were farm fresh. The whites and deep, orange-colored yokes were as firm as jello. I scooped up the eggs and trashed them. Cold cereal would be nice for breakfast. At least in the dining room we could keep milk in the bowls.

Lee leveled the stove before the children and I took him to town to board the train for work. He tested his efforts by telling me to fry an egg on the griddle. It stayed put. Several weeks later, he leveled the kitchen floor. During the years we lived in the house in the country, I prepared fried eggs many times. I always chuckled at that first attempt when they had disappeared. I had many unique experiences during the period we lived in this place, but none of them baffled me as much. ♦

As the letter dropped through the brass slot onto the rug, it made a small plop. Miss Merryfield paused with her teacup poised in midair. She glanced at the old-fashioned wall clock. Straight up ten. Much too early for the mailman. Placing the piece of left-over buttered toast on her small plate, she set down the cup and went through the living room into the hall. On the braided rug lay the letter.

A large greeting-card-sized envelope had smudges around its tucked-in flap. Someone had cut and pasted on a canceled stamp and printed her name in precise block letters. There was no address, just "Miss Merryfield."

How strange, she thought. Why not 'Miss Jane Merryfield'? Her friends called her Jane. Who would call her "Miss Merrifield"? She turned it over. The center contained a small lump. Slowly, she returned to her chair at the table in the sunny kitchen. What should she do? Should she open it? What if it blew up in her face? She found the hump suspicious, but who would want to harm her?

As she often did when faced with a quandary, she phoned her sister. "Do you have time to talk, Beth?" she began, and then tried persistently to wend her way through a thicket of inconsequential questions. "No, no. I'm all right. Just something I wanted to run by you. Look, stop talking and listen. I got this letter... No, it didn't come in the mail. That's what's funny. Somebody just put it through the mail slot. Of course, I didn't see who it was! I was in the kitchen. Well, yes. It had my name on it. No, not my address. Yes, a stamp, a used stamp. Beth, stop talking a minute. There's this bump in the middle... Yes, I know about letter bombs. But who would want to bomb me? No, I don't want you to come over. I just wanted to ask... No, I won't call 911. I'm going to



open it. If you hear an explosion, you can call 911." Firmly, she replaced the phone. It had been an exasperating call, one which left her committed to opening the letter. Carefully, she lifted the tucked-in flap and drew out the contents. What she held in her hand brought a lump to her throat. A Valentine, a card made from red construction paper, folded in half so it just fit the envelope. The front bore a

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small round lace paper doily almost covered by a big, hand-cut red paper heart. A visible fold showed where tiny hands had shaped it. *Be My Valentine* said the small candy heart mounted in the middle. Three uneven legs made of narrow strips of red paper pleated and glued into place held the big heart above the doily.

With tears in her eyes, she opened the card. On the inside page, carefully printed in block letters, she read: "Dear Miss Merryfield. My mom told me you taught her how to make Valentines in 6th grade. She said you showed her how to fold the legs like an

accordion so the hearts would stand up. Definitely cool. I love you. Melissa." Miss Merryfield read and reread the Valentine, wiping her eyes because she couldn't keep from crying. Melissa was the friendly little girl at the end of the block who brought her violets in the spring and redhaws in the fall. Her mother had been Carolyn Baker, a sixth grader with freckles, the one who could never fold the accordion legs quite right. She marveled at the printing. In the olden days, they taught children

cursive first, and what a struggle it had been! How things had changed since her retirement!

She poured the lukewarm tea into the sink. Taking the Valentine to the refrigerator, she freed a magnet that fit between the crooked legs under the big red heart, and positioned it carefully in the middle of the upper door. Then she sat down, nibbling on a piece of dry toast, and admired her gift.

It was, to quote Melissa, definitely cool. ♦

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# Use a Karate Chop?

In 1974, I took my family on a three-week vacation to the island of Barbados in the British West Indies. We rented a home on the beach. We chose the location for its diving, snorkeling, and proximity to the island's largest city, Bridgetown. Bridgetown is a miniature London, with excellent shopping and restaurants, a real plus for my wife.

Besides the incredible views and our large, comfortable home, we inherited Teresa, who managed the property for its Canadian owner. She became our babysitter, part-time cook, and home security officer.

One night, feeling secure with Teresa watching over our family, my wife and I had dinner alone at a special restaurant we had heard about. It turned out to be a beautiful old plantation home, set inland from the beach and tourist traffic. The restaurant featured ten small cozy rooms on two floors and a star-lit romantic stone patio with vine-covered walls. We chose a patio for its privacy and romantic setting and ordered an insanely expensive Beef Wellington dinner and their best red wine. We will forever agree it was the finest meal we ever experienced.

Three weeks after we returned home to Florida, my wife invited friends for dinner. She insisted on serving Beef Wellington, a first for her. For those unfamiliar with it, it's a beef tenderloin covered in mushrooms and wrapped inside a pastry crust. She told me to decorate our screened pool patio into a replica of our Barbados experience.

John H. Fleming Sr.

Our large patio had planting beds in each corner. To fulfill my duties as head set designer, I covered the pool ceiling with green vines and rented six large trees in large pots to ensure a romantic atmosphere. Our patio table was white rattan with a glass top and eight matching white rattan fan chairs.



When our guests arrived, we offered them wine in our living room. At precisely eight o'clock my wife tinkled an ornate bell, and we ushered our guests to the patio and dinner table. By then, the stars twinkled from above. Together with the full moon and the soft candle lighting, it created a

memorable scene. Expensive china, golden silverware, and cut crystal wine glasses adorned the table. The scene drew measured gasps from our guests.

The bell was my cue to bring in the Beef Wellington on a silver platter.

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## Recipes and Boxes

Nancy Fischer

Most new brides start with a simple recipe box. Hopefully, it's filled with recipes lovingly handed down from previous generations. Sometimes, if we're lucky, our friends will hand over their beloved family recipes as well.

I have always loved to be in the kitchen, so I started married life with a fairly good supply of these cards. I am fortunate to have inherited my grandmother's recipe boxes. She had three—one a small metal box that used a simple index card holder. A slightly larger metal one, hand-painted with flowers and scrolls, with a curved top and a lip. And a long, slender box, just wide enough to hold the recipe cards. I found this one the most interesting. Handwritten and

typed recipes stuffed it completely full. Some she had cut from magazines or newspapers. A few had notations scribbled on the edges. Reminders of things to change or comments of the outcomes.



What intrigued me the most were the letters filed in randomly with the recipes. One came from her niece, a missionary in South Africa, that described her daily life and challenges of living in what she referred to as "primitive" circumstances. I found a letter from a nephew soon going off to war. It had details of his hopes and dreams for his future once he returned. He came home and had a good life, but still got wounded and faced his own challenges.

In one, the preacher shared his condolences on the passing of her son (my father) at such a young age. I found similar notes and cards in my mother's belongings after she passed as well.

I saw a beautifully embossed and impressive invitation to a ladies' luncheon for the wives of area business owners (grandpa owned a filling station). This one had the menu of the day's offerings and recipes for each item.

Also tucked in the box were recipes from the



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It had an intoxicating aroma. Standing proudly at the head of the table, I lifted the large knife and fork into position and began undressing the beef. My first attempt sent shivers down my back. I could not cut through the dark brown crust. Undaunted, I tried again with more gusto, to no avail. There were a few whispered suggestions from our guests, who tried their best to suppress a laugh. I excused myself to sharpen the knife. The sharpened knife also failed.

One guest suggested we could break the crust open by slamming it on a hard edge. That seemed a little harsh. For the safety of my hand and wrist, I rejected using a karate chop. Finally, with my wife in tears and the meat getting cold, I used my small camping hatchet and freed the beast from its over-baked habitat. The crust and sauce splattered like shrapnel over the table and guests.

Our guests remembered that meal forever. The story of the dinner traveled throughout the subdivision and beyond like wildfire, much to my wife's distress.

The next day, I made the mistake of laughing at what had happened, which became the beginning of our divorce proceedings. ♦

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local gas company and electric company, and the large furniture store. Seems like everyone enjoyed sharing their family treasures.

Even though my grandmother passed away in my childhood, these glimpses of her life helped me complete my vision of who she was: a loving wife, doting mother, charitable businessman's wife, and a beloved neighbor to her community.

Over the years, I have expanded my collection and tried to share it with as many friends and relatives as possible. I do not believe in taking a recipe to my grave. To me, that defeats the purpose of living. After all, I believe we are here on earth to share and hopefully make things better for those to come. Whether it's a recipe or a trade or a skill, I think it's best to pass it on. ♦

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Wayne Carlson

# Hide and Seek

Sports and games are an important part of my life. I love physical exertion (as long as it's not work!) As a kid growing up on the farm near Galeton, Colorado, we had lots of Carlson family gatherings and played many games. The "older generation" loved horseshoe pitching. Our ping-pong games came with a unique set of rules. If you played doubles, you had to share a paddle. You hit the ball over the net, then lay down the paddle so your partner could pick it up and hit the next shot. The action sometimes got animated. I vividly remember my Uncle Johnny yelling, "YOU BIG BABY!" when someone got in his way or his side didn't win the point!

There were usually enough grown-ups waiting their turn to play that us kids never got to take part. We had our own games. We played everything popular in rural America during the 50s and 60s like Red Rover, Kick the Can, Pin the Tail on the Donkey, Musical Chairs, Blind Man's Bluff, London Bridge is Falling Down, and Hide and Seek.

In high school, I lived for sports. As a senior, I fell in love, married, and introduced my new wife into "Wayne's World." It took Carol a while to learn and accept the nuances of "Carlson rules," but as a good sport, she fit right in. She learned when a volleyball hits the line it is not necessarily "in" or "out" but that it depends on the circumstances of the moment.

Before long, we had a son named Kevin. I taught him how to play and love games. I bought him a baseball bat and glove, a basketball, and a football, but he didn't get the hang of these for years (him being an infant might have had something to do with it!). So, I reverted to Hide and Seek.

I would hide my eyes and count to ten while he crawled or lumbered off to hide. I would make a big deal of looking behind his toy bench, underneath his bed, in his closet, all to no avail. Eventually, I found him—usually hiding behind his mother! His hysterical giggles usually helped me. Then, Kevin would count and I would hide either behind his toy bench, under his bed, in his closet, or behind his mother. He would search for and eventually find me! We had lots of fun.

Soon we had two more boys, David and Randy. Big brother Kevin and I had the responsibility of teaching these "new guys" the joys and challenges of sports and games, including the intricacies of Hide and Seek. We developed three versions of the game: indoors, outdoors, and

combination indoors and outdoors (if mom wasn't home). When all three boys were still young, we moved from Los Alamos, New Mexico to Brush, Colorado, into a new house

on the edge of town, with a vacant lot next door and a cornfield behind us. There were lots of kids living in the neighborhood, and since I coached at the middle school, many of my students started hanging out with us. We had plenty of participants for wiffle ball, football, and basketball. Every once in a while, we even played Kick the Can and Hide and Seek. People always say, "Time flies when you are having fun." Well, we have had lots of fun, and the years have flown past. Our boys grew up and left. The one game Carol and I still play is Hide and Seek—except now the playing field and the rules have changed.

The game we played this morning is typical of the way it goes now. A little before noon, we dropped into the mega store to pick up a few things. We shopped together for ten minutes before she sent me to the card aisle. "I will meet you here in a few minutes," she said.

I found a nice card and waited. When she hadn't shown in ten minutes, and I had looked at all the humorous and interesting cards I could find, I went seeking—the game had begun! I wandered through School Supplies, Electronics and Photography, then the entire food section, Pet Supplies or Appliances. No Carol. On a trip through Groceries, I saw a couple I knew and asked if they had seen my wife. "Yeah, we had a nice chat with her about fifteen minutes ago." "Well, did you see which way she headed?" They shook their heads. I got an idea. Carol is an artist and a former

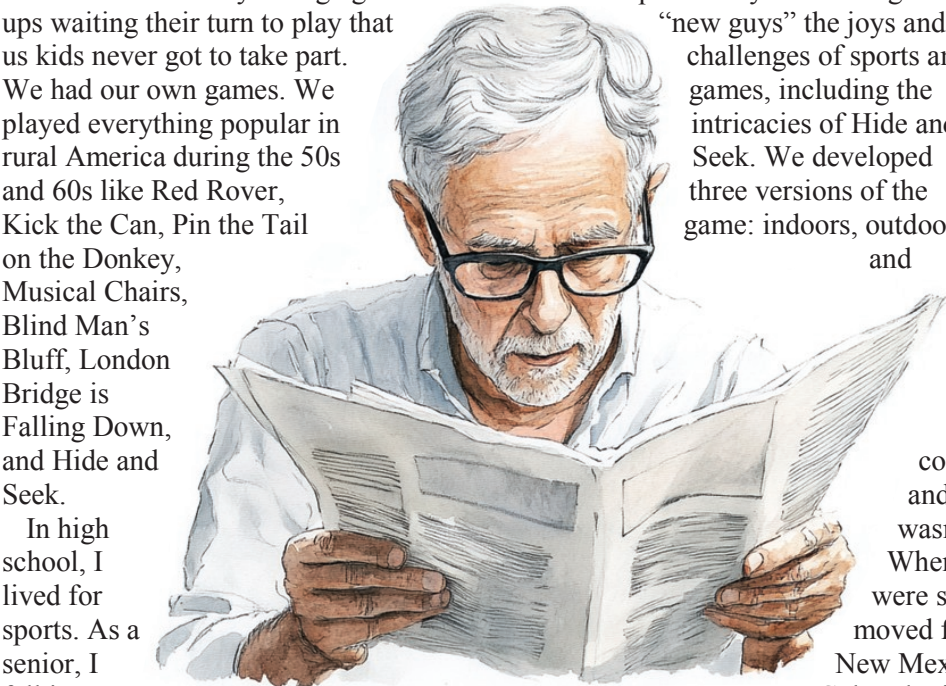
art teacher and sometimes frequents Crafts. I headed there—naturally in the opposite corner of the store. I returned to the card section where I had last seen her and found a bench, probably designated for exhausted game players like myself. Our three-mile walk before coming to Wally World had made me tired. I sat down and planned my strategy.

After ten minutes, I got up and ambled into Pharmacy. I sat down and checked my blood pressure. It had gone up. I bought a newspaper, returned to my bench, opened it up to the Sports section and started reading about the Broncos.

"May I please have your attention?" asked the voice over the store intercom. "Will customer Wayne Carlson please report to the Customer Service Desk? There is someone here waiting for you."

I hurried to the service desk and found Carol, looking calm and rested, with a toothpick dangling from her mouth. "I win!" I said.

"What in the world are you talking about? And where have you been? I didn't see you where we were supposed to meet, so I got some food. Aren't you hungry?" She acted like she didn't know she had just forfeited the game! ♦



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Troy Seate

# Dudley Do-Wrong

I've found the best way to deal with the loss of a beloved pet is to visit a shelter as soon as healing permits.

My most recent sojourn brought me face-to-face with a six-month-old shepherd mix named Dudley. He'd been brought in along with a rap-sheet accusing him of separation anxiety and a penchant for chewing, including the crown molding trim around the previous owner's fireplace. Further notes revealed they'd restricted him to a small area while the adults were at work with only the distant company of two adult cats. No wonder he chewed on the crown molding, isolated and in view of two felines who no doubt looked upon this canine interloper with disdain. I felt sure we could overcome his bad habits together.

At my house he would have the company of a four-year-old female Siberian husky named Stella who pined over her recently lost mate. Dudley's shortcomings couldn't diminish his adorableness as a brown-eyed puppy.

The two dogs were playful during the meet-and-greet session, so we (Stella and I) adopted him.

He arrived with the usual puppy issues: poop placement, grabbing hold of anything in reach with those sharp little teeth, and an inexhaustible curiosity with everything in his universe being a toy. Stella, good-natured sweetheart that she is, often seemed overcome by Dudley's playful furry-scurries involving leaps, running over, under, and in circles around the house in robust rampages. I'm sure Dudley found this an improvement to a sealed off corner with two superior felines glaring at an unwanted sibling.

Stella is young enough to roughhouse but has her limits.

When my blue-eyed huskie has had enough of the brown-eyed handsome boy's constant pestering, she searches for refuge from the precocious tornado flying through the house in search of an object to chew on, preferably Stella. The only relief comes when the not-so-little tyke goes from ninety MPH to zero for a brief nap, giving us a blissful moment of tranquility.

Still, I turn my ears for the sound of something being crunched or falling from a surface previously believed safe. Although Stella and the dearly departed Blackie enjoyed

rubber balls, ropey products, and stuffed creatures liberally strewn through the house, they didn't deal death blows. Sticks from the backyard are also fascinating and frequently find their way inside. I, of course, take them away for fear he might choke or swallow a splinter.

Despite the increasing vigilance required, I still need my sleep, so I eventually close my bedroom door and leave the two roustabouts to their nocturnal devices. I awake to the occasional accident, which I've countered with strategically placed plastic shower curtains in front of indoor entrances and exits, hoping a new sense of maturity will soon kick in. This is less bothersome than Dudley's habit of redecorating during the night (sofa cushions dragged onto the floor, doggie beds flipped and their insides investigated).

More concerning still: small objects disappearing. I've rescued older animals for many years, but in the art of making my humble abode puppy-proof, I've been sorely lacking.

So, now comes the *coup de grâce*. A few days ago, I rose to find the usual two furry faces anxiously awaiting their

highlight of the day, our morning stroll through the neighborhood in harnesses (them not me). Our walks are more like clinging to water-skiing grips than leashes. A feat that I applaud myself for achieving without making a splash on the pavement. After catching my breath, I began the perilous journey from room to room,



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hoping no overnight accident has proven too messy or too destructive. *Worse.*

My TV remote was missing. I searched forlornly under furniture, cushions, and blankets. I looked in every crevice and cranny I could think of without success. My primary contact with the world at large is through my laptop and my flat screen TV. Dudley looked at me with soulful eyes, his head bent to the side as if to ask, "What's up, Daddy-o?"

Dudley and Stella are both diggers. Is there a dog that isn't? I meandered into the backyard, not really believing my pilfering pooch would



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be so brazen as to carry a piece of plastic hardware covered in buttons out of the house. Wrong. Not only had he absconded with the device, he had dropped it into a hole he and Stella had been working on in pursuit of a small rodent. When I spotted the top half with its sensor device chewed away, I swore. No point in scolding him, since I hadn't caught the culprit during the transgression.

Dudley usually follows me outside, but this



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time, he retreated. I found him next to Stella in the living room. They weren't tussling or chewing on each other, just sitting as if waiting for a command. I held up the device, pushing the ruined buttons at the TV. "See what you two have done?" I asked, but not too harshly.

If Dudley could talk, I think he might have said, "Gee Dad, you spend too much time playing with *your* toy instead of with us." Or maybe they were in on it together. The mind boggles at the Lady and the Tramp image in my mind of Stella digging and Dudley holding the merchandise.

Days later, I'm nestled in my Lazy-boy reading a book, still waiting for UPS to deliver a replacement remote, and hoping the dogs are not up to any mischief when who should appear but Sir Dudley with a three-foot long dead branch that could pass for a walking stick wedged in his mouth. How he got it through the narrow space of the open glass door leading inside is something to ponder.

An even greater question to entertain: can a puppy sense when a human need arises? I've been struggling with a trick knee since I recently fell to the floor trying to separate my dogs when their play got rowdy to the point of suggesting trouble. Somehow, Dudley must have known I was in pain, or maybe he simply made amends with a gift for the unbecoming behavior during his first two months in residence. *Maybe this will help*, I imagined him thinking. The long stick won't help my knee, but it has improved my tolerance.

Like the cartoon character *Dudley Do-Right* from years gone by, my Dudley Do-Wrong has his good and bad moments. He is behaving better week by week. Already, Stella and I can't imagine what we would do without him. And, I'm slowly getting used to having all movable objects placed on surfaces at least six feet off the floor. ♦

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Don Boyer

# the experiment

It was a simple experiment. Easy to do and to plan. You didn't have to be an engineer like me to figure it out. It only required a bucket and a watch. The results could make a big difference. But I get ahead of myself.

We lived in a five-bedroom, three-bathroom suburban split-level house. There were my wife and I, two teenagers, and a preteen. Each child had his or her own bedroom, my wife and I had the master bedroom and I had the remaining bedroom as my office. Life should be perfect, right?

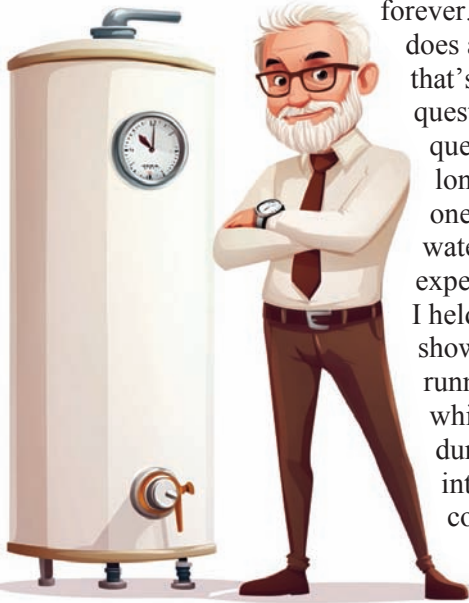
Then we tried to use hot water. The house was new when we bought it and had a 50-gallon hot water heater. What was the problem? Not who, but whom? Our teens had decided hour-long showers were required, even when the water became tepid.

My first remedy was to get water restrictors to put inside the shower heads that made the streams thinner and it fell like rain instead of in torrents. Good thought, bad result. The hour-long showers extended while our teens waited for the last drop of hot water from the heater. By this time, I needed a cold shower to calm my nerves.

I really didn't mind my children getting

clean. It's a good idea for teenagers to shower regularly. I only wanted a little courtesy and respect for others. Right—from teenagers. They could take a bath any time they wanted, no problem. But hours-long in the shower? That must stop.

What's the difference between a bath and a shower? A bath uses a fixed amount of water, while a shower can last forever. How much water does a bathtub hold? No, that's not the real question. The real question for me: How long a shower equals one bathtub full of water? That became my experiment. I held the bucket under the showerhead, water running at full blast, while timing the test. I dumped the full bucket into the tub and continued until it



reached the top. In fifteen minutes, I had it filled. I don't remember how many buckets full of water it took.

I announced the new house rule that afternoon. "No Shower Can Last Longer than Fifteen Minutes. After that, I Turn Off the Hot Water." I'm sure my teens heard every third word. They pretended to understand and

# On Love, Loving, and Being Loved

Ray Willis

Have you bought your sweetheart a Valentine's Day card yet? Are you planning a special occasion or event in honor of the day? Perhaps you have no inclination at all to celebrate this centuries' old special day.

I have fond memories of Valentine's Day from my elementary school years. Our homeroom teachers let us exchange cards during a special class. As a poor kid who feared being disliked, I'll never forget how special some girls in class made me feel by sending me a card. I used to plead with my parents to let me buy some of my own to give to my special female friends. Back then they came in sheets and you tore on the serrated edges or cut them out.

Ah, those wonderful words like: "Roses are red, violets are blue. Don't you know I love you?" or "Roses are red, violets are blue, when I see you coming, I go 'P, U!'"

Love is a powerful thing, isn't it?

I hope you've been luckier in love than me. Even back in the fourth grade, I fell in love easily, but often the girls didn't care about me or our romance only lasted a short time.



In my high school yearbook, the staff had the audacity to write in the section called Class Presentations: "To you we give these handcuffs for two, so your favorite girl will stick with you." The nerve!

Have you been able to love someone others consider unworthy of love? During our younger years, others may have considered that person unattractive. I spent far too many years looking for love in an attractive female. It took me a lot of heartbreak to learn the important lesson that beauty is only skin deep.

David Roper, my favorite writer for *Our Daily Bread*, wrote of a friend of his from boyhood showing great affection for someone David considered unworthy of love. He feared that this would lead to heartache, but his friend said he hoped when he stood before the Lord, He'd say it was better that he loved too many rather than too few during his lifetime. The Apostle Paul insisted that love believed all things and all people. (1 Cor. 13:7)



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nodded their heads. I now put into practice my set rules. My eldest started her shower, I started my stopwatch. As the timer approached fifteen, I hovered over the water pipes by the water heater. At precisely the fifteen-minute mark, I turned off the hot, leaving the cold full on. Screams came from the shower as she turned it off. Then the complaint, "There's soap in my hair." Habits can change, but some require an extra boost. ♦

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Love sees the potential in people. Love believes God can take the most unattractive, messy, or unworthy individual and turn them into a masterpiece of grace and soul-beauty. Pursuing love or being loved has almost wrecked me. I can't count the number of times my heart got broken. Somehow, it is the one area of my life where I throw caution to the wind. How about you? Have you been lucky in love? Perhaps you are one who has been in love with the same mate for a very long time. Remember these poignant words from Alfred Lord Tennyson: "Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." God bless you, and Happy Valentine's Day. ♦

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# It's a Special Day

B. John Jablonski

The day for lovers, Valentine's Day, is not an official holiday, but if it were up to me, it would be. It's important to the young and the young at heart.

There are no other creatures in God's world able to speak their affection and appreciation for one another as we humans. Our failure to show our feelings to a loved one invites disenchantment. It causes many regrets.

Most of us experienced what we thought of as being "in love," when we had that first crush on a specific someone in our teenage years. Receiving a positive response from the object of our affection coursed through every vein of our body, causing all our nerves to tingle. Can you recall that feeling? I can, and it's a wonderful sensation.

To love someone is our choice. When the object of our longing accepts our advances, it fulfills our desire and we can only heave a sigh. It is the first step in reassigning our ego to a lesser role. There is someone else we want to please now; someone we want to devote our lives to, someone we need to make our life complete. Once they enter our lives, we never want them to leave. No longer do we think only of ourselves.

In this world, the most important person to me is my wife, Anne. We are as one. She feels my pains as her own. I sense her worries and feel concern for her anxieties. I fervently hope to quiet them. We do all in our power to ease each other's worries and uncertainties of life.

We are two individuals, yet we labor as one. We talk and make known our true feelings. Life would be difficult for either of us without the other half of our identity. We both know that. Perhaps each of us cares about the other even more than we care about ourselves. It is love in action.

Every day in the newspaper, I find pictures of couples that fall under the category of before and after. We see a photo of a beautiful young couple taken on their wedding day. Their happiness and joy jumps right out at you. Next to it is a current picture taken of the same couple celebrating their 25th or 50th wedding anniversary. This latter picture tells the tale of the last half-century. With all life's burdens etched on their faces, somehow they can still

smile as they look out onto the world. Hand in hand, together, they traveled the path of life. Love that helped them over the rough spots.

Sometimes the road climbed steeply, and confidence in the future ebbed. Alone, it would have been impossible for either of them, but together, encouraging and helping one another onward, they achieved their goals and dreams or found new ones. They deserve the accolades and recognition heaped on them for staying married for so long.

Unfortunately, the love between people can also wither and die of starvation. The pressures and demands on today's young married couples leave precious little time for thinking about what they first saw in each other.

If we wish to keep love alive and strong, we need to cultivate it the same as a garden. We must keep the weeds (our selfish desires) at a minimum if the flower

of love is to flourish. A close attention to details works the ground. Then the flower's roots will spread and absorb nutrients needed for continued growth. Frequent, soft, rain showers of attention and care are preferable to infrequent downpours.

In view of this, it seems like an expression of our love to a loved one is too important to reserve it for one day a year. Would once a month be better, or once a week? At any time we wish, we can do small things that show we care. It can even be every day.

As with anything of value, you must keep love in a safe place. Where better than the confines of our hearts, to remind us why we devote ourselves in efforts to please our partners? Also, their efforts on our part will not go unnoticed.

Each year at this time, poets, songwriters, and storytellers try to answer the often-asked question, "What makes life worth living?"

Love. It's God's reward for a life well lived. Valentine's Day is the perfect occasion to express our feelings of love. Go ahead. Do it. ♦



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Joe Ferrell, Sr.

**I found the physical part of Boot Camp easy.**

In 1950, I joined the Air Force. They told me I'd eat three meals every day. Music to my ears! When we got off the train in San Antonio, Texas, Sergeant Sigwald greeted us. He would be my drill instructor for the next 13 weeks. They loaded seventy-one recruits, including me, into a truck and transported us to the Lackland Air Force Base. On our way onto the base, we walked through a gate with a sign over it that said, "Through this gate walks the greatest men of all."

I don't know why they asked what size clothes we wore; the clothes we received would fit people twice anybody's size in that room. Then they took us to a barber, who asked, "How do you want your hair cut?" and buzz-cut every single one of us.

After we received our gear, we entered the barracks. We had to sit on the floor in front of the Sgt., while he gave us a lecture about what he expected from us. I still remember his instructions. "Remember, men, I can't make you do anything you don't want to do, but if you don't, I'll make you wish you had."

I got latrine duty for one of my first jobs. Sgt. Sigwald assured me I would get "on-the-job training." The outside toilets I used at home didn't need to flush, just dig a new hole and move the building.

Next came Kitchen duty. Some of the worst tasting coffee I ever drank came out of that place. I saw the Mess Sgt. eating food off the food trays after people finished with it. That shot my eyebrows up to the back of my head. I thought, *With all this good food available, that guy must be crazy.* I never understood what our cook had against good food, because he could ruin anything. If a piece of food hit the floor, he picked it up, chucked it on the grill, and served it anyway.

We lined out in front of the barracks in formation and Sgt. Sigwald said he wanted three volunteers to handle the white elephant they had on the base. The what now? I knew better than to volunteer for anything, but so did everyone else. So he picked me. I soon learned they called the garbage truck the white elephant!

As time moved on, so did my education.

Yes, I learned a lot in boot camp, but it wasn't a place you'd want to go if you didn't have a desperate will to live. ♦



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# the LibRARY

Lorraine Theall

**One visit got me hooked!** At seven years old, I visited the Public Library in Council Bluffs, Iowa for the first time. I loved looking at the novels my parents had at home and the Dick and Jane books, which were my first readers, but I never dreamed there was such a wealth of adventure as I found at the library.

My big sister Florin took me to the library that first time. We walked the six blocks to the corner where the streetcar stopped. It cost us 5¢ each way and made for a thrilling ride. When the streetcar stopped for us, we climbed the high steps, found a seat and swayed and clanged our way uptown. The streetcar stopped in front of the library and we stepped down onto the street. We had arrived!

The Carnegie Library is a beautiful building with its tall white columns and the many wide steps up to the front door. As we entered, the slightly musty, almost sensuous, and unforgettable smell of books greeted us. There were rows and rows of mysterious adult books in the upstairs area. People were moving among the rows up there and I wondered what it would be like to be grown up enough to have that privilege.

We went to the children's section in one corner of the main floor, where I discovered the joy of reading. Through books, I could visit foreign lands and meet people from distant places. Sail the high seas on a pirate ship, get to know dangerous people, and solve mysteries with Nancy Drew. I could experience the hardships and rewards of living in a log cabin on the prairie or in the woods and be a part of the Ingalls family in

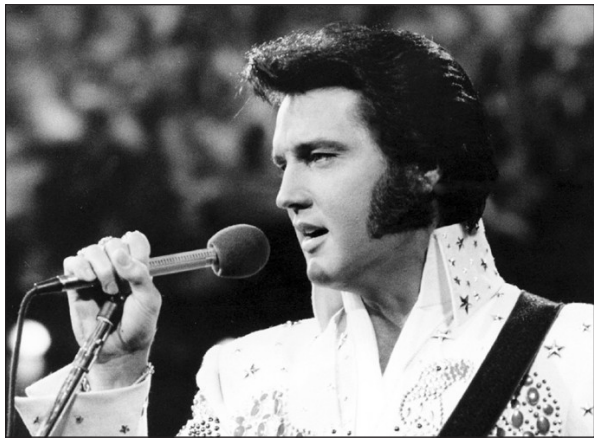
their many little houses. I could have all of this! They let me take three books home and keep them for two weeks! I could enjoy these adventures while sitting in my shady tree at home.

When we had carefully chosen our books, we took them to the librarian. She sat on a high stool behind a semi-circular desk in front of a massive marble fireplace. No queen ever ruled her domain with so much regal authority. The librarian used a pencil with the date stamp attached to it, another marvel to my eyes. After she removed the card from the book and stamped it, she put the card in a long row of cards. I wondered how she knew where to put it.

I could almost feel the thick silence in the library. Even the sound of my heels on the marble floor brought a frown to the librarian's face. We never dared to talk above a soft whisper, and we could not giggle. But, oh! I found the silence heavenly. Such a

comfort to a shy, quiet child who lived in an often chaotic home.

Our library visit finished, my sister and I sat by the fountain in the park across the street and waited for the streetcar. The sound of the water provided a soothing accompaniment as we looked through our books and anticipated the pleasures yet to come when we read them. When we saw the streetcar approaching, we scrambled to gather our books and ran to the corner. We climbed aboard, paid our fare and swayed and clanged our way back home, eager to explore all the wonderful places our books would take us. ♦



## Suzan L. Wiener Elvis Was The Surprise!

**My friend Terri and I were at work one day** having lunch, and she suggested we see Elvis at a concert at Radio City Music Hall. I wasn't a big fan of Elvis Presley, but she assured me I'd love it. The tickets were for Saturday. While not anxious to go, I hoped it would be fun. Unsure of what to wear to my first concert, I put on a pretty blue top and jeans.

We took the train to the concert hall, which gave us our first adventure. We almost got lost, since all the signs in the car had graffiti on them, but thankfully some nice passengers told us which station to exit.

We were finally in our seats and a comedian entered as a back-up performer until Elvis came on stage.

Unfortunately, the audience felt so eager to see Elvis they booed him off the stage! I felt bad for him. When the king of rock 'n' roll came on, everyone went wild. Clapping and cheering filled the hall. I got up and cheered with the rest of them. He wore his bejeweled white jumpsuit and carried a jazzy guitar.

Terri, who begged me to go, didn't get excited at all and just sat there. It surprised me she could be so indifferent to his terrific music and not want to dance around. He had an amazing voice and talent for playing the guitar. It impressed me, but I don't think it did her.

What was truly special was he didn't gyrate, and his songs were often religious, like *Amazing Grace*. I had a wonderful time and loved the concert, but for whatever reason, Terri did not enjoy it. We went out for pizza to make up for her non-enthusiastic day. I think she enjoyed that the most! ♦



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Kathie Craun

## Our Journey to Bliss

**You don’t get out of this world without bad times.** Our rough patch as a married couple took us on a journey to Falcon, Colorado. The second move, six years later, found us in Simla, in a little house built in 1917. A year into our stay, the opportunity to buy it arrived. While it had been improved, it needed more. It sat ten feet from highway 24, with no view other than a plethora of dead trees. A far cry from our 4000 square foot, brick home, acreage, and one of the most beautiful views in Boulder County. In my head, I repeated a dozen times, “Bloom where you are planted.”

We began cutting down dead trees, replacing all twenty-seven windows in the house, bought all new, shiny appliances, and cleaned for days. There’s still much to do. Being on the other side of the age game, I’m not sure we’ll get it all finished, but we keep at it.

Bob’s two garages are about 10,000 square feet smaller than his one at our home up north, but he makes it work. We don’t have the luxury of no neighbors, but it is quiet, and we have nine city lots.

Simla is 0.54 square miles in area at 5,978 feet high. The population is around 600 people. It is a small town.

Last year, I made a view for us. I bought a pergola and new patio furniture. Bob didn’t think it was money well spent, but it did not dissuade me from my quest. Once built, I took to creating our paradise.

I’m a flower girl from the 60s so it’s a no brainer that I can arrange plants. We planted bushes, trimmed trees, and mowed. I placed the new furniture, added specially made pots, garden décor and the extensive rock collection I’ve had for years.

We are nature friendly. When we hang outside, the wild turkeys stroll by and drink from the water we put out, the bee’s and other bugs drink from the waterers in the planters, hummingbirds flutter and drink from the hollyhocks, and the trees are full of lovely chirping from the birds who eat from the bird feeders while we BBQ. The feral cats we have spayed and neutered relax on the cool ground and on the tree stumps we left for them. They snack on their cat food while the turkeys are busy eating bugs. The town noise, which isn’t a lot, is remarkably hushed by the sounds of nature. Bob has changed his mind about it all. It is truly our bliss. ♦

## THE WEST OF YESTER-YEAR

Rachel Kovaciny

# Bill Pickett

**When Bill Pickett died in 1932**, his good friend Will Rogers, the legendary humorist, eulogized him by saying, “Bill Pickett never had an enemy. Even the steers wouldn’t hurt old Bill.” Though Bill Pickett became famous for inventing and perfecting the art of “bulldogging” cattle to subdue them, and while he performed that stunt and many others in hundreds of rodeos and exhibitions, Will Rogers was correct—a bull or a cow didn’t kill him at age 61. A horse did.

Bill Pickett, born in Texas after the Civil War, came from a family with a diverse background. Black, white, and Cherokee ancestry all combined in him create a natural-born cowboy and showman. At age ten, he quit school for good and went to work as a ranch hand. A few years later, he and four of his younger brothers went into business for themselves, taming and training horses. They called themselves the Pickett Brothers Bronco Busters and Rough Riders.

While working as a cowboy Bill Pickett observed an unusual way that some herd dogs would stop or subdue ornery steers or bulls: the dogs would jump right up in the animal’s face and bite its upper lip, which let them gain control of even the most massive or angry critter. I would have seen dogs do that and said, “Huh, that’s interesting,” and let it go. Bill Pickett did not. Instead, he tried this himself and invented “bulldogging.” He would grab a longhorn steer or bull by the horns, clamp its front lip between his teeth, and wrestle it to the ground.

Bulldogging became popular in rodeos and cowboy exhibitions. Thanks to his prowess at this new rodeo stunt, Pickett rose to fame in the American rodeo circuit in the 1880s, followed by international fame. There came a point where any rodeo that could secure him as a contestant or exhibitor drew massive crowds. While some arenas barred him from performing because of his African-American heritage, Bill Pickett eventually became the most famous single rodeo performer in the country. (Sometimes he got around the “white performers only” rule by calling himself a Cherokee, since he also had tribal heritage.)

For almost thirty years, Bill Pickett toured with the 101 Ranch Wild West Show as one of their star performers. The show traveled the US, to Canada, Mexico, England, and South America. His legend as a magnetic performer and skilled animal handler grew to legendary heights.

In the 1920s, Pickett became the first African-American movie star when he brought his showmanship to the silver screen. He starred in two silent movies, *Crimson Skull* (1921) and *The Bull-Dogger* (1923), and became good friends with early cowboy star Tom Mix. Show business also brought him into contact with cowboy comedian Will Rogers, who became Pickett’s close friend.

In 1932, while breaking horses, Bill Pickett became tangled in a rope, got thrown to the ground, and trampled by a bronco. The head



trauma he sustained put him in a coma from which he never awoke. He’s buried in Oklahoma on the 101 Ranch where he worked and where the 101 Ranch Wild West Show began.

Almost thirty years later, Bill Pickett got voted into the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum’s Rodeo Hall of Fame in 1971, the first Black rodeo competitor so honored. 1989 saw him posthumously inducted into the Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame. And, in 1994, the U.S. Postal Service issued a stamp in his honor as part of their Legends of the West series (but they made a big mistake—they printed a photo of his brother Ben Pickett instead of Bill’s photo).

Though he has been gone for almost a hundred years, Bill Pickett’s bravery and creativity forever changed the rodeo world. He achieved fame and renown without creating enemies, but by making friends with everyone he could, from stable hands and rodeo clowns to movie stars and legendary humorists. ♦

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Susanne Norman

# Miss Peg

Since deciding to get back on track with my exercising, I opted to focus on walking the two and a half mile lake’s perimeter near my home. With the sun low in the sky after a day of suffocating heat, I laced up my walking shoes.

Heading towards the designated path, I picked up my pace, sprinting the leaf cluttered outskirts around the lake. I walked a little more than a mile when I heard a sorrowful moan. Turning toward the sound, I observed a lone, grey-feathered goose pecking at the ground. I found it odd. Geese often remain alone, but are near their kind. Had this goose been exiled?

My heart felt heavy with sadness and fear for the creature. The emotion of being unworthy of love and unattached surfaced as a murky aura seemed to surround the bird. It created a perception of it melting into the landscape, unnoticed. I walked towards it. She generated a soft, feminine presence. I sat a small distance from her on the dry, weathered grass, trying not to be intimidating.

I took out my zip-locked breadcrumbs, the leftover remnants of lunch, and shook it. The goose slowly raised its discouraged head, showing little fear. I moved to a kneeling position, offering her contents. She struggled to gain her balance while hobbling with difficulty towards me on two stumps. Shock sank into me. This innocent and beautiful bird had no feet! My grief became overwhelming and tears began falling like raindrops. I shuddered.

I sprinkled the breadcrumbs on the ground. She pecked at them as if starving. Maintaining her balance without stable support proved virtually impossible, as she eventually lost her steadiness. She seemed resigned to the fact that life requires too much effort.

When trying to recount the tale of the goose to others, I continually burst into tears. They felt grief as well. For seven miserable days, the lonely, grey-feathered bird monopolized my thoughts and emotions. My eyes would tear

and my heart ache at the thought of her dilemma. I tried to redirect my walking routine and my self-talk around the lake to avoid the goose. It did not work. I could not stay away, for I truly cared for her welfare.

The following day, I parked in the usual area and headed toward the lake’s walkway and the location of the goose. Rounding the familiar curve, I saw her sitting alone, staring towards the western skyline, no doubt longing for her absent flock. I felt empty and sad as I watched, believing it, too, must feel these emotions. I softly uttered loving words like “sweetheart” and “darling,” allowing her to incorporate the sound of my voice as nonthreatening. Immediately, she raised her head as if excited to see me. As before, she struggled to lift her unsteady body onto her stumps and hobble toward me. I emptied another bag of crumbs onto the ground. She devoured them without hesitation, acting famished. I rose, letting her consume the morsels as I continued in my walk.

About 100 feet into my stride, I realized the goose must be thirsty. Since I had no water bottle, I used the crumb bag. Ripping the bag open along its sides and pressing it inwards, I constructed the shape of a bowl that held a fair amount of water. She approached and eagerly dipped her beak, elongating her neck as she swallowed the cool water. I took comfort as she quenched her thirst.

Thereafter, I checked on the bird many times, bringing her fresh water and cracked corn. Most of the time, she sat peering into the distance, alone. I gave her the name Miss Peg. She is gone now, but her memory stands as a reminder that no matter how hard life seems, things could be worse. She became more to me than a mere goose. It’s possible she was an angel. ♦



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James H. Matthews

A few animals seem to be born leaders. Others are content to follow.

The cowboys named the Longhorn Bovine Blue, because of the streaky bluish complexion of the hair on his hide. They referred to his genre politely as “a gentleman cow operated on so as never to be a family man.”

At three years old, Blue went with a herd of cattle over the Goodnight-Loving trail bound for a ranch in New Mexico, ninety-six miles of which had not a drop of water. Indians attacked, driving away six hundred head. Blue received an arrow in his side. The cowboys cut out the arrow and his wound healed.

The following year, he and twenty-five hundred other steers went up the Arkansas River to a ranch near Pueblo, Colorado. While on the trail, every morning, Blue took his place at the head of the herd and kept it. He seemed to understand every movement of the “point men” who managed the cattle. In guiding the herd, Blue was worth a dozen hands, his owner said.

Blue never went to the sale yard. He was a leader, and he knew it.

On the JA ranch, which spread out over a million acres and managed seventy-five thousand cattle, Blue led the first herd of a thousand fat steers, breaking the first cattle trail

Early morning grazing over, when it came time to hit the trail, Blue would move out toward one of the point men who untied the clapper on his bell. Then, with a toss of his head, a switch of his tail, or a low bellow to show his pleasure, he headed north. Giving out the call, “Ho Cattle Ho,” the riders and the cattle would string out behind the leader. Eager to travel, Blue might walk too fast, unless checked.

When arriving at trail’s end, Blue rushed straight for the open gate of the railroad pens. Once inside, he stood aside, waited until they penned the last animal, then bolted out before the gate closed. He knew he wasn’t just one of the herd. After the men delivered the herd to the rail-head, Blue stayed with the remuda, eating hay while the cowboys celebrated. On the road home with the wagons loaded with food and bags of corn, Blue ate corn. He loved it. As the weather turned colder, the riders and horses felt like making time heading home. Blue had a giant’s stride and could walk with any horse. On the way back, they often made thirty miles a day. It made Blue trot, but he kept up and never seemed to tire on the journey.

As breeds of cattle improved, cowboys sometimes had to shoe fine Herefords with sole leather, but never once did Old Blue limp. His hooves were as hard and bright as polished steel.

Millions of cattle driven over the Chisholm and other trails after the War Between the States helped to reunite the North and South. Where the buffalo had grazed, cattle came to occupy the grasslands. Blue’s owner, a



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pioneer rancher who introduced improved breeds of livestock for the ranching industry, was a significant leader and historical figure in his own right. Having taken a large area of Comanche hunting grounds for his large ranch, and depriving them of the buffalo, he made a treaty with the Comanches, and kept it, regularly furnishing them with beef cattle for food when passing through his lands. They esteemed and trusted him, and he felt the same about them. He had little interest in being written about, but told the journalists who visited him to write Old Blue’s story.

They retired Old Blue and turned him out to pasture at twelve years old, but he lived another seven years. His legacy will forever live on, as a remarkable bovine. ♦



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out of the Texas Panhandle to Dodge City, two hundred and fifty miles to the north. His owner strapped a shiny bell with a red label on it around Blue’s neck. The collar had the smell of new leather. With this collar and the “ling-ling” sound of his bell, Blue was as proud as a boy wearing his first pair of red-topped boots. The cattle soon learned to follow the sound of Blue’s bell.

After leading a herd all day, Blue took life easy. He grazed with the horses, instead of with the cattle, and would walk into camp at will to eat bits of food, bread, prunes, whatever the cook gave him or the cowboys filched from the chuck-wagon. Everyone loved him. He preferred to bed down away from his followers as a character of privilege.



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Kimberly Hamelin

# Trouble

How much trouble can one little kitten be? Years ago, my husband asked it, and boy did he find out! Baby was a malnourished four week old kitten that got stranded in my son's window well. Being a soft-hearted soul, my son had to adopt her. He was twelve and got part-time jobs to earn money to care for her. We helped and got her to the vet. Baby had ringworms and needed treatment and quarantine. We had to confine her to my son's room for the duration and she ended up in excellent health. There was just one problem: Baby hated the rest of us because she had only bonded with my son. Once released from confinement, she wreaked havoc. Not a week went by where I didn't have to change my panty hose at least. Usually four times a week. And she wasn't playful about it. She left claw marks on my legs deep enough I had to stop for first aid. As she grew, she discovered houseplants and began digging and tearing them up. She left potting soil and ferns everywhere. If any of us tried to stop her, she'd lay stripes on us with her claws. Then there were the bookshelves. We had a tri-level house with tall bookshelves on every level. Her favorite was the one next to



the stairs leading up to the bedrooms. She would make her way to the top and crouch like a jungle cat waiting to pounce... and pounce she did! On every person who went by, except our son. We'd walk down the stairs, and suddenly five pounds of kitten latched onto our heads with all twenty claws dug deep in our scalps. She had a heck of a grip, and it took a good long while to get her off. It got worse if I wore a scarf, so I learned to keep it in my purse until after I left the house. We all complained about Baby, but the soulful eyes and sad demeanor of my youngest son made us cave in and keep her. Then everything changed. When Baby came into maturity, she loved all the men in the house. She purred and rubbed on their legs whenever they were around. Baby became the sweetest, most loving cat on Earth. She sat on my husband's lap one evening while he watched television.

Astonished, he didn't know if he should pet her or not, for fear of her claws. After having her spayed, she calmed down even more. She never developed a liking for me, which I didn't mind. I wasn't replacing my hose as often, and life got a lot better for us all. Last week we got another kitten. He's a cutie but the cat I already have doesn't like other cats. My cat will shred the plastic on the windows put up for the winter when the neighbor's cat lands on the windowsill outside, so I got worried,

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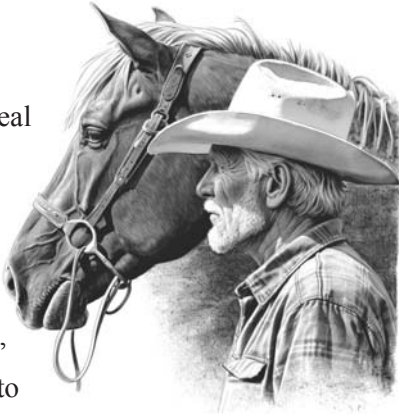
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Prairie Parson

# Are You Payin' Attention?

I recently read an article that said Netflix is writin' its shows for an audience who ain't payin' attention, cuz they're scrollin' on their phone. Well, that explains a lot. The last time I watched TV, it had some of the worst dialogue I've ever heard, bad characters, weak plots, not a man worth his salt anywhere. Gone are intelligent pieces of dialogue, replaced with endless cussin'. I've been a fan of some good movies in my time. Most of them predate the 70s. Back then, the man's role in a movie was the hero with a posse that stands up for him. He didn't start fights, but he sure could finish 'em. He got the girl. Back when I grew up, those men inspired me. They filled my head with notions of what a man should be. Some of the movies lasted three hours, and I never got bored. I admired and wanted to emulate the likes of Gary Cooper, John Wayne, and Gregory Peck. Who can forget when he stood up to an entire town as Atticus Finch, because he knew it was right? These men were not perfect. They made mistakes. But they did what needed done.

That's what real men do, whether it's workin' two jobs to afford to feed their kids, or killin' a rattler next to the house. Movies have power. Stories spread virtues, or lack thereof. They can inspire or demoralize us. Be powerful, or be garbage. Teach us how to be good, or make us crass and selfish. These seeds are in us already, but the right kind of rainwater brings 'em out. It's important to use our time well. To seed our mind with good things. It's time to look at what you're consumin' with fresh eyes. Are you half-watchin' trash when you could be watchin' a better movie? What is 'behind' the story you're watchin'? What do the writers believe in, by what they show you? Do you even agree with it? What messages are these stories sendin' your



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imagining all sorts of dire consequences. Aside from a few hissing matches, though, all has been well. The dog is playing mama to the kitten and referees between the cats, so they're getting along. Of course, the dog got into the kitten food and got sick all over the carpet, but that's a dog for you.

A tiny cat scratch got infected and my husband spent a whole day in the emergency room because his entire arm swelled up like a sausage and turned black from cat scratch fever. We've had to take the cat toy with the bell in it away every night at three am, but other than all that, how much trouble can one little kitten be?

I guess we're going to find out... ♦

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kids? Are they inspirin' your son to be his best self, or tellin' him he's the scum of the earth? He's always gonna be dumber and more violent than the girls? Is the male character ever right, or is he takin' a backseat to everyone else? Is the dad a good one, or the punch line? Show yer kids the movies I grew up on, full of characters who made me want to grow up, start a family, be involved in my community, and take care of my own. Scout Finch is a fine little girl, who learns a heap of lessons from her daddy. When Gary Cooper can't find another man worth his salt to stand with him in a shoot out at *High Noon*, his Quaker girlfriend winds up defendin' him. The best stories tell us somethin' good, but also leave us feelin' inspired. When's the last time you felt that way watchin' a show? ♦



# NIGHT LIGHTS

Our farmhouse stood in the middle of several hay fields. The remoteness became more conspicuous at night because the only lights were inside the house. The few vehicle lights which moved along the road in the distance had no illumination impact at home. When the sun went to bed, we went inside and stayed. Darkness surrounded the house like a thick blanket thrown over a candle to smother the light.

The few streetlights from town didn't reach us. Gloom covered the outlines of all farm structures, including the barn, water troughs, pump house, cellar roof, trees, fences, cows, dog, pigpens, chicken house, tractor and related attachments. The animals were quiet. Listening? Our eyes couldn't penetrate the darkness. Our hands were invisible. No luminous eyes stared at us. We couldn't push the dark curtain aside to see around it.

The wild lights from lightning bugs arrived at dusk while we sat on the back porch. Their pinpoints of illumination flitted through the air over our heads and around us. Sometimes they landed on us and then flew away. We enjoyed their nightlight dances. All too soon, darkness sent them on their way, and mosquitoes whined, bit, tickled our ears, chased us into the house, and came inside with us.

On cloudless nights, we looked up and saw

birds dipped, swooped, chased and caught the insects that populated the night air. We felt the air puffs from their bodies as they flew close to us without sound. The night absorbed

other hunter sounds. The intense quietness gave us pause. As the temperature cooled, we smelled and felt the hint of moisture that became dew on the



plants in the morning.

The pitch black often unsettled us kids and sent us indoors. Even the full moon did not entice us outdoors. Rather than refer to people who stay up all night, the term "night owl" summoned the vague knowledge of animals, birds and insects that used darkness as a hunting tool.

Indoors at night encouraged us to quiet pursuits such as reading for pleasure once we finished our homework, sewing projects, magazine reading, and assembling 750-to-1000-piece puzzles. We listened to music on the radio or Dad's boxing matches, which were broadcast from a famous arena in New York.

Our ten o'clock bedtime meant lights out and beckoned us up to our rooms. We had no night lights or flashlights and couldn't see the hands in front of our faces, so we felt our

the stars. They covered every inch of the sky as far as we could see. Our sky search found the big and little dipper, the north star, Orion's belt, and the milky way.

Our house had no outside lights, and the electrical poles had no attached fixtures. We relied on flashlights to navigate the night when necessary. The barn had lights inside, but once turned off, Dad used a flashlight to find the path from the barn to the house.

The darkness ushered in a stillness inside our house. The outdoor night hunters navigated the darkness and the quiet because survival depended on their special skills. Dusk began with various inaudible sounds from the animals, insects, and birds. The night

Berene  
H. Ingram



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Brenda Flipse

way up the stairs to our rooms, undressed from our day clothes, put them in the dirty clothes basket, and pulled on pajamas. We burrowed under the covers in the winter or under the sheets in the hot weather.

The air didn't move. We heard the house as it settled along with us for the night. It creaked, popped, and groaned as the wood cooled. The roof received the most impact of the day's heat. The boards in the walls and roof had dried out and adjusted as the daytime heat increased. We also heard life awakened within the walls and move around for their night hunting journeys.

On the edge of sleep, we heard Dad and Mom walk up the steps into their room. We didn't see the flashlight mark their journey to bed, but we knew he carried one for emergencies. Their bed creaked as they settled onto it, and their whispers melted into the night. We were safe in our beds in dense darkness. ♦

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# The Front Porch

George  
Rice

**Do you remember when** there were no six-foot privacy fences, back yards were occupied by flower gardens, and people spent a good part of their evenings on the front porch, waving to passersby and visiting with the neighbors? I do.

Many dusk-to-dark summer hours of my misspent early youth were occupied playing stickball, “kick the can,” and other tag games in the unpaved streets and alleys of Wray and Yuma. In those pre-TV days, there was no hand-wringing about juvenile obesity or delinquency because our parents were sitting on front porches enjoying our games. We got slimming exercise, and our observers kept us morally straight while participating in neighborliness. The front porch institution made for closer, friendlier neighborhoods where people felt responsible for each other.

When I returned from my service, I found the social order in transition. People retreated to back yard bastions, entertained a few, and rarely spoke to their neighbors. We bought a house on Lincoln Street that had a courtesy concrete slab at the front door, and a patio the size of a dance hall. My lovely wife said, “It’s a nice place, but I wish it had a front porch.” I heard this many, many times in the following years.

I didn’t disagree with her, but there were more pressing things to do with our income. We built a fence along the alley and replaced the flat portion of the roof to prevent the annual flooding. Then there came a new sidewalk and driveway, and new windows.

We’ve had fine neighbors for nearly forty years but barely knew them. Our four sons went to school with their youngsters, and we notified each other if we were leaving town for a few days, but we did it by telephone. We didn’t even see our neighbors coming and going, because no one ever walked, and cars were in the garages.

Well, we changed all that. When I collected a lump sum for my latest retirement, we finally got that new front porch. And it has changed our lives and the nature of the neighborhood. We found a contractor through the lumber dealers and settled on a budget and a time frame. As they were demolishing the old concrete slab, a neighbor asked, “Doin’ a little remodelin’, George?”

I said, “Yep, gonna put on a front porch.”

After an awkward pause, he said, “Okay,” as more of a question than a statement.

But the porch construction became the center of attention in the neighborhood. Never in all our years on Lincoln Street had so many people had such a mutual interest in anything.

Now it’s done. Our front porch is sizable and its big white wicker chairs have already welcomed neighbors from both directions and across the street. We’ve exchanged more pleasantries in the past weeks than in the last year. People wave from passing cars, and strollers on the sidewalk stop for a few words. We know more about more people (and they about us) than we could have imagined.

This wasn’t an ugly house before, but people we never even met have stopped to say how nice the porch looks. It is a people magnet. It says we aren’t afraid to meet people, and its furniture invites others to join us. If you drive by Lincoln Street some evening, we’ll be out there to wave to you and welcome you up for a sip of something and a friendly visit. Maybe it’ll catch on. I hope so. ♦



felt responsible for each other.

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# The Sentry

Robert T. Thornberry

**The security of military forces** and equipment has been a top priority since time began. No doubt the Roman legions practiced night guard duty as they forged across the continent.

In World War II, the challenging of an unidentified person was probably the same as that of all previous armies. It went something like this. An unknown approaches the guard post, and the required exchanges follow:

The guard: “Halt, who’s there?”

Unknown: “A friend.”

The guard: “Advance friend, and be recognized!”

After determining it is a friend, not the enemy:

The guard: “Pass friend.”

All is well, the articles of war have been satisfied and nobody has been hurt or killed. Unfortunately, those rules which have been so rigorously demanded aren’t always followed, even in combat. The following is an example of the failure of the system. The event is true, not even the names have been changed. The setting is a small German village in World War II. The weather is cold, the narrow street is covered with snow, packed hard by the relentless movement of advancing military vehicles. The moon is full, but cloud cover softens the light. The air is still, the hour late.

The guard is hidden in the shadow of an inset door. Suddenly, a figure is seen coming down the road. His movement is not furtive, but rather deliberate, as if there is a purpose for his presence. Dutifully, the guard slams a round into the chamber of the .45 caliber pistol he is carrying. The following is the exchange. The guard: “Halt, Who’s there?”

Unknown: “Thornberry, you idiot! It’s Major Feathers and you know it! Put that thing down, and let me by!”

Well, so much for military protocol! ♦









Someone came in to check on my progress and bumped the cake, knocking it onto the floor, upside down. I cried, scraped off the icing, and started again. The frozen cake didn't seem too much the worse.

We arrived at the church fourteen minutes before the service. When I opened the car door, I found my mother in distress. The tier she carried had fallen into her lap. She wore a dark green velvet dress. We sponged off the icing.

I set the wounded cake on the proper pillars, found the photographer and told him to shoot all pictures from the west, not the east, said a quick prayer and didn't look again.

Robin came out of the dressing room holding the sleeve of her dress, saying, "Mother, what am I going to do about this?" The elastic had come loose. I went into the dressing room to look for a pin and found Gail in tears. The florist had brought the flowers, but had mislaid two corsages. Some ladies were giving each other theirs, but I didn't. I had earned mine!

Fortunately, we found the missing corsages on a table, and the rest of the wedding went off without a hitch.

Wedding number five went well. Ria melted into tears before the wedding, but she cheered up when her aunt and namesake arrived. We had not told her Aunt Ria was coming from Lusk, Wyoming. It was a wonderful moment for us all. The back of her cake had broken away as well.

I decided no more weddings and no more cakes! I had run out of daughters to marry anyway, so I considered myself done. I wouldn't want to do it over again, but I wouldn't trade any of it for anything in the world—they are all my precious children and precious memories go with them. ♦

# IT'S CHIRPING!

Ima Klutz

A week ago, while eating my breakfast, I heard a cricket. I dislike crickets because you never know which way they are going to jump and if they land on you, their little feet are like tiny suction cups. It makes my hair stand on end just to think about it. Anyway, I sat there with my coffee and donuts and heard a loud chirp. One "chirp," then silence. I went back to my coffee, then it came again. "Chirp" (silence) then, after a long pause, "chirp" (silence).

I remember thinking the poor thing must have only one leg and was falling over each time it chirped. I ignored it. By the time I finished getting dressed and did my housework, it was time for lunch. My cricket serenaded me throughout. "Chirp" (silence). "Chirp" (silence). This little creep was really getting on my nerves.

Since Wilbur and the kids were gone for a couple of days, I had to face this challenge myself. I either had to live with it or find it, one or the other. I went into my bedroom for ammunition. First, I put on Wilbur's hiking boots for protection, then had to take them off again because I decided I needed to wear jeans instead of shorts. I didn't want that one-legged pest jumping on my leg! After I struggled into my jeans (I've gained a little weight since the last time I wore them) I put the boots back on but I had to take them off again because I decided I should wear socks. Finally, I was ready. I felt like I weighed 50 extra pounds.

I made my way to the hall closet and opened the door. When I did, a stack of towels fell to the floor. I gingerly picked up each one and shook it out, hoping the cricket wouldn't fall into my boot. When through with that, I carried the towels to the washer "just in case." I stopped off in the kitchen for a glass of orange juice and a cookie, then went back to work.

There was a stack of games on the top shelf, so I took out each one. I wondered if I should get rid of Candy Land and Flintstones since Patty just graduated and Junior is in high school. Nah. Leave that decision for another day. I had to do one thing, find that cricket!

I got some boxes from the basement and began dumping things from the shelves into them. Maybe if I took them into the garage, the cricket would jump out and be gone when I brought them back in the morning. As I struggled out with the boxes, the telephone rang. My niece wanted my advice about her wedding. She said her mom told her I would be a big help with the invitations. I spent the next hour chatting with her. I told her to invite everyone she ever knew. That way, even if they didn't remember her, they would send a card and the card would look empty without a check, so they would probably send money. It shocked her I would say such a thing. She said she only wanted people there who were a part of her life and who wished her happiness in her marriage.

I spent the last thirty minutes trying to smooth things over. I still think she should at least send one to her kindergarten teacher and everyone on the church roster. Church goers are notoriously good about gifts and checks. Didn't I send some of Patty's graduation invitations to the church down the street and didn't they send some nice checks? Never mind that Patty wouldn't speak to me for a week. I told her college was expensive, and we had to make ends meet somehow. Wilbur took her side, but I'm right.

That night, every other minute, I heard that silly thing. It kept me awake. I'd just about get to sleep when "chirp" (silence) "chirp" (silence). The next day I called the exterminator. He fumigated the house while the dog and I stayed in a motel. When I returned home the next day, the first thing I heard was my one-legged cricket. Instead of crying or throwing a fit, I spent the day at the mall and came home at bedtime. Wilbur and the kids returned the next day. The first thing Junior said to me was, "Mom, you need to change the battery in the smoke alarm. It's chirping." ♦



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# Sport

Charles  
Oz Collins

I have heard of town drunks or town busy-bodies, but in the little town near where I grew up we had a town dog. We all assumed Sport lived at Grady White’s house, the blacksmith, but he devoted a certain portion of his days (and nights) to supervising the little unincorporated town of Galeton, Colorado.

Sport looked like a Cocker Spaniel on steroids. He was decidedly taller, longer, and heavier than the average member of that breed, but he had the floppy ears and friendly disposition that suggested a doe-eyed cocker. A curly black coat covered much of Sport’s head and shoulders, but the rest of him was speckled black and white, sort of like a Holstein.

Sport had a Jekyll and Hyde personality, with a little Danny Kaye thrown in for interest.

The normally affable dog became territorial about the blacksmith shop and Finch’s filling station next door. Woe betides the incautious canine that violated that realm without first submitting to a close inspection and sniffing by Sport. I witnessed one such flagrant trespass. Sport fell upon the sizable mutt with a fury. It was give and take for a few moments of furious combat until Sport latched on to the miscreant’s muzzle. With dogged determination, the defender of the blacksmith shop clamped down, leading me to believe there might have been a bit of bulldog in old Sport.

Despite Grady’s yelling, threatening, and yanking on his dog’s hind legs, Sport would not release his hold until his opponent submitted.

Sport had a much more obvious sunny side. He greeted customers with an uplifted head, lolling tongue and bright eyes. Few people entered the shop who didn’t take a moment to speak to Sport, stroke his head, or both.

But life in the blacksmith shop appeared to be too confining, perhaps insufficiently stimulating for his outgoing personality. He needed lots of human contact and attention. Though the blacksmith shop sat across town from the school, only two blocks separated them. Sport loved to show up at school, where he got recognized, greeted, petted. A place where people knew how to treat a high-class dog.

Sport often appeared at outdoor sporting events,

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drawn by the noise of the crowd or the band music. He favored football over baseball. His appearance at football games would have gone unnoticed had he merely moved among the crowd to be acknowledged and properly greeted. No doubt there were those present who had the good manners to turn their attention for a moment from the game on the field to the Sport on the sidelines.

But the town dog found this insufficient. Sport’s solution was simple. If most of the folks were focused on the field, that would become his arena.

As a play was about to unfold, Sport would take up his position in the defensive backfield. He did not seem attracted to line play (how much media attention do guard and tackles get?), nor did he feel it necessary to be in the huddle. Confident in his athleticism, Sport would insert himself into the middle of the action. Suddenly you would hear a Galeton player yell, “Sport, get off the field!” No doubt he loved hearing his name announced in front of so many fans, for the shouting encouraged him. I found the reaction of referees interesting. Aware of too many players on the field, the men in black and white would loudly blow their whistles at the black and white defensive halfback. The high-pitched added noise and attention sent Sport into a romp among the players. He would cut in and out, circle, suddenly stop and reverse his field, all the while fixing his teammates with bright eyes and a lolling tongue. From the sidelines, you could hear individuals doing their best to coax Sport away while others threatened him with dire consequences if he didn’t let the game resume.

Everyone during their life will have fifteen minutes of fame. Sport exceeded that by a wide margin. At countless football games over the years, Sport stole the limelight for a minute or two, then resumed his other duties as the town dog. However, the next time he heard crowd noise, Sport geared up and reported to the field.

Such loyalty deserves an appropriate award and one year at homecoming, Sport received his dues. Wearing a regulation football helmet and accompanied by a member of the Pep Club, Sport took his rightful and proud place and marched in the homecoming parade. He appreciatively acknowledged the comments, smiles, and applause directed at him with a pair of bright eyes and a pink lolling tongue. But if I know Sport, he would have traded all that adulation for a good romp down the middle of the field on game day.

You’ve got to love small town America. ♦



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# Elbert County Connection

Keeping citizens informed and up-to-date on county government

## FRONT PAGE NEWS FROM YOUR COMMISSIONERS AND TREASURER

### From Byron McDaniel

As a commissioner, I will be involved in making critical decisions that can significantly impact the lives of our county residents. Whether it's improving local infrastructure, enhancing public services, or addressing budgetary concerns, my role allows me to effect change directly. Knowing my decisions can lead to improved quality of life for others brings me a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

**Collaboration with Diverse Stakeholders.** This position enables me to collaborate with various stakeholders, including businesses, non-profit organizations, and government agencies. Working together toward shared objectives can lead to innovative solutions to community challenges. I look forward to building strong partnerships that leverage different perspectives and resources for collective success.

**Advocacy for Community Needs.** As a commissioner, I have the privilege of advocating for the needs of my community. Whether it is addressing issues related to housing, education, or public safety, I can bring these matters to the forefront, ensuring they receive the attention they deserve. This advocacy role allows me to be a voice for those who may feel unheard or marginalized.

**In conclusion,** embarking on my service as a newly elected county commissioner is an exciting and meaningful endeavor. The opportunity to engage with the community, make impactful decisions, collaborate with diverse stakeholders, grow professionally, and advocate for important issues is both fulfilling and inspiring. I am grateful for the trust placed in me by the community and look forward to making a positive difference in the lives of my fellow residents.

Byron McDaniel  
Commissioner District 3



### From Dallas Schroeder

Here are some of my goals for 2025.

With two new commissioners, there will be significant time involved in getting them up to speed on everything a commissioner does and is involved in. There is a lot of drinking from the fire hose for any newly elected official, and my goal is to assist Commissioners Buck and McDaniel in any way possible.



Besides that, an evaluation of our Building Department fees is due to be completed. We secured a partial grant last year to update our Comprehensive Plan, which we hope can be completed by the end of the year.

Personally, I will be keeping my eye on many different bills the General Assembly proposes and will be active as the Elbert County CCI representative to monitor bills, vote on positions for the organization and testify before various committees on those bills.

I was also honored to be appointed to the Property Tax Commission by Minority Leader in the House of Representative, Rose Pugliese. My goal as part of these groups is to represent Elbert County as the CCI representative and advocate for small and medium sized counties on the property tax commission.

Dallas Schroeder  
Commissioner District 2



Turn the page to read an interview with your new District 3 Commissioner, Mike Buck!

### Treasurer's Office Update:

We estimate that the 2024 property tax notices payable will be in the mail by January 30, 2025.



We do not bill your mortgage company. They receive property tax information through a file that is uploaded daily with our property tax servicer. Property owners will receive the original notice in the mail. If you do not receive your notice by the second week of February, it may be because we do not have the correct mailing address, or it is lost in the mail. Please call us at 303-621-3120 and we will try and locate it.

It is important to notify the Assessor/Treasurer if your mailing address changes during the year.

You have the option to pay your taxes in full or in two equal installments as indicated on your property tax notice and coupons. You will only receive one notice unless taxes become delinquent, then we send delinquent notices in July 2025.

**First half due:** February 28, 2025

**Second half due:** June 15, 2025

**Full payment due:** April 30, 2025

If a payment deadline falls on a Friday, weekend, or holiday, you have until the next regular business day to make the payment.

Failure to receive a property tax notice does not invalidate the owner's responsibility to pay taxes on the deadline.

Taxes may be paid online at [www.elbertcounty-co.gov](http://www.elbertcounty-co.gov)

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Please feel free to contact us with any questions you have at 303-621-3120 or at [treasurer@elbertcounty-co.gov](mailto:treasurer@elbertcounty-co.gov).



TAX INFO

NOTICE for QUALIFIED  
SENIOR PRIMARY  
RESIDENTIAL  
CLASSIFICATION

**Note:** the term “residential real property” used in this article means real estate used as living purposes (houses, apartments, etc).

A qualified senior primary residential property tax classification is available for tax years 2025 and 2026. This allows property owners who moved and lost their senior exemption, or will move in 2025 or 2026, to have it temporarily reinstated for their new primary residence, if they meet certain requirements. For those who qualify, 50% of the first \$200,000 in actual value of their primary residential real property is not taxable, unless it causes the assessed value to drop below \$1,000.

**Application requirements are as follows:**



The applicant must have previously qualified for, and received, the senior property tax exemption in property tax year 2020 or later, but are not currently receiving it.

The applicant must meet “owner-occupier” criteria. “Owner-occupier” is defined as an individual who; is an owner of record of residential real property that the individual occupies as their primary residence; OR is not the owner of record, but is either a spouse or civil-union partner of an owner of record of the residential real property, and who also occupies the residential real property as the owner of record’s primary residence, or is the surviving spouse or partner of an owner of record until the owner of record’s death; OR is not an owner of record of the residential real property because the property has been purchased by, or transferred to, a trust, a corporate partnership, or any other legal entity solely for the estate planning purposes; OR but for the confinement of the individual to a hospital, nursing home, or assisted living facility, would occupy the residential real property as the individual’s primary residence.

Applications are available on the Colorado Division of Property Taxation website: <https://dpt.colorado.gov/forms-index> or at the county assessor of the county in which the property is located.

The application deadline is March 15. Completed applications must be submitted to the county assessor of the county in which the property is located at the following address:

Elbert County Assessor, 221 Comanche St., PO Box 26 Kiowa, CO 80117

Call: 303-621-3101  
Email: [assessor@elbertcounty-co.gov](mailto:assessor@elbertcounty-co.gov)

Completed applications must be submitted to the county assessor of the county in which the property is located, at the above address, no later than March 15. ♦



Call 303.621.3144 to  
schedule an appointment

ELBERT COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH CLINIC  
“Primary Care Close to Home”

Our Services Include:

- Pediatric, adolescent, adult and senior care
- Wellness visits and preventative care
- Immunizations and childhood vaccination services
- Sports physicals
- Treatment of acute illness and minor injuries
- Chronic disease management and wound care
- Strep, Influenza, and TB testing
- Lab Work: Annual labs, diagnostic and surveillance labs & more through Lap Corp and Quest

We accept most insurance plans, Medicaid and Medicare, and offer affordable pricing for those without insurance or out-of-network.



ELBERT COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH  
75 UTE AVENUE  
KIOWA, CO 80117  
MAIN LINE: 720.595.3620



# Mike Buck: Get to Know Your New Commissioner

**My name is Mike Buck.**

I ran for Commissioner because I felt compelled to ensure the protection of our County’s way of life. I heard the Citizens and their concerns regarding growth, water, traffic etc. and realized someone needed to give them a voice in how this County moves forward. The people spoke loud and clear, which led to my overwhelming majority in the primary election and record setting results in the general election.

The swearing in ceremony was an honor and I am ready to get to work on your behalf. My goal is to become a humble servant for the Citizens of this County.

In terms of what’s on the agenda moving forward, we have a LOT on our plate. Everything from updating our comprehensive plan and our rules and regulations to evaluating our current building permit fees you have to pay when making improvements to your property. If you have ever heard the term “drinking from a fire hose” ... well, it’s real.



**I get asked a lot about my views on growth, so let’s start with that.**

High density equals high impact, period.

The previous administration liked to remind us they only issued a few hundred building permits last year. While that may be true, we have roughly 9,300 building lots either fully entitled or in the preliminary plat stage of

development. (A “preliminary plat stage” is the initial step in the process of dividing a property into a subdivision.)

The infrastructure for these lots are currently being built and once completed, our building permit numbers will spike.

This translates into an estimated 24,000 new residents, nearly doubling our current population. Our Housing Needs Assessment study, completed in 2022, called for 3,050 new homes to be built in the next decade. In just a few years, the County has already approved three times over that amount. Imagine if we keep going at this pace?

I get it. We need to diversify and increase our commercial tax base. The fastest and easiest way to do that is by adding housing units to attract businesses. But at what cost? Will Elbert County become Aurora?

We are in a unique time in our County’s history, with an aggressive metro area on our border. It’s a balancing act between a rural lifestyle and big city amenities. We only get one shot at this, because you can’t go back once something gets approved. As leaders, we owe it to our citizens to take that responsibility seriously and focus on selective and controlled growth.

## WATER

As far as water is concerned, the County recently completed a water master plan in 2024. While providing some useful information and even some positive feedback, it’s not a comprehensive study. It failed to consider the usage trends of our neighboring counties that represent roughly 96% of the use in the shared Denver Basin. So, we will continue our discussions with the consultants and water law attorneys to determine what actions we can or can’t take to ensure we have enough water for the long term. At the end of the day, it’s about sustainability.



“We only get one shot at this, because you can’t go back once something gets approved.”

After my recent staff meeting with the various department heads, I am optimistic that we have a solid core group of employees. They presented themselves as a cohesive, capable group. I look forward to getting to know and working with each of them.

I also look forward to meeting and sharing ideas with the other leaders in the community. It is my goal to meet with the members of each municipal and local school board, superintendent of schools, representatives from the fire districts and sheriff’s office, etc. For a successful plan moving forward, it is important to represent all entities and that we build stronger lines of communication and work together. What happens in the County affects the towns and what happens in the towns affects the County.

I want to thank the people for their confidence in me and the opportunity and the blessing to serve as your commissioner for the next four years. Elbert County, you have a great day! We’ll talk again soon.

Mike Buck  
Elbert County Commissioner District 1

### HOW TO CONTACT ELBERT COUNTY GOVERNMENT OFFICES AND OFFICIALS

**The Commissioners:**  
**Mike Buck**  
303-621-3132  
mike.buck@elbertcounty-co.gov

**Dallas Schroeder**  
303-621-3139  
dallas.schroeder@elbertcounty-co.gov

**Byron McDaniel**  
303-621-3114  
byron.mcdaniel@elbertcounty-co.gov

**The Assessor:** 303-621-3101  
**The Clerk & Recorder:** 303-621-3116  
**Human Services:** 303-621-0122  
**Public Health:** 720-595-3620  
**Sheriff’s Office:** 303-621-2027  
(In emergencies, call 911.)



# NOTICE OF PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION: For Senior Citizens, Veterans with a Disability, and Gold Star Spouses

A property tax exemption is available to senior citizens, qualifying veterans with a disability, the surviving spouses of Gold Star Veterans and the surviving spouses of senior citizens or veterans with a disability who were previously granted the exemption. For those who qualify, 50% of the first \$200,000 in actual value of their primary residence is exempted. The state pays the exempted portion of the property tax. Once approved, the exemption remains in effect for future years, and the applicant need not reapply.

The General Assembly may eliminate the funding for the Senior Citizen Exemption or Veteran with a disability Exemption at their discretion in any year that the budget does not allow for the reimbursement.

Application requirements are as follows:

### SENIOR CITIZEN EXEMPTION

The exemption is available to applicants who: a) are at least 65 years of age as of January 1 of the year of application, b) owned their home for at least 10 consecutive years as of January 1, and c) occupy it as their primary residence and have done so for at least 10 consecutive years as of January 1. Limited exceptions to the ownership and occupancy requirements are detailed in the qualifications section of the application.

The exemption is also available to surviving spouses of senior citizens who previously met the requirements.

The application deadline for 2025 is July 15. The application form is available online and must be submitted to the county assessor at the following address:

Elbert County Assessor,  
221 Comanche St., PO  
Box 26, Kiowa, CO 80117

Call: 303-621-3101  
Email:  
assessor@elbertcounty-co.gov

### VETERAN WITH A DISABILITY EXEMPTION

The exemption is available to applicants who: a) sustained a service-connected disability while serving on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States, b) were honorably discharged, and c) were rated by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs as 100%

permanent disability through disability retirement benefits. Starting in tax year 2025, applicants who do not have a 100% disability rating but have been awarded individual unemployable ability status as determined by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs are also eligible for the program.

Besides the disability or unemployable ability qualification, the applicant must have owned and occupied the home as his or her primary residence since January 1 of the year of application; however, limited exceptions to the ownership and occupancy requirements are detailed in the eligibility requirements section of the application.

The application deadline for 2025 is July 1. Applications are available from the website of the Colorado Division of Property Taxation at <https://dpt.colorado.gov/forms-index> or the county assessor of the county in which the property is located.

As of January 1, 2024, Senate Bill 23-036 requires completed applications must be submitted to the county assessor for which county the property is located in.

### VETERAN WITH A DISABILITY SURVIVING SPOUSE EXEMPTION

The exemption is available to surviving spouses of veterans with a disability who had the veteran with a disability exemption and

who passed away prior to January 1 of the current year. The property must be owner occupied and used as the primary residence of an owner-occupier who is the surviving spouse of a qualifying veteran with a disability. The application deadline for 2025 is July 1.

Applications are available from the website of the Colorado Division of Property Taxation at <https://dpt.colorado.gov/forms-index> or the county assessor of the county in which the property is located.

Completed applications must be submitted to the county assessor of the county in which the property is located, at the above address.

### GOLD STAR SPOUSES

Beginning in January 2023, this exemption is available to surviving spouses of “Gold Star” Veterans. The property must be owner occupied as of January 1 in the year of the application and used as the primary residence of an owner-occupier who is the surviving spouse of a qualifying Gold Star Veteran.

The application deadline for 2025 is July 1.

Applications will be available from the website of the Colorado Division of Property Taxation at <https://dpt.colorado.gov/forms-index> or the county assessor of the county in which the property is located. Please submit your complete application to our county address. ♦

## Avoid the "Second Shovel"

After a snowstorm, how many times have you shoveled your driveway only to have it plowed in when the local snowplow comes through? Clearing an area to the right of your driveway (as seen in the diagram below) and giving the snow on the plow a place to go other than your driveway should keep you from having to do the same job twice.

