

Shirley Howington

Can Beauty Be Found in Chaos?

The Mountain Pine Beetle has been killing trees in Colorado since the early 1990s. The outbreak reached its peak in 2007. It mainly attacks lodge-pole and ponderosa pines. It has affected over four million trees in Colorado, leaving devastation to the forest and the animals that inhabit it. This is a story about what I felt and saw after the beetle's destruction in 2007.

This wasn't the forest I remembered, with huge green pine trees reaching for the sky and long green grass that waved in the wind. Instead, dozens of trees lay dead on the ground, some crisscrossed over one another. The trees left standing looked sad and most of them were dead or dying. The pine beetle had made chaos out of what had once been a beautiful, thriving forest.

I had guided tourists through these mountains above Granby on horseback. I could remember the times they gasped at the beauty of the mountains, but also the times the trees began turning reddish orange from the beetle's damage. Tourists from Europe thought our trees were orange. A solemn mood came over me as I sat down on the fender of the horse trailer.

"Shirley, what are you doing?" my dad hollered from the other side. "We have to get a move on or we will never get up there and back before dark. Get Sarah saddled up and let's go!"

My dad already had Timber saddled. He loved the outdoors, especially the mountains. Dad's philosophy was each day is precious, and one should make the most out of it. He often repeated that something good will come out of something bad and that included the devastation the pine beetles had caused.

The ride today would be treacherous due to all the fallen timber and the steepness of the mountain, with several drop off areas. Sarah and Timber were excellent mountain riding horses, and they trusted us as much as we did them. They enjoyed a challenge.

"Okay, Dad, I'm saddled up. Where to and which way?" I asked.

"Do you remember the story about the 1930s rodeo cowboy? I think he was a bull rider. Rumor has it he built a cabin somewhere up here and was never seen again. Our mission for today, should you decide to accept it, is to find the cabin. I don't think



**Don't miss
Cowboy Up!
Details on
Page 7.**

anyone ever has, but we can try. Besides, it will be fun navigating the forest," Dad replied.

Off we headed, with Timber and Dad leading, stepping around and over fallen trees and me and Sarah following. The dead

limbs crackled all the way. A chipmunk started loudly chattering at us as if to say "no trespassing." A little way off, I saw a jackrabbit. Then, up above, a golden eagle soared. I noticed little sprouts of green grass and even the tiny trunks of pine trees. Rebirth from the devastation, proof that life would return. A doe and fawn peered at us from behind what appeared to be part of an old wagon. The forest was coming alive! Such a wonderful feeling to see new life and wildlife. Such a glorious day!

Our horses moved along at a good steady pace, eager to get to wherever we were going as we usually stopped for lunch and got off and gave them grain from our saddlebags. Suddenly, they snorted and stopped dead in their tracks with

their heads held high, looking off to the right. In the far distance stood a bull moose. He stared at us as if to say, "Watch yourself. If I feel like charging, I will."

We rode slowly on, making sure not to go anywhere near him. We headed in the opposite direction. The change of direction caused us to ride in an area neither of us had ever been. The tall grass and some of the trees looked healthy. We got off to eat our sandwiches and let the horses graze. Seated there enjoying our lunch, I saw what appeared to be a fallen down cabin hidden in the brush. I pointed it out to Dad, who said, "Let's go explore it!"

Off we went. Part of the roof had fallen in, and the floor didn't look sturdy. We had to walk gingerly and be careful. There wasn't much left in the cabin, an old coal stove, a coffee pot, and a few utensils. An old nightstand and the springs to a bed, no mattress. This had been someone's home. I felt like an intruder, even though they were long gone.

I opened the coffeepot, and to my amazement, I found a buckle engraved to say, "1933 World Champion Bull Rider."

The lesson I learned that day is there can be beauty in chaos; from the rebirth of a forest inhabited with wildlife to the finding of a World Champion Bull Rider Belt Buckle from 1933. ♦



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THE POWER OF FICTION

Charity Bishop

My attention span has shrunk. How about yours? Have you noticed? I am reading a really excellent book called *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention—and How to Think Deeply Again* by Jonathan Hari. He talks about how technology is altering our brains, our cell phone addiction and how it contributes to our loss of extreme focus, about the social and emotional consequences of people no longer reading long books, and more. I am only a third through it, but so far have taken four pages of notes.

One chapter is about fiction. Experts who study the human brain say reading fiction for long periods of time lets our brain develop cognitive empathy, and the greatest advances in humanism came about through being able to put yourself into someone else's shoes, imagine life from their different perspectives, and have compassion for their situation and choices.

Is *that* what changed history all at once? Think about it. Novels were not available before the 1700s. Printing was so expensive for such a long time, publishers mostly used it for religious or scientific volumes. In the days of Sir Thomas More (1500s), rich people could afford books and knew how to read them, but few of them were novels. (Those were also the days when they burned folks at the stake.)

By the time of Marie Antoinette (1700s), novels were becoming more popular among the upper class, and education more available to the lower class, but it wasn't until the 1800s that everyone learned how to read and novels got popular. That is when a lot of our attitudes about humanitarianism shifted all at once. In England, Charles Dickens writing about the poor and about the vile treatment of little kids in workhouses changed policies. For the first time, people from other classes not only *knew* about these things, they saw them through the eyes of David Copperfield. By reading about Amy Dorrit, they knew how it felt to grow up in a debtor's prison. Nicholas Nickleby taught them compassion for kids dumped in abusive boarding schools. Then came Thomas Hardy, who wrote depressing but eye-opening accounts of "women wronged." Along with Tess, readers suffered the injustice of being assaulted, then

cast out of society for her "sin." With *North & South* by Elizabeth Gaskell, readers could understand the hardships of the industrialist revolution and how strikes left families bereft. In America, Mark Twain gave readers compassion for orphans like Huckleberry Finn. Harriet Beecher Stowe made slavery unbearable with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, fifteen years ahead of the push to "free the slaves."

Reading a novel, becoming involved in a character's point of view, and going through their emotions and losses with them gives us a greater potential for empathy if we ever meet anyone *similar* to them in the real world. It opened people's eyes to the lives of those around them. We moved from compassion for people to having greater compassion for animals, through such books as *Black Beauty* or *Charlotte's Web*.

For a while, we were doing well as a society.

We had advanced enough to show tolerance for differing points of view, were learning what it might be like to come from another culture or have a different skin tone... and now we've regressed. Maybe because people read less and talk more. Others' views feel "threatening" rather than holding the potential to broaden your mind.

To test your attention span, put your phone in another room and try to read a novel or watch a movie. Notice if you get engrossed fully right away, or feel distracted and like you need to check your phone.

If your attention span has shrunk and want to recover it, set a goal for your free time that you care about and fill it with focused activities. Try to read for 10 to 20 minutes at a time, focusing on each

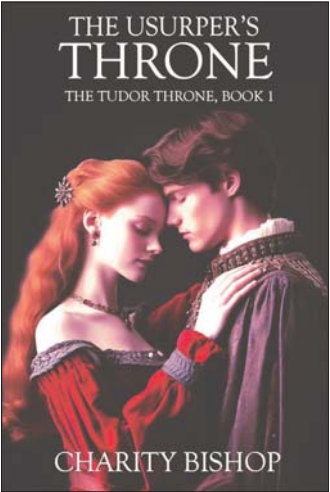
word and what it means. Go for walks without a phone. Over time, you will retrain your brain to pay attention. Let your mind wander. Happy reading, my friends! See you at the library! ♦



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Veronica L. Asay

DEAR DAD

I can't believe you've been gone twelve years now. There's so much I want to tell you. A lifetime seems to have passed since you were taken from us. I'll never forget finding you in your room...you were sixty years old, but lying there, you reminded me of a child. No matter how much I screamed, you didn't wake up.

Since your death, I've learned more about you and your life than I did the whole time you were alive. How you had rheumatic fever three times as a young boy and when you were small, the family briefly moved south. Your grandmother didn't know if she'd ever see you again alive. A nice Jewish family took a liking to you, welcomed you into their home, and encouraged you to swim in their pool. Their intervention, and the milder climate, saved your life by helping you recover.

In your teens, you couldn't play football because you couldn't run. You tried out, ended up making yourself sick, and quit that day. The military rejected you and you couldn't serve in Viet Nam, which was a thorn in your side. College wasn't your thing at first, but then you became a teacher. You went to Europe in your late twenties, and afterwards when you came home you entered the engineering field. You were unlucky in love until you met Mom. That eventually led to my sister and me.

Life was never easy—health problems and employment challenges plagued you. Later, you returned to teaching and admitted it was your niche. Only now that I'm in my thirties do I realize how frightening it must have been for you. I'm in my late thirties now; I was small, but I remember you at this age. The world terrifies me, yet you persevered despite all odds. You had the responsibility of a family and did your best for us. I regret you weren't able to fulfill some of your dreams, like returning to Europe or owning your own business, and being able to retire to pursue your passions. Or resume your art talents, or pick up woodworking again. I'm sorry you were plagued with health problems.

What do I miss most about you? Probably your honesty... and your principles come in second. Your love for Christmas. Your cooking was fantastic, and last but not least, your warped sense of humor. Mom may have passed on a great legacy of faith to us, but you passed on your warped sense of humor. Other dads gave their daughters nicknames like "Sweetheart" and "Pumpkin." You called me

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"Bucko" and "Kiddo." My sister was "Sidewinder."

You were a wonderful father and provider. Whenever someone made comments about you having daughters instead of sons, you proudly defended your girls. You insisted we could do anything we set our minds to and told us: "There's no such thing as men's work or women's work. There's just work, and as long as someone does it, that's all that matters."

My favorite memory of us is when you took me to the hospital after my sister was born and you introduced us. You helped me hold her and there's a beautiful photo of the moment.

I know you loved me; however, I worry while you lived that I let you down. I never behaved

like a normal child. I was odd, and in my teens and twenties, I had nervous breakdowns. I became agoraphobic, I never went to college, I was a failure-to-launch. I have been able to carve out a modest life for myself, but I never published that novel you liked or snagged a literary agent. But I have had several short pieces in print, many of which feature you, and I worked in a nursing home for a time. There was a horrible pandemic going on. Words can't describe it.

But somehow, I've been able to work throughout it the entire time. So many times, over the years, I wished I could talk to you. I often wonder what you'd think of the world today. One dream of mine came true: like you, in my late twenties, I overcame many of my issues and went to Europe.

I'm not married. No doubt you'd tease me about holding true to the contract you made me sign when I was two years old—that I'd wait until I was thirty-five to date. I don't have children either, and I doubt I ever will.

I hope you know how much I love and miss you. I've tried to take care of Mom since you passed away, and be a credit to you both. I wish I had known you better and let you into my world more. I'm sorry if I ever caused you a moment's pain or regret. I once heard that when Grandma lost her father at sixteen, she never got over it. That's true of me too, Dad. I'll never get over losing you. I may heal, I may grow, and I may find a measure of happiness, but I'll never get over your death.

I love you, Dad. I know I'll see you again.
Your Bucko. ♦

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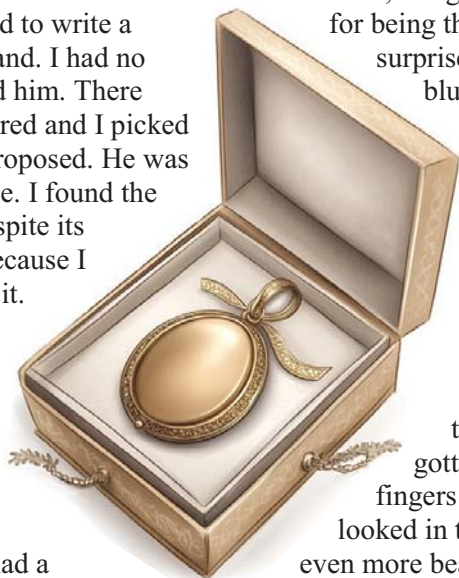
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My Surprise Locket!

Suzan L. Wiener

I read in a writer's newsletter about a contest for the most romantic story. The winner would get a beautiful gold locket. To say I wanted to win it would be an understatement. My heart fluttered every time I saw the picture. I followed the rules as best I could to write a romantic story about your husband. I had no trouble doing that since I adored him. There were so many memories we shared and I picked the memory of when Howard proposed. He was so sweet, getting on bended knee. I found the ring he bought me beautiful, despite its small diamond. I didn't mind because I knew a lot of thought went into it.

They would announce the contest winner in two weeks. I waited with bated breath to see their name, hoping for mine. When someone else won, I felt devastated. The editor had chosen mine as an honorable mention, but I really thought I had a chance of winning. The winner had an excellent story.



When I told Howard I hadn't won, he felt so bad for me. He put his arms around me and said, "Don't worry, Susie! You are so special to me."

Touched, I hugged him and thanked him for being there for me. To my surprise, he handed me a pretty blue box with a white bow.

"Howard, what's this?" I asked, surprised.

"Open it, honey. I hope you'll like it," he replied with a big grin.

I did just that and couldn't believe my eyes. He had written to the editor of the newsletter to ask where they bought the locket and gotten me one. As his gentle fingers hung it around my neck, I looked in the mirror, and found it even more beautiful than I imagined.

True, I didn't win the contest, but I won my beloved husband's heart many years ago. ♦

Beautiful Dishes

© Katie Martin

We had Melmac dishes when we were young and just married. They were a brand name of melamine. Everyone had a set. We ordered them from the S & H Green Stamp catalog. We checked our supply of stamps and found we had enough books of stamps to order our dishes. They were very simple, a wheat color with a brown circle around the plate. We called them "salt and pepper."

They matched everything, which made decorating the table for holidays or everyday easier. Our dishes made us happy, and we showed them to anyone who came for a visit. People loved their simplicity and often asked where we bought them. We tried to order more from the Green Stamp catalog but found out they did not have that pattern any longer. No one seemed to have our dishes.

Weeks later, my mother called and invited us to drop in and see her new purchase. As she took us to the dining room, she told us she had seen these dishes somewhere, and really wanted them. "They are beautiful," Mom said.

There, on the dining room table before us, were "our" dishes. Mom had forgotten she had seen them at our house and bought a set at the new department store. She got service for 26, since she had company around the holidays and wanted enough place settings. She added a couple of extra settings for breakage, etc. Later that week, we went to the department store and bought additional sets for us, grateful that she had tracked down the pattern.



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Dishes were broken over the years. One day, my mother called. "I had to buy new dishes. I don't have enough place settings anymore. Would you like the old ones?"

We snatched them up. Our collection has dwindled, but we still use them every day and continue to receive compliments. Memories associated with our dishes continue to be made. Each conversation begins, "I remember when..." ♦



The air in the wood turned deep misty blue
(And I wonder if this ever happened to you)
I'd seen him before,
oh who could he be?
As he faded before me,
I knew it was me ♦

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Looking Back

Susan Sundwall

Down by the water where the cattails grow
I spied a young boy with his puppy in tow
The puppy was brown
with a fluffy white thatch
Beneath his chin whiskers,
a neat little patch

A fishing pole sat on
the boy's sunburned shoulder
The creel for his catch was
round like a boulder
He turned, and he winked at me as if to say
'I'll be catching myself a whopper today!'

This old-fashioned scene then
brought to my mind
Those days long ago when so easy to find
Was a boy and his pole with a
whopper to seek

Going off fishing down by the creek

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Sweet Memories

Linda O'Connell

Recently, I went to lunch at a small neighborhood deli that serves a variety of sandwiches on healthy breads. On the counter, at the cash register, sat an assortment of not-so-healthy homemade cakes sectioned into thick squares displayed in clear plastic containers with handwritten labels. My mouth watered at the sight of a chunk of carrot cake. I flirted with a chocolate frosted wedge, but my heart skipped a beat when I recognized a long-lost love.

It had been nearly thirty years since I'd had my last taste. Memories flooded back, the good and the bad. I turned my head, forced myself to look away, trying to escape the past, but my desire called out to me and when I looked again, I was a goner. I gave in to that scrumptious chunk of apple-walnut cake. I devoured every tasty morsel. I even smooshed the remaining crumbs with my index finger and licked it clean. I'm quite certain that my old fat cells still contain remnants of that first apple-walnut cake, and I'd bet my bottom that the new ones were as happy with the reunion as I was.

I sat at a retro wooden table, similar to the one in my friend's old kitchen. Every forkful of that apple-walnut cake resurrected happy memories of my late friend

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Rose and our dearly departed mothers. Rose and I were best friends and neighbors for ten years. We had the same warped sense of humor. We shared coffee and sweets, gossip and good news. We cried on one another's shoulders, complained about our problems, and shared child rearing tips. We parented our parents, and like most women of that generation, we took care of everybody else's needs first. Seated in her kitchen, we gazed at her collection of salt and pepper shakers as she baked desserts that rivaled those sold at the neighborhood bakery. Her banana cream cake was spectacular, her brownies decadent, but the apple-walnut cake with its cinnamon goodness had just the right combination of smooth, moist, coffee cake texture, crunchy nuts, and fresh fruit. We deemed it a healthy dessert and nibbled on it for days, sliver by sliver, trying to make it last. It was one of our simple indulgences.

Rose and I chauffeured our moms to grocery stores, bingo halls and took them on leisurely Sunday drives. One fall day, they invited us to accompany them on a day trip with a senior citizen group. An old-fashioned picnic and apple picking sounded like something we would enjoy, so we boarded the chartered bus along with our mothers and forty other seniors. The ladies wore gauzy headscarves in a rainbow of colors knotted under their chins to protect their

bouffant hairdos from being windblown. Rose and I sat our moms up front and settled across the aisle from one another in the side seats. Bits and pieces of conversations floated our way. We overheard one word repeatedly: nurses. When several ladies stopped to ask what malady our moms suffered from, since they needed their nurses along, we chuckled and explained our relationships.

At the picnic grounds, the seniors lined up to receive their boxed lunches. Rose and I darted to the restroom. As we were heading back, we both gasped out loud at the sight of our moms. We were too far away to prevent the inevitable from occurring, but sprinted towards them and watched as they both lifted one leg and then the other over the wooden picnic bench and placed their open boxes on the table.

Simultaneously, they sat down. On the same side of the bench! One end of the small picnic table sawed up in the

air as our moms flopped backwards onto the grassy ground. Their milk splashed their faces like a surprise summer shower, their apples rolled topsy-turvy down the hill, and their ham sandwiches ended up on an ant mound. A strangled laugh escaped one of us, then the other started laughing, and by the time we reached our wide-eyed moms flat on their backs, feet in the air, flustered from the tumble, we were doubled up with laughter. After we regained our composure, we assisted them up, brushed them off and nursed their bruised egos, as there were no actual injuries. We apologized for laughing and gave them our boxed lunches.

On the bus ride home, Rose and I couldn't look at one another without giggling. As a diversion, we counted the apples in our bags and stared out the windows until one of us glimpsed the other. We tried to stifle chuckles and snorts, guffaws and snickers. We were a mess. We took our moms home, thanked them for a

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memorable day, and made sure they were okay. Then we laughed all the way to Rose's kitchen, talking about their slapstick fall. We peeled and chopped our large red apples, measured dry ingredients and greased a baking dish and followed the recipe for Apple Walnut cake.

Over the years, there were many times we sat in her kitchen and shared tidbits of our lives as we devoured delicious home-baked goods. None were ever sweeter than the apple walnut coffee cake. The memories of that day and the taste of that delectable dessert still linger. ♦



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Random Acts of Kindness

Judy McMillie

I'm a firm believer in modern-day miracles, because I see them every day. I witness so many, sometimes I am oblivious to them while they're happening. It isn't until later I realize and acknowledge a miracle happened in front of me. Some are huge. Some are infinitesimal. But all are important in our daily lives. We should recognize them for what they are.

It's difficult for me to recall specific events, but I know they are there. Everywhere. Every day. Strangers giving a few coins to a lady in the grocery store's cash register line who is a few cents short of what she needs to pay her bill. Travelers stopping along the road to help a family whose car broke down. Children giving their teddy bears to fire or tornado victims. Someone giving his or her place in the grocery-store ten-items-or-less line to a young mother with a wailing infant.

It's easy to be cynical and think stopping to help strangers is not only dangerous, but has become passé with cell phones to locate "giving" professionals. I cannot subscribe to that mindset. I am helpful by nature, and I care about people, so although I know an oldster like me traveling alone can't stop to help, I

would if I could. That's what makes the world go 'round.

I recall a time in my past when our church's pastor, Francisco Escalera, rode with me to visit our friend Patsy in a nearby hospital. After our initial hellos, Rev. Francisco asked if he could read her a psalm. She agreed. He asked, "Would you like to hear it in Spanish or English?"

Surprised by the question, she said, "English would be fine."

Rev. Francisco began reading Psalm 1 from his King James version of the English Bible, and she noticed him struggling with the language. Patsy stopped him mid-verse and said, "You know what, Francisco? I've changed my mind. That's a familiar psalm to me. I believe I'd like to hear it read in Spanish for a change."

I heard the relief in Rev. Francisco's voice as he read in Spanish. It was truly a beautiful reading, and although I didn't understand one word, I understood the kindness Patsy showed when "changing her mind." A random act of

never forget it, and neither will I.

A similar incident happened to me many years ago. While being prepped for surgery, the anesthesiologist came to my bedside to speak

with me before beginning the process. He told me what and what not to do, then he bent down so he could whisper into my ear, and asked me to allow that part of my body which tends to the healing of all ailments to become engaged and begin the healing process at that instant. He invited God's loving kindness to surround all of us in that room. I grew to know that doctor in



the ensuing years with an extra measure of love for him and his persona. That random act of kindness was exactly what I needed.

Most of us have a favorite restaurant or two. My husband and I loved Avila's Mexican Food in El Paso, Texas. We had a particular booth we like to sit in and we chatted up everyone who served us and gave them a generous tip. It's what we liked to do. One time when we went to Avila's for enchiladas on a cold, windy evening, the service was slower than usual because of a big party in the back party room and a large takeout order. We didn't mind.

While waiting for our food, my husband spotted something shiny on the floor under the next table. He thought about leaving it alone, but he got curious, so he picked it up—a big beautiful gold and diamond man's ring, a really lovely piece of jewelry. At that moment, our server Luis passed by and asked what caught our attention. Buck showed him, and he almost fainted. Luis had been searching for that ring all evening. He had been to his car and locker; had searched the counters in the kitchen, the break area, the dining rooms, and the bathrooms.

Luis called it his "anniversary" ring. He and his wife bought it when they married, and every year, on their anniversary, he added a diamond. They divorced after twenty-two years, but he saw it as an outward visible sign of their life together, and the family they created. He treasured that ring. And we just "happened" to find it, because of slow service.

I believe God places us where He wants us. Buck and I could have gone anywhere, but we chose Avila's at the minute Luis begged God to help him through this stressful time. Life can be so sweet. I love happy endings!

Luis bought our meal that evening, although we protested. He felt grateful to have such good friends, and so were we. He shouted his joy and gratitude to God and His world that evening!

I have experienced a lifetime of random acts of kindness. It's such a wholesome way to live. Why don't you spend a day watching for them? I think how many random acts of kindnesses you witness will surprise you. ♦

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From the Publisher, Jerry Bishop

A Story to Tell

We constantly get phone calls from new folks who have just moved out here, telling us how much they love our publication and asking if there is anything they can do to support it. The answer is simple: patronize our advertisers. Whether or not you end up doing business with them, you can still tell them you appreciate their advertising in the *Prairie Times*.

When my wife Susan and I started the *Prairie Times* thirty-four years ago, we wanted to create a community magazine with only positive stories in it, to counteract the negativity of newspapers. We wanted to give aspiring writers a chance to see their work in print. Some of our writers have been with us from the beginning (such as Charles Oz Collins), while others continue to discover us today.

We wanted to provide local small businesses with a place they could promote their products and/or services that would be cost effective for them. And we wanted the *Prairie Times* to be commercially viable for us. The early days were far different for us than they are now. I drove a lot of miles servicing clients and visiting prospects. When the fax machine became available, it saved me many long hours on the road. We were among the first to use Microsoft Publisher. Susan had to learn desktop publishing programs, and spent hours reading and screening stories, writing material and putting the *Prairie Times* together to be physically taken to the press for printing. She used a light table to paste the pages onto templates and had to insert photos and graphics manually onto each page with wax. It was some years before we could digitally put the publication together and upload it to the press. Eventually, email replaced the fax machine to gather ad copy from clients.

In those early days, we had to hand-insert flyers and sometimes spent all weekend “stuffing” the magazines, before drop-shipping them to post offices all over the county. I also had to drive to Greeley to deliver our pages, wait around all day while they printed us, hand load thousands of magazines into my van, and drive back in the evening. Even though things are more streamlined now, it still is a big job to prepare thousands of copies of *Prairie Times*

for mailing and delivery.

Like every other small business, there were constant challenges. The dot.com bubble, 9/11/2001, financial crisis of 2008, Covid, etc. all created challenging times for small family businesses—ours and those of our advertisers. There was also constant difficulty finding suitable printing plants whose quality were up to our requirements. Many large web presses have closed down, as some



newspapers shifted to digital, forcing us to get published out of state. But we like to hold the results of our labors in our hands, and give you something to look forward to in your mailbox every month.

When our son JD and daughter Charity were old enough, they pitched right in and helped in every way they could. In the old days, they stuffed in flyers. Now, JD currently still helps with distribution and mailing and working our family ranch. Charity started writing for *Prairie Times* part-time while in High School, screened manuscripts at sixteen, and is now the editor, in charge of layout, manuscripts, editorial work, etc. Susan is the office manager now, in charge of accounts, as well as servicing clients and creating attractive ads. I work as the Publisher whose desk is where “the buck stops,” sell advertising and try to keep our electronic equipment functioning properly.

As Editor, Charity selects well written short stories that touch the heart. Some are funny, others sad, all are clean and reflect the all American country flavor this area has and wants to keep. She’s had 90 year old writers and six year olds and everything in between!

While some of our readers read the *Prairie Times* in one sitting, many take their time reading a story here, a story there and the last story on a coffee break at work. This long shelf life gives our advertisers maximum exposure. Readers tell us they like the attractive, non-intrusive advertisements. There’s nothing popping up or grabbing at you like happens on your phone or computer.

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For the last seven years, the *Prairie Times* has hosted a special feature for our Elbert County readers called The Elbert County Connection. This is provided and paid for by Elbert County Government to keep folks up to date on the doings of the county government. This has proven to be a big hit with many readers, who want a summary of things which might affect them but without a lot of laborious detail or signing up for yet another app.

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Richard B. Whitaker

Dancing & Spin the Bottle!

In 1955, I entered the sixth grade. Although Rock ‘n’ Roll was still in its infancy, that didn’t stop some radio personalities from doing their best to use it to enter the world of television. Al Jarvis, a disc jockey, emceed a weekly dance television show called *Make Believe Ballroom*.

Although I had never tried dancing, when some classmates sent in for tickets to the show, I joined in. While I never expected to receive tickets, a few weeks after mailing my request, two arrived at my home. I now had two problems. One, I didn’t know how to dance. Two, as a shy child, asking a girl to go on television with me would be a major challenge.

I mentioned this to a friend, who said, “The first one is no problem, Rich. Every Saturday morning, they’re giving Bop dance lessons at the Recreation Center for fifty cents a lesson.”

The next Saturday, I rode my bicycle to the center, and gave them my fifty cents. For the next 30 minutes, they taught me how to move my feet back and forth, roll my hips and snap my arms back and forth to the Bill Haley and the Comets hit *Rock Around the Clock*. “It’s just like riding a bicycle,” shouted the dance teacher above the thumping of the music. “Heel, toe, heel, toe, Richard!”

After two lessons, I believed myself not only ready for *Make-Believe Ballroom*, but for the *Lawrence Welk Show*!

After a few sleepless nights, I asked a girl from church to be my dance partner. Diane accepted, and we were both excited about being on live television. On the day of the show, I slipped on my new pair of Black-Snap-Jack Lever Action Rockabilly shoes and my light blue suit. After we picked up Diane, my dad drove us to the studios. As they entered, each couple received a large piece of paper with a number printed



on one side. “Boys, have your partner pin that to your back,” said a member of the staff. “Then take a seat in the bleachers. When the music starts, move to the dance floor and start dancing. We will call each couple forward. If you are eliminated, you will feel a tap on the shoulder. Now go to it and enjoy the show!”

Handing the paper to Diane, I looked at the number: 5 of 7. With a “Lights, camera and action,” we were on the air and on the dance floor!

The first record was *Rock Around the Clock*. Boy, was I rockin’, or so I thought. “Heel, toe,” I whispered. “Heel, toe!” With cameras rolling, we heard, “Couple number five!”

Diane and I bopped our way across the television airwaves into ballroom oblivion. I was ghastly. So bad the guy who won made a point of stopping me after the show and said, “Whitaker, your dancing stinks! You were horrible!”

That ended my dancing career, and I never saw Diane again after that day.

In 1956, a group of friends and I attended a graduation party at the home of a girl named Marlene. Everything went well until someone suggested we play Spin-the-Bottle. Although I had heard of the game, I had never played it, and looked for an escape route. When I found none, I sat on the floor with my legs crossed and waited.

Marlene said, “I will put a Coke bottle on the floor in the middle of the circle and spin it. Whoever it points at when it stops, I must kiss that person! It will then be their turn to spin the bottle and kiss the next player it stops at.”

Uh-oh. Big trouble. I had never kissed a girl other than my mother. For the next fifteen minutes, that bottle spun wildly and stopped at everyone... but me. Whew! Just before the final spin, Marlene’s mother entered to tell us it was time for refreshments and then to dance.

Dance! I don’t dance, I thought. *Just like kissing a girl!* “It’s time to leave,” I mumbled.

Eagerly, I got up and headed for the food. As a new singer named Elvis Presley sang his newest song, *Heartbreak Hotel*, I remembered my television performance on the Al Jarvis show. I quietly slipped out the backdoor and grinning ear-to-ear, I walked home. ♦

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Dutch in the Field

Jean Thompson

Last summer, my husband and I spent nearly every evening on our new screened-in porch. Enjoying cool breezes without swatting and slapping mosquitoes was pure happiness. We moseyed out after dinner, watched the sunset, retired the day's events to the serenity of the mountain vistas, and expressed wonder and gratitude to call this semi-rural area our home.

One night, I asked my husband if he knew what the neighbor across the street was doing in the fenced off section of his yard. I had noticed him there the two previous evenings with the same white utility bucket and shovel. He arrived at dusk, poked around in the dirt and nearly disappeared into the three-foot tall grass. Was he actually digging? From our vantage point, we could not be sure. "I wonder," I thought aloud to my husband, "what could he be doing?"

The next evening, instead of the bucket and shovel, our neighbor had a scythe he swung back and forth over the grass. With his fenced area at least a half-acre, this was a tedious method of mowing the lawn. "Perhaps," I said to my husband, "he is using the scythe because the grass grew too long for his riding mower, but wouldn't he have seen that coming?"

I considered he might have been digging for worms, or conducting an agricultural experiment, or was up to something covert, dastardly, and sinister. His appearance put spark to the question. He sported a long beard and sideburns, but no mustache. I had never heard of any Amish in Colorado, but I had once driven through Pennsylvania Dutch Amish country and he looked just like one of them. "If he is an outcast Amish but still holds their religious beliefs," I pondered to my husband, "perhaps he is restricted to non-motorized lawn care."

The distance from our porch to where our neighbor stood, whom I now referred to as Dutch, was well within wave and howdy range, but he surreptitiously averted his face. Remembering the Amish as friendly, smiling and waving to me as I drove by their farms, my suspicions were newly hatched. "If he is hiding something," I theorized to my husband, "this

archaic tool and Amish facial hair may be mere diversions."

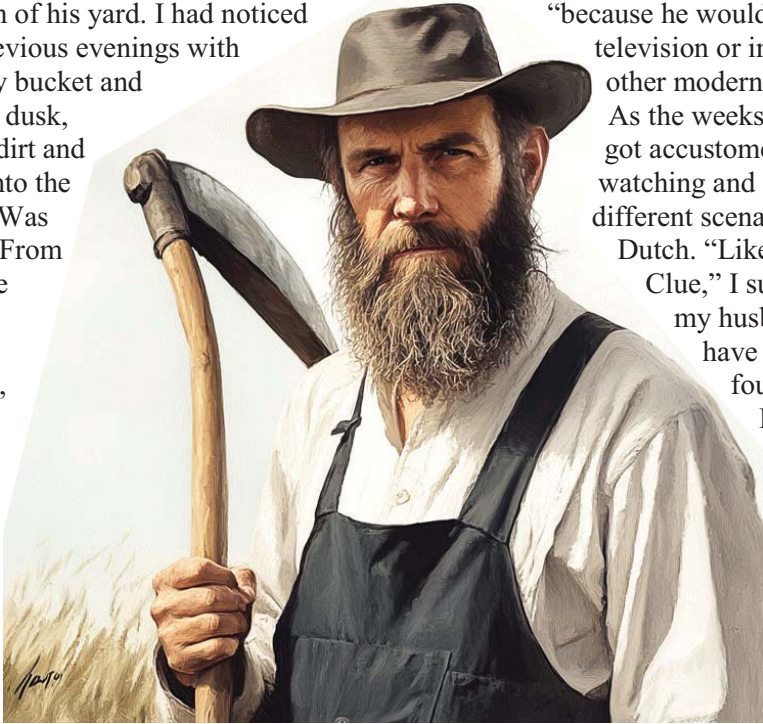
Night after night Dutch appeared at dusk, head down, intently slicing at the grass. Besides mulling over what he was doing, I wondered why he didn't worry about the West Nile Virus. Everything else aside, wasn't he being bitten profusely? "If he is unaware of West Nile, this may prove his Amish authenticity," I deduced to my husband,

"because he would not have a television or interact with other modern day media."

As the weeks went by, we got accustomed to watching and creating different scenarios about Dutch. "Like the game of Clue," I surmised to my husband, "we have three of the four pieces: a Dutch

Amish, in the field, with a scythe. But what is he doing?" The next Saturday afternoon,

Dutch went out into the field in broad daylight. I signaled to my husband, whereby he turned from our garden and walked over to Dutch's fence. I nervously watched from the porch, cordless phone in hand, index finger on the "9" of 911, prepared to alert the authorities at the first sign of any untoward movement. They were chatting, Dutch pointed at the grass, heads nodded and my husband returned unscythed, unharmed, smiling. "There is no three-leaf greenery growing deep within the grass," my husband related, "no



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secret tunnel, no worms for fishing, no agricultural experiments and no pieces of dead bodies poking up from the soil. Dutch is making hay for his horse from the organic soil he lovingly nurtured in this field since last year. He said nothing could beat the nutritional value. Dutch uses a scythe because it allows him to cut long lengths of grass from small areas a little at a time, proclaiming that it is kinder for the earth and easier to dry."

Dutch was not a Pennsylvania Amish in our game of *Clue* after all. He was a hippie, in the field, with the scythe, making organic hay for his horse. ♦

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THE WEST OF YESTER-YEAR

Rachel Kovaciny

Did They Really Drink Sarsaparilla?

All my life, I have enjoyed trying new foods based on the books I read and the movies I watch. If fictional characters make or enjoyed a specific food or drink I've never tasted, I get a hankering to try it for myself. For years, I wanted to try steak and kidney pie thanks to the pilot episode of *Five Mile Creek* (1983-1985). A story in *Highlights* magazine made me yearn to try artichokes. The Baby-Sitters Club books convinced me bagels with cream

cheese and lox would be amazing. A casual mention of celery root in the 1996 Gwyneth Paltrow version of *Emma* had me curious about what it tasted like. And you can guess what I wanted to

try because my family loved *The Apple Dumpling Gang* (1975).

Unfortunately for me, my parents were not adventurous eaters, and some of those things weren't available in the rural Michigan of my childhood. No matter how much I wanted to try steak and kidney pie, artichokes, bagels with cream cheese and lox, and celery root, it was no use. And as for apple dumplings, the closest I ever got was apple pie, which is delicious, but I knew it wasn't quite the same.

But there's one exception to my childhood food-related disappointments: sarsaparilla. I first heard of sarsaparilla in *Davy Crockett and the River Pirates* (1956).

Notorious riverboat captain and brawler Mike Fink (Jeff York) is forced to forgo his usual whiskey order at a bar while traveling incognito, and instead has to order sarsaparilla, at the insistence

of Davy Crockett (Fess Parker). My childhood mind decided sarsaparilla sounded like the fanciest drink you could ever order on the frontier, something so special and delicious it could even please a mean and cranky coot like Mike Fink. When it got mentioned in the John Wayne western *The Searchers* (1956), I was even more eager to try it.

Wonder of wonders, my dad bought me a bottle of sarsaparilla at a convenience store



as a special treat while on vacation one summer. Did it disappoint me that it tasted like root beer? Not a bit! I like root beer, and it was different enough it felt new, exotic, and old-fashioned all at the same time.

Just what is sarsaparilla, though? And did cowboys and riverboat captains really drink it?

Sarsaparilla is a non-alcoholic drink that originated in South America as far back as the early 1500s. This sweet and refreshing beverage was originally brewed from a vine called sarsaparilla (a relative of the lily). In the 1700s, it gained popularity in the United States as an alternative to beer and whiskey. In the 1800s, druggists used it as a major ingredient in patent

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During the classic Cowboy Era of 1865-1885, many saloons, bars, and restaurants served bottled sarsaparilla all across the United States. But it probably wasn't as widely enjoyed in the Old West as popular culture has led us to believe. Thanks to the fiction of Zane Grey and Louis L'Amour, and to movies like *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), we now equate the drink with thirsty young cowboys and temperance-conscious

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schoolmarms. Advertising and personal accounts from the frontier prove they had sarsaparilla as an alternative to alcohol and as medicine, but it may

have been consumed more for its medicinal effects than anything else.

In the United States, sarsaparilla is made from birch oil and dried sassafras tree roots, since both were easier to get in the 1700/1800s than the vine, which had to be imported from Central or South America. Flavors like vanilla, licorice, and wintergreen were added, whether it's brewed from the sarsaparilla vine or birch oil and sassafras. Carbonation was traditionally achieved by allowing the drink to ferment or by adding carbon dioxide gas or carbonated water.

You can still buy bottled sarsaparilla! I am partial to the Sioux City brand, because my family hails from the area. Also, it's the brand I first tried all those summers ago. If you enjoy root beer, birch beer, or ginger ale, you might like sarsaparilla too.

Although I'd only recommend steak and kidney pie to people who enjoy organ meat, I'm happy to report that artichokes, celery root, bagels with cream cheese and lox, and apple dumplings are all delightful. ♦

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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 few vehicle lights that moved along the road in the distance had no impact on our home. When the sun went to bed, we went indoors and stayed.

Darkness surrounded the house like a thick blanket thrown over a candle to smother the light.

We were far away from the nearby town, and their few street night lights didn't reach us. The immense density of darkness that settled on the place covered every line of the farm structures including the barn, water troughs, pump house, cellar roof, trees, fences, cows, dog, pigpens, chicken house, tractor and its attachments. All the farm animals were quiet. Our eyes couldn't penetrate it, and our hands were invisible. No luminescent eyes stared at us through the night.

However, we had wild lights from the lightning bugs which arrived at dusk while we sat on the back porch. They were little pinpoints of light flitting through the air over our heads and around us. Sometimes, we lingered a little longer just to enjoy them. If

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so, they made a brief landing on us and flew away. We enjoyed their nightlight dances. But too soon, they went on their way.

While we enjoyed the lightning bug show, mosquitoes buzzed, bit, tickled our ears, and chased us into the house to find relief. They got some of our blood and left us with itchy bumps on our arms, legs, necks, faces, and backs. In a few days, our bodies absorbed and neutralized the impact of the bite toxins.

On cloudless nights, we looked up and saw the pinpoint lights of the stars. They covered every inch

of the sky as far as we could see.

Our sky search found the big and little dippers, 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 if necessary. The barn had lights, but once turned off, Dad used a flashlight to find the path home.

The darkness ushered in a stillness except for the night hunters, whose survival depended on their skills. Dusk began with various inaudible sounds from the animals, insects, and birds.

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

Once indoors, we read for pleasure if we were done with homework, sewed, and assembled interlocking 500-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.

When we turned off the lights and went to bed, the darkness oozed into every floorboard. We had no night lights or flashlights and didn't talk as we felt our way up the stairs, the four boys to their room and the three girls to ours. In the darkness, we undressed from our day clothes, put them in the dirty clothes basket, and dressed in pajamas. We burrowed under

Berene H. Ingram

the covers in the winter or under the sheets in hot weather. Curled up in bed, we heard the house as it settled along with us for the night. It creaked, popped, and groaned as the wood cooled. The boards in the walls had dried out and adjusted as the daytime heat increased. The roof received the most impact of the day's heat. We also heard the sounds of life as it awakened

within the walls and moved around for their night hunting journeys. On the edge of our sleep, we heard

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Dad and Mom walk up the steps into their room. We didn't see a flashlight mark their journey to bed, but we he carried one for emergencies. Their bed creaked as they settled onto it, and their whispers melted into the night.

Once we were safe in our beds, we soon slipped away into fantastical dreams. ♦

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Decorating & Beauty for the Beginner

Abby
D. Jones

Decorating is one thing we look forward to when setting up our new home. I know I did. There is a thrill in creating the look and feel of your own little space. It's something many of us "old hats" still love.

It isn't a waste of time, but an important part of our work as a homemaker. It is vital to the mental and emotional well-being of our people to take the time to create a cozy nest. How we decorate directly affects our attitudes, our husband's sense of calm and welcome, and our children's sense of beauty. God doesn't consider beauty a waste and neither should we. Beauty, like a hot cup of tea, is one of those helpful attitude-assistants. Many women find vast wells of motivation in beauty. It drives us to learn new skills, be creative and frugal, save our pennies, and clean. Don't miss out on this blessing we can employ in our homes.

Now some advice, in no particular order:

Aesthetics: It's popular right now to claim your aesthetics, to find your label. Like... cottagecore, grannycore, goblincore, whimsigoth, farmhouse, rustic French country, and more. This can be

helpful. Finding a look or a style provides boundaries, goals, or unity. It keeps your home from turning into a mad-hatter of a mess. I've used them for years to train my eye and keep me from buying all the things. I can acknowledge something's beauty without having to have it, because I know it won't blend with my existing style. Just be careful, because you can lean so hard into an aesthetic that your home will look like a showroom floor display instead of a place where real people live. If you don't have a clue what your aesthetic is, don't worry about it.

Color Palettes: Another helpful boundary is to choose a color palette. Pick a handful of neutrals, add some contrasting pops of color, and stick with it. This gives you cohesion and helps you select paints or fabrics. If you're not sure about this, get on Pinterest and search for color palettes and find neutrals paired with pops of color. Pick one you like and start there. Make sure you pay attention to the lighting in your home. If you have a lot of natural light,

you can play with much darker color schemes. If you don't, be prudent with moody tones or you will make a cave instead of a nest.

Decorating Books: Beg, borrow, and steal (especially from your sisters) decorating books, and feast on the pictures. Read them, yes. Some of my greatest homemaking inspirations come from decorating books, but for sure, look at the pictures. Notice what grabs you and what doesn't, but start by filling every corner of your mind with beauty. When you saturate yourself with beautiful images, you will start naturally tweaking things in your home in that direction. The more I look at Tasha Tudor-styled gardens, the more I'm figuring out how to create that look even in the higher temps of the West. The more English Cottage images I take in, the more I develop that look and feel in my home.

Seasonal: Some of us are seasonally driven. I find it helpful for my attitude if I

acknowledge the seasons. It gives me a chance to refresh my home every quarter and keep my toes rooted in nature. This isn't a total overhaul of my home, but a few decorative pillows and throws. It is also felt in changed bedding, changed meal planning, and foraging outside for things to bring in. Different seasons may get more acknowledgment (looking at you Autumn and Christmas) and others less (let's not talk about Summer), but seasonal decorating is fun and useful for keeping our homes from stagnating. It is something you can layer on over time. Maybe this year all you can afford is one Christmas throw pillow. Add another next year. Keep going. Learn to bring the outside in. This doesn't have to be and shouldn't be budget-busting. Also, think about storage. I love changing pillow covers because they store so easily, but I also have a throw problem, and they take up a little more space. Limited storage can be a blessing if you let it.

Changing Your Vibe: We women are often accused of changing our minds too easily, but this is an area where we can do that as long as we do it right. When I started homemaking, I was a strange mix of fairy tale, gothic, and Moroccan-Western. It was too much and crazy. It was unsettling to my husband and out of control. I

had no clue what I was doing. I just did what I wanted. After struggling through a lot of woes, I moved into a Rustic Modern look. This toned things down and brought cohesion. Health issues pushed me into a Minimalist world. I'm so thankful I found Myquillyn Smith and her wonderful books, *Cozy Minimalist Home* and

Welcome Home. I learned so much from her about creating a cozy environment. Now, I'm a Minimalist English Cottage / Western gal. I love the patterns, the flowers, and the relaxed comfort. You can change your mind when you are decorating, and will, because something is not serving you anymore. That is a good thing.

The world of home decorating is massive. We can spend a lifetime in that space. It is valuable and good. But caution is necessary.

Many a woman has brought financial ruin to her home by making decorating the most important thing in her world. Most new homemakers aren't wealthy. Start small. Dream without discontent. Use those dreams to drive you to frugal creativity. Thrift. Pick up things on the curb. Swap with people. Learn how to do it yourself.

We often get trapped in feeling our homes have to be perfect or we're doing it wrong. Go get *Perfect English*

Cottage by Ros Byam Shaw. Listen to her talk about rooms needing to be a bit rumpled and ugly to be comfortable and take a breath.

Decorating is an important part of home-making, but it is not the only part. Keep it where it needs to be on the priority list. Make wise choices. Don't make a white room your

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goal if you want to have lots of kids. Don't buy things no one can touch. Don't put in flooring that isn't good for animals if you want a zoo. You're decorating for *your* life, *your* family, and *your* loves, not mine or someone else's. This isn't a competition to see who is the most immaculate and trendy, but an area to practice prudence, temperance, justice, and courage. (Are you beginning to see that beauty isn't shallow and self-focused?)

Decorating is such a wonder! Ponder on how delightful the customizable-ness of homemaking is! The diversity of tastes! You are not wrong in your excitement at decorating your new home. Go for it, dear ladies! Set up that nest, cozy that space, and create beauty. This is who we are and what we do. ♦

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Passing the Rod

Cliff Smith

George Morgan gently flipped the fly rod. He hadn't enough room in his bedroom to really test it, but his wrist and fingers told him he sent out the perfect cast, a symphony in bamboo. "You were made to be used," he whispered, "and to think I can't take you..." Suddenly, with eyes glowing, George moved to the telephone. He had been "resting" for two months after a heart attack. While improving steadily, two weeks ago, when he began making plans to open the Missouri trout season, George received an emotional body blow. The doctor told him no more fishing. George's optimism evaporated.

After his telephone call, George's eyes became more alert, his appetite improved, he slept better, and Doc okayed moderate activity. Mrs. Morgan rejoiced. She would have been alarmed had she discovered the bag packed with fishing clothes stashed in the car trunk along with his gear.

Tuesday evening, after family dinner, George dropped his bombshell as his son and his wife were leaving. "John, I'll be by for you at 4."

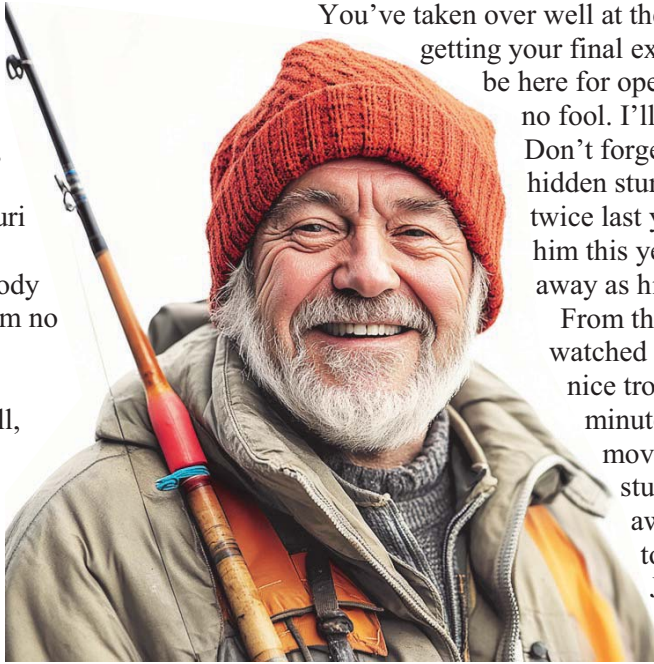
"For what?" gasped John.

"I've opened the trout season for 24 years and I'm making it 25 tomorrow," he stated calmly. No amount of pleading or arguing from

anyone could swerve him. The next day, George directed John to a parking spot near his favorite fishing hole. Standing by the car, he tied on a fly and whipped the rod gently. "Son, it's perfect. Here, go catch me a fish," and he extended the rod. John stared unbelievably. "Son, I've tried to make a businessman and a fisherman of you. You've taken over well at the store, but you're getting your final exam today. I had to be here for opening day, but I'm no fool. I'll watch from the car. Don't forget Jumbo by that hidden stump. Since I lost him twice last year, I swore I'd get him this year." George turned away as his voice choked.

From the car, George watched as John took two nice trout in the next 45 minutes. After John moved over toward the stump but backed away, George called to him to go for Jumbo. His son put his finger to his lips. After an hour, another fisherman approached.

George fumed. "Why hasn't John tried my spot?" He saw his son say something to the man, who glanced at the car, smiled, and moved off. A few minutes later, John crept close to the stump, then motioned for his father to join him. As George reached his side, John flipped the fly expertly. As it settled, he handed the rod to his father. "Take him Dad. Jumbo is yours. Don't get too excited and it won't hurt you."



Keep Cool

Beth Kiteley

Back in the old days, they didn't have refrigerators. Some people reading this may have seen or used an ice-box. Delivery men carried in blocks of ice with huge, wicked-looking tongs. Unlike my friends, I was never brave enough to sneak bits of ice from the truck while he was out of sight.

Iceboxes made of oak had two doors, one above the other. The top one held the ice, and if it had room, a milk bottle. The food in the lower compartment kept cool enough to be safe, but not what I'd call cold. Refrigerators gradually replaced ice-boxes, and the latter now turn up as collector's items or novelty furniture in "country style" decorating. The term "ice-box" has lingered on; many of us still call our refrigerators by that name.

I knew about iceboxes and refrigerators from being at friends' houses, or going with Mother to homes where she worked. Deep in the depression, we didn't have an icebox until I turned twelve. In the summer, we filled a shallow pan with water and set it in the north window. Milk, butter, and anything else that might spoil, we wrapped in wet dishtowels and left in the pan. Eating leftovers at the next meal kept things from spoiling, but I never liked milk until I tasted it ice cold from a refrigerator.

Refrigerators could serve various purposes.

In Colorado, as a young farm couple just starting out, with no money for anything fancy, often camped out in a beet shack. The tiny house was an un-insulated two-room building provided for migrant sugar beet workers to use for a week or two while they worked the fields. Furnishings included a wood-burning stove and an old refrigerator, one with coils on top. That refrigerator kept nothing super cold, but came in handy when they had to stay longer than planned into the winter. The stove would not hold a fire overnight, and nights were so cold they put whatever they didn't want frozen into the refrigerator for safekeeping.

At home, my sister tried to use our new refrigerator in a way we all teased her forever after about. She took the sheets off her bed and went out onto the glassed-in porch, where the new refrigerator sat next to the Thor wringer

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George waited long enough to set the hook, and was hardly ready when the fish took the bait. Ten minutes later, he brought in Jumbo, a 4 pound 9 ounce rainbow trout. "Son, you pass the test," George said with tears streaming down his face. "It's unbelievable you could time old Jumbo to leap at one cast. I'm convinced you youngsters can run things as well as—and sometimes better than—us oldsters."

George and John stayed two days longer and John got his limit for both days. George sat by the lodge fireplace, retelling how John had left Jumbo to him, making just one cast to hook him; proclaiming, "Letting our young folks take charge of things is just dandy!" ♦

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washing machine. She opened the refrigerator and stood there with a bundle of sheets in her arms for a couple of minutes before deciding she had really meant to put them in the washer.

My kitchen now sports a new "ice-box," a tall freezer-on-the-bottom model I dearly love. Some people get nostalgic for the olden days, but as far as iceboxes go, I'm glad we're out of that era. I don't have to remember to put the sign out for the delivery man, empty a pan regularly, or mop up melted ice water when I forget. I don't have to chip ice from the block for my tea. Just open the freezer door and grab a handful of cubes. Now if I can just learn not to drop one on the floor every time! ♦

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Bill Rupert

Freedom is Never Free

I wonder how many of our children could tell us how many signers there were to the Declaration of Independence? How many could tell us anything about any of them? I sincerely doubt even the teachers charged with the responsibility of teaching that segment of US History will do more than gloss over the signing.

Have you ever wondered what happened to the 56 men who signed the Declaration? Five were captured by the British as traitors, tortured, and put to death. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost sons who served in the Revolutionary Army. Another had two sons captured. Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the war. They pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor to give us the freedoms we enjoy today.

What kind of men were they? Twenty-four were lawyers and jurists. Eleven were merchants. Nine were farmers and plantation owners. All were men of means and well educated, but they signed the Declaration of Independence knowing the penalty would be death if they were captured.

Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships swept from the seas by the British Navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts and died in rags.

Thomas McKean was so hounded by the

British that he moved his family constantly. He served in the Congress without pay and kept his family in hiding. His possessions were taken and poverty became his reward.

Vandals and British soldiers looted the properties of Ellery, Hall, Clymer, Walton, Gwinnet, Heyward, Rutledge and Middleton.

At the battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson Jr. noted that the British Gen. Cornwallis had taken over the Nelson home for his headquarters. He quietly urged Gen.

Washington to open fire. The home was destroyed and Nelson died bankrupt.

The British destroyed the home of Francis Lewis. They jailed his wife, and she died within a few months.

John Hart was driven from the bedside of his dying wife. Their thirteen children fled for their lives. His fields and grist mill were laid to waste. For more than a year, he lived in forests or caves, returning home to find his wife dead and his children gone. He died shortly thereafter, heartbroken.

Morris and Livingston suffered similar fates.

Such were the stories and sacrifices of the American Revolution. These were not wild-eyed, rabble-

rousing hoodlums, but soft-spoken men of means and education. They had security, but they valued liberty more. They gave us a free and independent America.

The history books never tell us much of what happened in the Revolutionary War. We were British subjects and fought against our own government in an act of treason that shaped the world.

In my conversations with the youth of today, I don't sense a knowledge of, or a feel for, the honor and traditions of the time. I don't get the impression that the values of our forefathers are being passed on to our young. Too often, I get the sense we take our liberty for granted. American Legion Posts all over the country will conduct essay writing contests about this time of year, looking for middle school and high school students who can tell us something about the Declaration of Independence. I hope a whole batch of them prove me wrong.

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While you are enjoying the festivities of the day on July 4th, take a few minutes and silently thank the patriots for their heroic contributions. It is not too much to ask for the price they paid. Freedom is never free. ♦

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This space paid for by Elizabeth School.

Troy Seate

Gentle Hands

In my hands no more to hold tenderly. Into your hands to hold with tenderness.

It was a sentiment from an earlier century crafted on the face of ancient stone. I rubbed my hand over its aged surface, worn away from years of exposure to the elements.

The only way I deciphered the complete message was by using my fingers to feel the letters. The person to which the words were dedicated had lived a mere twenty-four years, from 1850 to 1874. The raised letters proclaimed **Mary Vernon Cowan.** Beloved daughter of John and Martha.

What had taken Mary at a tender age? My first guess was childbirth, but the stone omitted a husband. The number of small tombstones topped by sleeping lambs stood as testament to the premature death sadly common in earlier times. I explored to see if one of the small stones bore the name of Cowan. None existed. Mary had the surrounding area to herself.

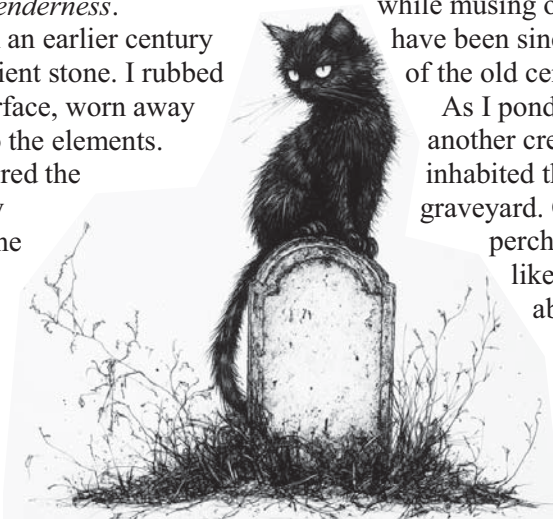
What drew me to Mary Cowan? Why had I picked her resting place to pause and reflect?

Was it the gentle, carved hands in repose below the poetic affirmation? No. Something I couldn't quite put my finger on. I spotted a nest of wildflowers and plucked one. "For you, Mary," I said, laying it at the base of her stone while musing over how long it might have been since this untended section of the old cemetery had seen a guest.

As I pondered Mary's demise, another creature stirred. Cats inhabited this section of the quiet graveyard. One caught my eye, perched upon a nearby stone like a sentinel. The gray fur about the muzzle and heavy lion-like coat cast him as the band's patriarch. This place belonged to the clan of felines as much as to the remains of the departed, which brought me back to Mary, who rested beneath my feet.

The notes of an old tune from my youth called *Wayfaring Stranger* floated unbidden into my mind. It reminded me of lost souls returning home. Sweeter than any grief, the last note covered over us—me, the cats, and the restful residents like a veil of gossamer.

These sites, sounds, and emotions led me to the county seat for research. I perused the records of residents in the area and found Mary in a small newspaper clipping obituary. It read:



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Mary Vernon Cowan, a county resident for all of her twenty-four years, passed from this life on May 24th of 1874. Although unmarried and childless, Mary lived a full, if short, life. She took great pleasure in rescuing unwanted animals, especially cats. Referred to as the "cat lady" by many, Mary was highly thought of in the community. It was with loving hands and a warm heart she labored. May her gentle nature be of service in the hands of our Lord.

Here was my answer to the hands and the cats. It seems the ancestors of long departed felines have made a tradition of honoring the "cat lady" and now serve as her earthly shepherd. At least, that's what I choose to believe. Being an animal activist myself, I thought about how ironic my attachment to Mary's resting place had proven to be. ♦

Katelynne G. Good

Wildfire

He came to the ranch on a rare wet and humid summer day. I had been dawdling my time away. All my friends had left for vacation, leaving me with nothing to do except chores. On an especially muggy afternoon, our rusty, dinged-up farm truck came rolling down the driveway with a horse trailer in tow and parked in front of the house. The driver-side door swung open and my mother stepped out, waving me over.

"I know I said I was only running errands, but I saw an auction going on and I couldn't help myself," she said as she led me to the back of the trailer. "When I saw him, I fell in love at first sight."

I audibly gasped when she opened the door. Inside wasn't just a horse but a fierce-looking thing that seemed to have fire spouting out of his mouth. He was

a smaller palomino with large patches of white splashed over his top line. His face was golden, except for a white swirl on his forehead. He had a light blue eye that conveyed both intelligence and excitement. He was a charmer, looks wise, but had

the personality of a mean old cat. Getting him unloaded made me question how he had gotten into the trailer. He bucked and ran whenever anyone tried to get near him. He was a younger horse, I'd wager three or four years old, and most likely had never interacted with a human before the auction. Mom and I worked together to corral him into an empty stall. He got only the finest hay and the coolest water.

"So, Mom, what are you going to name him?" I watched the palomino nibble on his grass defiantly.

"I was thinking you could train him and call him whatever you want. He's yours."

I looked up in surprise. I had only worked with cattle and broke horses. "Is that a good idea?" I asked.

Mom laughed, shaking her head. "Probably not, but it'll get you out of your comfort zone."

I took a minute to think of names when the perfect one struck me. "Let's call him Wildfire. Cause he's absolutely crazy and came here without warning."

Mom gently turned her head to look at the horse, who was now violently scratching at his bedding. "I think that suits him perfectly."

He kept me busy for the summer.

An extra stall to muck out every

day, an extra head to feed, and a horse who was his own master to train. I found a couple of horse magazines and books to reference while working with Wildfire. They recommend

starting by getting him used to my presence. I talked his ears off about my day and sat with him in the evenings. It was a long, slow process.

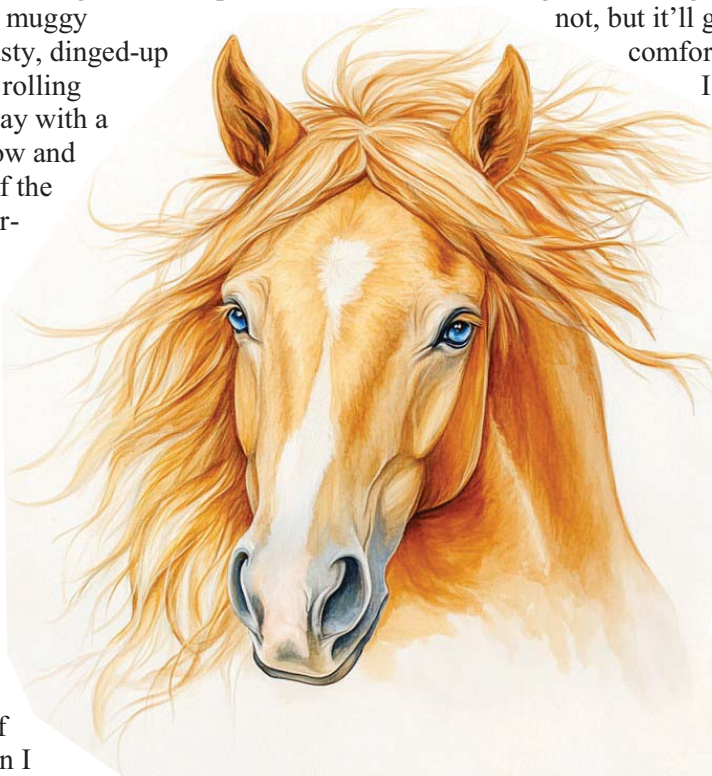
One day, my work paid off. Wildfire let me touch him. His coat was soft and smooth. I outlined the white lines of his back with my hands. I swiftly ran and grabbed a dandy brush; bringing it near his face. He lowered his

muzzle to smell the brush, let out a deep sigh, and nibbled on the bristles. I slowly brushed his chest floor. Then the side of his barrel. His skin flinched, but his ears were upright and curious, so I continued to groom him.

It took a lot longer to teach him everything a horse should know, like how to trailer, saddle up, and be ridden. Some days he would do everything I told him, and others it would feel like starting over. When I rode him for the first

time, it scared me senseless, but I could tell he trusted me. Wildfire became my best and closest friend. We were inseparable, kindred spirits, two peas in a pod, etc.

It was Wildfire and me until the end of time. ♦



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June Domes

poor little Dandelions

I've always wondered why folks don't like dandelions, and who came up with the idea they were a bad flower? After-all, yellow is a bright, feel-good color, much like sunshine. Dandelions are a sure sign of spring and sustenance for the first butterflies, who also bring us a certain happiness.

My sister, who is meticulous in every endeavor, immediately gave me her undaunted opinion about dandelions: "I love my plush, green grass, work hard to keep it that way, and don't want little, round, yellow polka dots in its midst!"

I retorted, "Don't you remember, when we were kids, how we would make bracelets out of them and dangle one under someone's chin to see if they were in love, or just turning to butter?"

"Kid's stuff," she said, "and no one cared about their lawns then, anyway!"

I try to protect my stance by reminding her of how the first women to travel the hard road west were ever so grateful to see any kind of flower in this then harsh environment, and there stood the ever faithful dandelion, with its bright, yellow face to greet them. I've heard of cooking dandelion greens and of brewing dandelion wine. I've never had either, but it seems the dandelion has many uses. I realize I won't get much credence with my stance or a pat on the back, but I still like the poor little dandelions. ♦



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Janeen Jackson

FENCING WITH A BLONDE

His face went red. It looked like he'd either explode or cry; I wasn't sure which, but tried hard to keep from laughing. He had handed me a staple and, pointing to a spot on the wire, told me to get with it. I did what he said, you know! I drew back that hammer, aimed and hit with all my might. My new bridegroom let out a yell of pain and danced in circles while holding his knee, his face a shade somewhere between red and purple. How could I have hit him? His knee had been a *mile* away from where I aimed. I felt sure of that. But in a conciliatory tone, I asked if he was ok and told him I was sorry. I had a terrible time hiding my laughter. I don't think I fooled him, and I wondered if he would give me a good scolding. I got off easy this time though; I guess because he realized he married a city girl and bought himself a job in educating her about country ways.

We weren't living on a ranch then, just a mini one we purchased the first year we were married. Actually, we bought a sandy piece of bare land little better than a mesquite patch. Imagine getting land near a scenic creek for \$100 down and \$40 a month? Mind, this was almost sixty years ago, and the down payment took three of our weekly paychecks. As an apprentice electrician, Jimmy took home \$35 a week, so we ate lean for a month to buy our nest. Our little chunk of paradise cost us a pretty penny as the most expensive land in the area, but Jimmy saw the finished product in his mind's eye, and knew it would increase in value, so we jumped into deep waters.

It didn't happen overnight; by inches, our efforts wrought wonders and turned our sticker patch into a lovely showplace. With a lot of hard work, it took shape and became a stepping stone to owning our dream; our Bar J3 Ranch in Montana. It is amazing how a raw beginning can nurture a dream and make it happen.

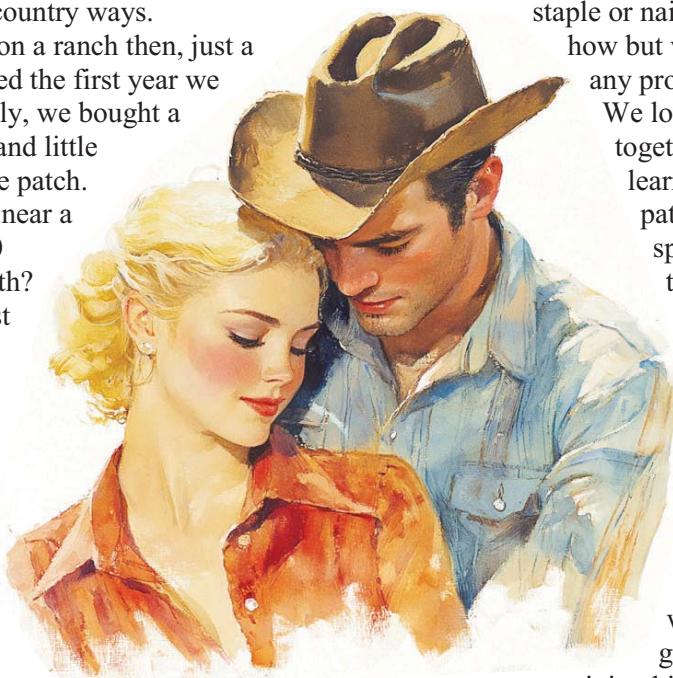
The fencing came first because we lived near open range ranches. The Hereford bulls

loved to "play" in our front yard and were rough with everything; sometimes what we built one day had to be rebuilt the next. We had very few tools, since we couldn't afford them, so Jimmy put a lot of muscle into the job and used what he had on hand.

Only seventeen and a city girl when Jimmy married me, when it came to using a hammer and driving a staple or nail, I did not know how but was game. I tackled any project alongside him. We loved working together, and I enjoyed learning new things. A patient man, Jimmy spent a lot of time teaching me the ropes. He made an extremely good teacher. Here we were building a fence. He used his hand tools to stretch the woven wire and attach them to wooden posts and gave me jobs like

giving him tools, staples, etc. that saved him needless trips and extra steps. Then Jimmy called me over and gave me his hammer, telling me he would stretch the wire and get it tight. He wanted me to drive the staple in to hold it in place. He started it where he wanted it, placed his knee on the bottom of the post and got the wire taught. He nodded at the staple and said, "Just drive it into the post!" Simple! That's when I left the imprint of the hammer in his knee.

When you have a ranch, one of the major chores is to work fences in the spring. If you live in the pines as we do and have elk and deer, this project continues year around. Trees fall across fences; elk and deer twist wires or tear down sections of fence. Most ranches have old barbed wire fences that snap easily when a herd of elk hit them running. As long as you have cattle in your pastures, you will ride and work fences. I love it. It is a quiet time, with the smell of pungent pine tickling your





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senses. Red squirrels chatter and wild turkey gobblers call to the hens. Birds sing. It gives you a large dose of spring fever. I love working fences; it is a "come alive" time after winter dormancy.

Jimmy never let me forget our first time building fence. Every time he got a chance to share this story with someone, he did. If he had to take it on the knee, I had to take it on the

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chin for the rest of our life together. We shared a grin or two every year when we worked fence after that, especially if he gave me the hammer and a staple and held the fence stretched and ready. I saw him as pretty brave to try that method again, but he did. He always cautioned me before I wielded the blow... "hit the staple will you, not the knee!" With a wicked grin, I grabbed the hammer and went after the job. Once I got the staple set in place where he wanted it, I heard an audible sigh of relief escape him.

I am sure of it, even though he would never admit it to me or to himself. ♦

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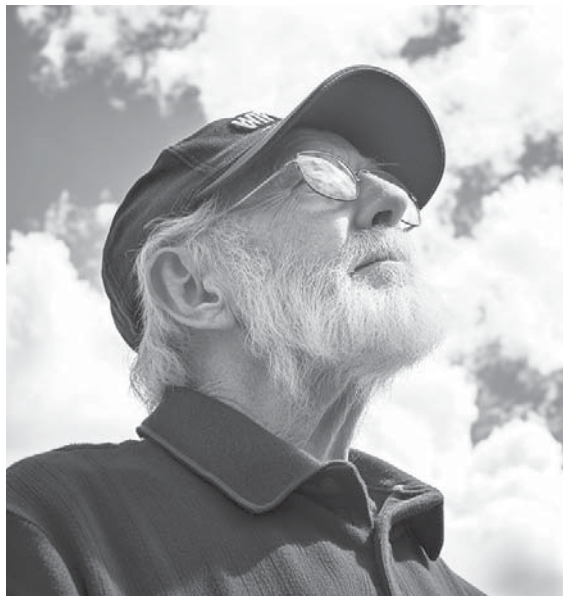
Don Boyer

OLD MEN CAN'T HAVE DREAMS

A sky as blue as a baby's eyes towered above him. Billowy white clouds encroached on its edges. The blazing white-yellow summer sun almost blinded his eyes. A perfect day for daydreaming. But as an old man, he figured he had no time for that nonsense.

In his youth, he often stretched himself across a grassy hill to watch a sky like this one and imagined the grand adventures he would embark on, the mountains he would climb, jungles to hike, oceans to sail. He intended to be someone important.

The memory brought back the pain of a life a lot less dramatic, and



less successful. A life of one difficult thing after another. One barrier to cross, one trap to avoid, one mistake to recover from. He was old and his memory long. He could remember all the faults and pain. Disappointments, like when he couldn't become a pilot with his poor eyesight. An education he couldn't afford. Long hours. Impossible tasks at work. Lost opportunities. But he could also remember the good things. A wife and family, successes and recoveries, friends and good times. Life had been full,

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but nowhere near the dreams of his youth. His dreams became smaller, less ambitious as he grew into middle age.

Now nearing the end of his life, he tallied his life to a mental scorecard. He had no time left to dream. Many of his friends were gone. He had no more work to do. Little left he wanted to try. Only things he *had* to do, necessities of his life. No, old men can't have dreams.

Then he looked back at the sky and the unusual cloud formations. Without thinking about it, he laid down on the grassy hill and shaded his eyes from the sun to examine the clouds. They were being pushed by whimsical breezes and ever changing. On the edge of one cloud, a tiger emerged. He aimed his finger and pretended a shot. On top of another, a sailboat appeared. He imagined himself at the helm, steering the craft across the choppy foam. An errant breeze whipped a loop out of a cloud's edge and he imagined leaping through it, his heart pounding. Animals appeared and disappeared. Rabbits and giraffes, horses and sheep. Faces came and went. At one point a Greek god showed his face for a second with a flowing beard and hair and hints of a toga on his shoulder.

The old man stayed on that hill for an hour, pondering the images overhead. As he got up, he checked his pants for grass stains and returned to the real world, but he felt refreshed.

His adventures were not over, he realized. There are many more ahead. New friends if he wanted them. New tasks if he cared to take them on. Old relationships to strengthen. New dreams to fulfill.

He walked home at a faster gait than when he came. ♦

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In the Tall Grass

We had a good rain the other day. It smells real good after a soaker, but with one thing and another, fixin' fence and jawin' with all my neighbors, I neglected to notice the darn weeds and grass shot up about six inches in three days until my wife pointed it out to me. Then, as I hauled around the hand mower and cussed cuz I couldn't see what was lyin' in wait in the tall grass, it gave me a bit of time for introspectin'.

Now, most of us are just livin' our lives and doin' what's best for ourselves and our kin, but we may not notice the weeds gettin' out of hand until it becomes a problem. Like a young friend of mine, named Jed, when we were kids. We grew up on the same patch of land, with a fence in-between, in the days you could walk half a mile to a county schoolhouse.

Jed had a heart of gold, but one summer, he started lyin' out of nowhere. It began small. *No, I didn't throw that rock. Yup, I saw a coyote on my way in this mornin'.* Sure, I'll do that chore for you, Preacher. Big mouth, not much follow-through. And it got to where he'd forget which lie he told to what person.

At first, nobody thought much of it.

We'd laugh and say "Ah, that's just Jed, goin' through a phase." And for awhile, that's all it was, a phase. But then it became a habit.

And as anyone who has ever tried to kick a bad habit knows, habits can be hard to break.

Before Jed and the rest of us knew it, he'd lie about any and everythin', sometimes right to

your face with the truth standin' next to ya. Once, he pulled into a parking square crooked and I remarked on it. Face as stoic as a dead man, he insisted he parked straight.

Even after I pointed out the lines, he still doubled down on the lie. Jed had forgotten how to tell the truth.

You may not think lyin' is a big deal, until you start doin' it on your taxes, and that's when he got into a lick of trouble.

But it makes a man think.

If I had been payin' attention, for a couple of days after that rain, it would have been real easy to yank those weeds out by the roots. Ten minutes of work, tops. I waited until they got stuck down, taller than is easy to mow, and were thick enough around to make me sweat.

There may be weeds in your life, or startin' in the lives of somebody you know, that you'd be wise to pull up afore they get too tough. A kid lyin'. Not bein' real honest when you talk to your pastor. Drinkin' too much ("just one more beer, it'll be fine"). Encouragin' attention from someone you're attracted to, but not married to. Holdin' on to anger rather than

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learnin' to let it go. Nurturin' hate for a neighbor instead of prayin' for 'em. Usin' bad words more often or lookin' at stuff you shouldn't. Or maybe it ain't soul-related, but is somethin' you need to take care of that you ain't. Maybe you need to mow that patch, pull up them weeds, or write an apology. Maybe it's time to bury the hatchet (not in somebody), or let go of your anger, or spend time readin' wise words, or just take a walk every night before bed.

Because, we never stay the same. We're all growin' in some direction, and it's either good or bad, strong and tall or twisted and gnarled. Our bad habits might go steady for a long time, and get a little bit taller every day, or they may shoot up after a rain. But it sure is a lot harder to deal with weeds and thistles when they're four feet tall and full of stickers than when they are a quarter of an inch tall and in soft ground.

Bless you. ♦

A Hand's Imprint

When I think of the many amazing things my grandmothers did, a lot of my memories involve their hands. It's true. You can tell a lot about a person by their hands. These days, hands seem to be a lot more idle or wasting time on electronic devices. I watch hands at church sometimes, in an atmosphere where you can slow down to do so. Some hands are holding a sleeping child, others are note-taking, a few nails are nervously being chewed, while others tell an animated story. I see more beauty in the road maps of an older person's hands than a highly manicured one. Rough and tanned hands show the fortitude of my relatives, who were farmers and skilled workers. They tell you a lot about the life of their owner.

My maternal grandmother had petite hands with pretty nails, covered in sun spots from her endless hours in the flower and vegetable gardens. It surprised me how clean and smooth her nails were for being in so much dirt every day. She could

Angie Ulrich

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peel a potato round into the thinnest spiral.

Those hands made magic meals and knew the exact measurements of ingredients without using any measuring devices or recipes. A fellow reader, she tried to have a book in her hands at the end of a busy day for a little reading before bed. Her hands also did beautiful sewing, and her left hand wrote lovely cursive letters that we received weekly full of news.

My paternal grandmother was a strong, wonderful woman, whose hands took her through years of different jobs. She used them to cut and style hair, then they worked hard as a mother and wife on a busy farm.

During this time, they cooked pies for a local cafe. They helped take care of her mother-in-law. She had a whitish hue



to them when she worked in the kitchen at the local hospital. Bleach water is not friendly to ungloved skin. Like many in her generation, she had an unrivaled ability to bake and cook. She

had so much practice, her food came out perfect by the time we grandkids came along. Those hands did quilting and needlepoint. I am thankful to have some of these memories living on in items I can touch and hold, even though she is gone.

I have heard the saying, "The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world" (William

Ross Wallace). I hope I can use my hands for service to others, and the things I do and make with them are inspiring and a piece of me for my children and grandchildren to cherish. ♦

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Responding to a Fire

Susan Davis

As a young farm girl, I did not realize how quickly a fire could spread out of control, but one winter evening changed my concept of fires forever. Mom and Dad were out milking our cows by hand. A small propane heater in our living room heated the house. Since we were remodeling, my parents had been burning some old wooden laths torn out of the walls. One of my siblings shoved a few of them through the grate on the top of the hot stove. The thin boards were too long to fit inside the stove, so the ends of them stuck out. It did not take the hungry fire long to crawl up the wooden laths. We panicked!

I ran outside in the snow without my coat on and saw Mom carrying a full bucket of milk. I dashed up to her and frantically explained the situation. Alarm blossomed across her face. She yelled for Dad's help, and they rushed inside. I cannot remember how they did it, but Dad and Mom soon got control of the situation and prevented what could have been a terrible house fire. There wasn't any doubt in my brothers, sisters

and my mind that we were in big trouble. We never played with fire again.

This incident changed my view on the fire drills I experienced in grade school. They scared me, even though I knew we were just practicing. The teacher explained to us what we should do in a fire. I had a hard time accepting the fact that we should leave our belongings behind. "It wouldn't take me long to gather them up and take them with me," I reasoned. I did not want my things to be burned up.

One school day, we were put to an actual test.

Like I was supposed to do, I left the classroom empty-handed and filed in line behind my teacher and classmates. We marched out to the south side of our school. Other excited students were assembled there. As we waited, I worried about my belongings. I did not see any flames shooting out from the building. News spread of a fire in the kitchen, extinguished without causing any damage. Our teacher told us to return to class. Fortunately, our emergency did not warrant a need for a fire truck and firefighters.

In pioneer days, even if they needed those things, there were none. Can you imagine the terror pioneers felt to see a prairie fire on the loose? Smoke billowed in the distance. The smell in the air warned of approaching danger.

Frightened wildlife fled in all directions, trying to outrun the inferno. Wind pushed the fire along that much faster. Unbroken sod had tall grass on it that provided plenty of fuel to support a raging fire. The pioneers plowed around their property and wet any material they had to beat out the flames that crossed over the line. If they were lucky, they could pull water from a creek or a river rather than a hand-dug well.

Our son grew up wanting to fight fires. As a kid, he used to pretend our house was on fire. He turned the hose on and sprayed a stream of water toward the roof and the walls. He thought I would be unhappy with him for this, but how could I extinguish his dream? Nick's college training equips him with professional hoses and gear. So when he is called to respond to a fire, he will be ready. ♦



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Debbie Unruh

Taking the Train

Accompanied by white puffs of steam and short blasting sounds, our family boarded the train. We were taking a fifty-mile trip between two former mining towns, Silverton and Durango. Walking down the narrow wooden aisles, I took the seat behind my two brothers. The dark leather seat cushion felt smooth and cool after standing in line. I waited for the train to start. It was my first train ride.

Short, jerky movements smoothed out as the wheels began to roll. Hearing the long pull of a whistle wailing across the valley signaled the start of our journey. The old depot became a remembrance as we hugged the side of the mountain ascending above a silver track. The creaking of the front door alerted our attention.

"Tickets, tickets please!" called a tall man with a mustache. In a black suit coat and tie, he made his way down the tight



aisle, walking in a shifting gait to keep his balance. As we handed over our tickets to be punched, he kept up a running dialogue about long-ago events. Below us wound the silvery stream of the river. Pines and aspens winked at us as we twisted around the mountain. I peered out of the paned window at the scenes in front of me. I didn't want to miss a thing.

Suddenly, we heard a loud commotion at the front. Startled, I looked over the back of my brother's seat. A big man clothed in a brown leather jacket and canvas pants came running down the aisle with a shiny pistol pointed at the ceiling. Smoke filled the air, stinging our throats and noses as a loud crack reverberated in the car. "This here is a holdup!" he shouted. Pointing his finger at my younger brother, he growled, "Hand over all of your candy!"

My brother shook his head vigorously back and forth. The gunman bent over, staring into his face, but he refused. Disgusted, the bandit moved to the seats behind us, collecting gum and candy. He fired a few rounds of shot into the air as he opened the rear door of our car to pass into the next. Loaded down with loot, the gunman let the door slam behind him.

Letting out my breath, I settled down in my seat, laughing at my little brother. He had held out and won. I did not know if he knew it had all been a game, but I knew he didn't even have any candy! ♦

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My Favorite Electrician

Gene Segers

I worked as an industrial electrician for about thirty years at the same company. I've worked with a lot of other electricians, especially in construction. I enjoyed them all and never met one I couldn't learn something from, but I found one fellow a genuine delight. I'll call him Easy Go. He was the most easy-going fellow I ever had the pleasure of knowing. In the years I have known him, I have never seen him angry.

He faced the same problems we all did, but took it in stride. I never heard a cross word. He never bad-mouthed anyone, and was congenial and quiet. He didn't waste words, so he didn't bother you with endless or pointless chatter. He did his work without fanfare and couldn't care less if anyone praised him. He certainly did not praise himself or boast.

Easy Go had never been in the mountains. All his travel had been from Kansas to the east and south. I didn't know this when he went with me to an installation at Slick Rock, Colorado, by the Utah border. I had driven in the mountains for years, winter and summer, and thought nothing of it. After we loaded up our van at our Pueblo, we headed west.

I enjoyed the trip because Easy Go and I had a lot in common and visiting came easy. I motored right along the Arkansas river canyon and occasionally heard a tire squeal. I'd swing around curves, trying to keep up with the traffic and not be a hazard by holding anyone back. Easy Go became quieter than normal, like he had his mind on something.

We stopped in Salida and ate lunch. The sun came out and the weather warmed. I shut the heater off as we headed up Monarch Pass, sailing along as usual. The road was dry, the weather beautiful, and I enjoyed the mountain drive. Easy Go, however, had gotten quieter. Maybe his mind was on the work we would do in Slick Rock. I plan many a job while driving. We crossed the top of Monarch and started down. It got hot. I didn't have air conditioning, so I opened up the fresh air vent

on my side. I told Easy Go to do the same if he needed fresh air. When he said in his quiet way, "I about got one pushed through the floor," I realized he was not talking because he was scared stiff. I slowed down and heard Easy Go breathe easier. He settled down a bit and finally relaxed. He hadn't let all his weight down since



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we started swinging around the curves of the Arkansas river. We had a good laugh out of it, as he said he had never been in the mountains.

I watched my driving after that, but when we got to Norwood Hill, it was almost more than Easy Go could take. He thought about getting out and walking as the canyon was on his side. I drove on the left all I could because he said he felt like he was hanging over the edge. On the way home, I brought him through back country between Naturita and Montrose. We had gotten along well with the job by working long hours, so we took our time on the way home. We even stopped once to watch a bear amble across in front of us. Easy Go enjoyed this drive very much. He saw wildlife and scenery he had never seen before. He decided he and his wife would come to Colorado on their next vacation. I'm glad I didn't leave a bad taste about the mountains of Colorado.

Easy Go would still ride with me after that, and he's still my favorite electrician. ♦

Peace of Mind

Once upon a time, a king offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of peace. Many artists tried. The king looked at all the pictures. But there were only two he really liked, and he had to choose between them.

One was of a calm lake, which served as a perfect mirror for the towering mountains all around it and a blue sky full of fluffy white clouds. Everyone who saw it agreed that the artist captured the perfect image of peace.

The other picture had mountains, too. But these were rugged and bare.

Above was an angry sky, from which rain fell and in which lightning played. A foaming waterfall tumbled down the side of it. At first glance, this did not look peaceful at all, but when the king looked closely, he saw a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock behind the waterfall where a mother bird had built her nest. There, amid the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird in her nest—in perfect peace.



Which do you think won the prize?

The king chose the second picture.

Do you know why?

"Because," explained the king, "peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. Peace means to be amid all those things and still be calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace." ♦

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Keller the blind calf

Charles Oz Collins

Our mature Hereford cow, Square Head, had calving down to an art. No protracted labor and no bawling and floundering about. Square Head waited until the last minute, got right down to business, and took care of it. When I noticed her nosing around in the corner of the pasture, I didn't bother her. Shortly afterward, I saw her licking a dark red pile of hair with a white spot on one end. A few hours later, I made my first inspection pass. It was a gorgeous calf. Not overly large, but it had that dense wine-red hair topped off by a face as white as a new snowdrift. Square Head had done well.

She kept her calves at a distance from other stock and humans. After three days, I could no longer contain my curiosity, and walked down to the new calf. Square Head lingered nearby, watching my every move, concerned about any bad habits I might pass on to her baby.

The calm, quiet calf was a heifer. I admired the clean whiteness of her face, the tip of her tail, and the precise line between deep red and pure white. Her long eyelashes would be the

I agonized over the unnamed calf and its plight. I entered the house and told Ruth and the kids. It surprised me how calmly the kids took the news. The optimism of youth is a wonderful thing. As we headed down into the pasture, Jeff and Pam discussed how they could help the calf and arrange things to make life easier for it. Before we knew it, the kids were calling the calf Keller, after Helen Keller. Did they hope the name would carry with it some traits of that remarkable woman who overcame so much? Did they hold similar hope for this small calf? The name stuck.

Square Head saw to everything. Keller nursed frequently, was licked to a shiny gloss, and playfully crow-hopped around her mother. Like all young calves, she slept a lot. And she grew. Square Head did not tolerate the other cows, nor especially the calves, getting close to Keller. Mother made solo trips into the corral for water, but these were not as urgent as before. As Square Head moved about the

pasture to graze different spots, Keller followed close behind. I wish I knew if it was smell or sound that kept the calf in tow, or both, or something else. Whatever the system, it worked.

All young animals experience attacks of friskiness. These come at any hour, without warning, and without cause. One minute all is quiet; the next instant, tails fly up in the air and feet follow. I dreaded the time such an event would overtake Keller, and when it happened, I was in the pasture. Keller hurtled across it, heading for the electric fence and the pond beyond it.

If you have not chased a healthy

calf, it is difficult to appreciate how fast four young legs can carry eighty pounds of red and white hair. Most calves in happy flight will do a bit of sashaying, kicking, and jumping about. Sometimes this lets you get close enough to change their direction. But Keller ran with her neck stretched out, tail up, in a straight line. I know, because I was quite a ways behind her. Heart thumping, throat tight, lungs burning, I saw the calf whiz under the single strand electric fence and disappear over the bank of the pond.

After the briefest encounter with the electric fence, I plunged over the pond bank and saw



Keller thrashing about in the water. Her momentum had carried her beyond the fringe of cattails and into water several feet deep. She saw no reason to turn back and seemed headed straight across. I did not stop to think that Keller could probably swim and I might wait for her on the other side. Falling into the pond behind the calf, I grabbed a leg while my feet were planted in the mud. After considerable stumbling and water swallowing, I hauled Keller up on the bank and released her so I could cough up a lung. Passing once again under the biting wire, she set course for the windbreak behind the corral, but a frantic Square Head cut her off. As I sloshed home across the pasture, I saw Keller enjoying a snack and enduring yet another bath. To see them lying side-by-side in the grassy pasture made it difficult to believe anything was wrong.



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FENCING, STALLS, HAULING

As we watched Keller grow, my concern mounted. As soon as she stopped nursing, she would need water to drink. To get to the waterer in the corral, the cattle moved through a lane a hundred yards long and twenty feet wide. An electric fence marked both edges. This first time I saw Keller in the corral, she stuck close to Mom. She appeared ill at ease because she sensed other cattle nearby. If these approached, she drew back or turned away. Yet as she followed Square Head, I never saw her crowd or bump into her mama. I watched them leave the corral and negotiate the lane. To my enormous relief, she never touched the fence.

With her increasing size, the invisible tether that kept Keller in "contact" with Square Head grew. The calf spent more time grazing and less time nursing. But who would lead Keller to water? I volunteered for the job.

Keller tolerated our family. She was no longer interested in being touched or scratched, but we felt welcome to walk or stand near her. For "her" benefit, we talked to let her know where and who we were, so she would not be

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envy of any Hollywood starlet, and the eyes, large and clear, projected a calm assurance. I stroked the perfectly matched ears and passed my hand over the small face, but she didn't blink, close her eyes, or try to pull away. Troubled, I waved my hand in front of her. My heart fell. No healthy calf is this calm after several days. I forced myself to look directly into her eyes and saw two light blue aqueous orbs without an internal structure. My throat tightened. My hands stroked the neck and ears of this otherwise perfect new creation.

Trudging back to the house, I was not seeing too clearly, either. Square Head got busy with her long tongue, removing unwelcome human odors from her baby, which stood calmly nursing. What could I tell my kids, Jeff and Pam? Assigning a seeing-eye dog to the calf was not an option, though I suspected I could find two volunteer kids for the job, but that wasn't practical. And how much could Square Head do? It was not a large pasture until you considered the size and disability of that tiny calf. What about ditches and electric fences? How would a blind calf find its way to the corral, the shed, and the waterer? By the time I made my way home, I had no answers for the calf or my family.

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Dude Ranch

Ima Klutz

Last week, Wilbur informed me we would go on a brief vacation to a mountain dude ranch. We took the scenic route, full of lots of blue spruce, pine, and little animals. Some of the mountain valleys were kind of nice, but I didn't see one place to stop and eat a donut.

Wilbur insisted we leave the dog home. They had some goofy rule at the ranch that says they don't want any dogs. I can't imagine any ranch without a dog, and Bassy, our Basset Hound, is a perfect gentleman... most of the time. But my darling hubby informed me we would be on a horse most of the time and Bassy couldn't come along. I said I could put him on a leash tied to the saddle horn, but he just laughed.

I'm glad I'm so funny, but I really couldn't see what he was laughing about.

We took the scenic route and arrived at the dude ranch about noon. I took in a

long bunkhouse and a corral full of horses. The smell of a corral and something cooking in the kitchen overpowered me. It's not where I would choose to spend vacation, but life isn't all about me (or so my family remind me often). Wilbur

registered, Junior went off to pet a horse, our teenaged daughter Patty got all the bags out of the car, and I sank down in an overstuffed chair in the bunkhouse's lobby. It was the last time for a long while that I enjoyed sitting down.

Wilbur was right. We rode horses all that first day. We took lessons, we went on a trail ride... the whole nine yards. And they made us take off the "tack" (saddle and bridle and sweaty blanket) afterward and brush the horses while they ate grain. Boy, if that isn't the life... for the horse! And then they wanted us to do it again!

By the afternoon of the second day, I could barely make it to my bunk. Patty, Junior, and Wilbur were all having a great time. I couldn't figure it out, so I asked them, "Why aren't you guys saddle sore?"

Patty sat on the bed beside me and put her arm around my shoulder. She said, "Mom, do you remember when we were packing for this trip, we encouraged you to wear jeans, a good pair of boots, and a wide-brimmed hat?"

I mumbled something about remembering. I just didn't listen. She gave me a little squeeze, got up, and reached for the door. "Mom, if you would have done so, you could have saved

had no effect. Mom was not here. A cattle keeper of dubious reputation thought he was in charge, and this entire situation required study. Then it hit me. Keller followed her mother. I walked slowly ahead while talking to her. She followed at a measured distance from me and the bordering electric fences.

We entered the corral without incident, but at the last minute I wondered if Keller would execute a gentle right turn or smack into the end of the shed. There were no other cattle in the corral and the calf came to a halt fifteen feet from the waterer. Calmly, she stood there. Less calmly, I stood nearby. Now what? Should I push her up to the waterer? It was an electric one. Did it give off an emanation like the fence, something I could not sense, but that caused Keller to keep her distance? Still, Keller stood. And stood. This was not the "crisis" I had

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Keller, Continued

frightened. The first time I took her to water, I approached the grazing calf, now weighing three hundred pounds, and talked to her. Keller noted my approach, raised her head, and "looked" at me. I called her by name and told her what a good and pretty calf she was. As usual, she seemed indifferent to my approach. Gently, I pushed her rump in the direction I was sure she wanted to go and softly said, "Let's go." And she went!

We made our way slowly toward the end of the lane, Keller in front and me just behind. She kept a short and constant distance between us. All went well until we got near the lane within ten or twelve feet of the electric fence. Keller stopped, swung her head side-to-side, and shuffled her front feet with her hind feet firmly planted. An encouraging word and gentle push

yourself a lot of sores. Shorts, a t-shirt, a kerchief, and a pair of thong sandals just isn't enough to keep you from getting saddle sores. There's a reason for all that garb."

Ugh. I hate it when she's right.

She turned to Wilbur. "Ready, Dad?"

He nodded, and they were out the door, followed by Junior. I watched as they went across to the corral where their horses were waiting. I smiled and slowly made my way to the bed to lay down. I pulled my romance novel out from under my pillow and settled in for a pleasant afternoon of reading.

Who's having the most fun now? I thought.

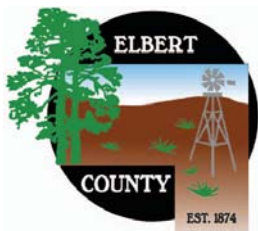
Somehow the room seemed strangely empty, and I wondered if I couldn't have made better decisions regarding my week at a dude ranch. ♦

expected and fretted about. Then, for the second time that day, a revelation struck me. *Maybe she is not thirsty. Maybe she is wondering why I brought her here. Maybe she is wondering why she is not out in the pasture doing what she was doing before I came to "help."* I led Keller out through the lane and she resumed grazing.

The day I found Keller alone in the corral and drinking from the waterer brought me great relief. No doubt my gift for helping, for sensitive guidance had paid off, with minor help from God and Square Head.

*All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.*

(Cecil Frances Alexander, 1818-1895) ♦



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They say a picture is worth a thousand words...and the County is on a mission...to capture photos representing what you value most about living here in beautiful Elbert County.

But first, we want to know what you think because these will be the images used on the county's website, in social media, and in all the ways we share stories about this county we call home.

Whether you are new to Elbert County or a descendant of Samuel Elbert, where would YOU go...now and as the seasons change...to watch the sun set...to watch the sun rise...to take in a sweeping landscape, to picnic, to admire wildlife in the sanctuary of their habitat?

Do you have a favorite historic site or the best place to capture images of cattle grazing? What are your favorite community events, or favorite parks?

We want to hear from you...and with your recommendations as our guide...within the coming months you may see our team, cameras in hand, capturing images that celebrate what you value most.

Please send your recommendations to:

mybeautifulhometown@elbertcounty-co.gov

and thank you in advance for your consideration and assistance.

NEW MEDICAL CLINIC FOR VETERANS

Are you a veteran of military service living in Elbert County, eligible for VA benefits, who seeks access to essential VA health care closer to home?

Great news! Eligible veterans now have access to essential health care at a new clinic located at 3753 Dacoro Lane, in Castle Rock.

What's your first step? Should you have a question about your eligibility, visit the Elbert County Veterans Services Office web page <https://www.elbertcounty-co.gov/353/Veterans-Services> for more information or call 720-869-6772 to reach the Elbert County Veterans Services Officer to learn more.

MAINTENANCE OF YOUR GRAVEL ROADS

Did you know that your Public Works/Road and Bridge Department is responsible for 1,100 miles—or 2,200 lane miles—of gravel roads? For perspective, maintaining this road volume is like driving in a straight line from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C.



These gravel roadways range from rural collectors with several hundred vehicles per day to neighborhood local roads that carry fewer than 20 vehicles per day.

Due to the nature of gravel roads, routine maintenance is performed to retain a road surface that is safe to travel. Our maintenance efforts span 19 gravel road routes, ranging from 33 miles per route for high-traffic roads on the west side of the county to 110 miles per route for lower-traffic roads on the east side.

Road grader operators, who understand your local conditions best, determine which roads need grading beyond the priority assignments. They focus on high-traffic, priority roads in their areas once a week, gravel roads with less traffic bi-weekly, while the remaining gravel roads are graded once a month or on an as needed basis. After completing their routes, they record the grading dates. The gravel roads supervisor then reviews these forms and conducts additional inspections to ensure our standards are met.

Road conditions can vary week to week within different areas of the county. Many factors interfere with grading operations such as localized severe weather, impacting the efficiency of how much road can be graded; emergency operations; staff capacity and experience; training time required for new grader operators; equipment breakdowns; ditch mowing operations; right-of-way tree mitigations; and other road and bridge operations priorities.

For more information on gravel road maintenance, call 303-621-3157 or visit elbertcounty-co.gov/237/Road-Bridge

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