

# Prairie Times

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Stories that nourish the soul.

## My Cowboy

Alivia Ulrich

I'd always dreamed of marrying a cowboy, the kind of man who worked as hard as the day was long, but still had time for the important things. A man who displayed a gentle strength and salt of the earth ways. Turned out the cowboy of my dreams didn't just exist—he was even better than I envisioned.

The man I've been married to for a year is so much more than the hero I conjured up in my mind. True, living out our "happily ever after" has its trials among the joys, its tears mingled with laughter. But each memory we make together is another beautiful page in our story. The man I am privileged to call my husband had shown this city girl so many hidden gems in the rugged life he lives. He's shown me the beauty of the High Plains. Where I see endless grass, he opened my eyes to a vast sea of golden wheat and hidden life inside it. He told me when he looked to the mountains on the western horizon, he sees magnificent peaks pointing heavenward, to the One who placed them there. Each morning gives us a new painting in soft watercolors to enjoy. What I love most about ranch life are the nights when we sit in the back of his truck and gaze up at the vast display of flickering lights, forming pictures as old as the ages. During those times, I came to realize why he loved this place, this life so much.

Every day, I find something in him that makes me fall in love with him a little more—from the way the simple things on the ranch and in our marriage make him flash the smile I fell in love with, to his humble words and simple acts that show how much he cares. I put in my hope chest the sweet little notes he leaves for me to find some mornings, the wildflowers he picks from the fields to brighten the table, the words to favorite songs we dance to.

In the year of our married life, I came to see the little things that made the humble house he built for us a home—from his boots lined up by the door with his Stetson perched atop them, to his worn Bible on the nightstand, waiting for us to read it together. I love the evenings we spend sharing about our day while swaying on the porch swing. Excitement shines in his eyes as he describes his hopes for the future of our ranch. But I also realize how much this hard ranch life and the land take out of someone willing to put his whole heart into them—and the richness that hard work and determination give back.

Today, on our anniversary, as I watch my husband pull up to the house in his truck, I smile at the memories of this past year with him. Soup spices and baking bread fill the room with the aroma of coziness and comfort, reminding me of the simple joys of ordinary moments. As the familiar creak of the back door swinging open reaches my ears, I lift a silent thanks to the One who gave me this man to love, and I turn with a smile to greet my cowboy. ♦



Meet a local  
small business  
owner on  
Page 4!

## Finally, Seeing Johnny Cash Live!

Ray Willis

"Here we go again," I said upon hearing yet another twelve-year-old boy plying that bow to his fiddle a mile a minute, to the tune of *Orange Blossom Special*.

In the 70s and 80s, I adored Johnny Cash. I had grown to love him as a man, as well as his music, after reading a biography or two. I couldn't hear enough of his music or watch his guest appearances on some TV show.

When I lived back East, a while back, Cash was slated to appear at the Eastern States Exposition in West Springfield, Massachusetts. I taught school at the time and wondered how in the world I could catch him at the only time left to see him, a matinee in the late afternoon.

As much as I loved the idea of finally seeing him live, I would not take a day off from my responsibilities at my school 45 miles away. It would be a real challenge to get there on time, as I hated speeding. The principal let me leave school a few minutes early, and I sped out to I91 North to make the 4 p.m. Johnny Cash Show.

Wouldn't you know it? Traffic backed up all the way from Hartford to Springfield, no doubt with others having the same plan as mine. When

I finally made my way to the huge, old barn-like structure where Johnny appeared, I found all the entrances locked, and the show about to start in ten minutes! The fans, seated inside, had been sitting there for over five hours! Alarmed and downtrodden, I headed for the Expo's "Show Office," who let me talk to the man in charge of ticket sales. How could he not relent when I

blurted out my sob story of speeding from central Connecticut, fighting traffic all the way, and that Johnny Cash meant so much to me at this stage of my life, now in my 40s? The important gentleman listened and seemed concerned. He arose from his desk chair and quietly said, "Follow me."

He took me to the barn I had left only minutes before and pulled a key from his pants pocket to unlock a barely visible side door. He motioned me to enter. "Enjoy the show," he whispered, and left through the same door.

It was dark; the place was packed. When "the man in black" took the stage, he stood only 40 feet from me! We faced each other for the entire show. I still get goose bumps whenever I think about that magic moment in time. My 7th grade English students also enjoyed my story. ♦





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# Embrace Art & Beauty

Charity Bishop

**Browsing online the other day**, a video caught my eye called “Why is everything ugly now?” He brought up some true things I never noticed. In 1970, there were a lot of car colors and you could tell the model at a glance, but now cars are neutral-toned and look alike. Architecture used to have aesthetic appeal and details or fit into the neighborhood, but now it looks like it came out of *Star Trek* and/or is dull to look at. Modern apartment buildings are ugly, tall rows of steel and windows. A lot of homes look like Monopoly pieces plopped on top of the lawn with tiny interior windows and no eaves.

The same banality infiltrated interior design with an allergy to color. Show homes are beige or white and sterile. What happened to bold accent walls and rich red dining rooms? How about wallpaper or interesting paint designs?

Yes, we use color in our couches and in our clothes, but think about how “ugly” other things have gotten. Does a comfortable shoe have to be ugly? That is the question.

Our brain, when we see a beautiful thing, goes “wow!!!” That’s why we stop and marvel at a butterfly or enjoy a field of flowers. We get a buzz from looking at attractive people. Humans are artistic, creative, and enjoy art. Maybe the reason so many of us are stressed, depressed, struggle to pay attention, or lack hope for the future is because we aren’t surrounded by the beauty our brain needs to function healthfully.

I love to walk into my home. It feels lived-in and mine. It isn’t fully functional and the cats make a mess, but it has lots of beauty. In the spring and summer, I look out my windows at the prairie, which flourishes in green and with wildflowers. In the dull, depressing winter, I take in the beautiful blues, lavenders, and dark purples on my walls. I curl up with a bright pink blanket on my teal couch, or lay down in my room and stare at my bold teal and purple dresser, which I painted after I received it from my grandfather, who made it with his own two hands. One drawer sticks, but I love it. I made it mine and I think of him whenever I touch it.

Beauty makes me happy. I love to drive by a lovely house, to hold a book in my hands with a

whimsical, colorful cover. To watch a movie filmed in Technicolor, instead of the bland palate every director uses now (I like *Wicked!*, but why film it in pastels when the original had glorious rich colors?). I squeal when I see how my sister repainted her living room with bold walls and a gorgeous, colorful print. The little row of grape hyacinths I dug out of my lawn and replanted near a crumbling stone wall is flourishing, and it makes me happy to see them growing taller beneath my encouragement and careful watering, next to the crimson tulips.

I recently took up sewing, but I decided not to start with something practical; I make adorable little cloth stuffed animals instead. Kitties with tiger stripes and ruffled jumpers, and bunnies in trousers. I find them pleasing to my eye,

the same as I do with my book covers. Even how the text lines up on a page pleases me.

It feels like banality has taken over the world, but we don’t have to let it. Don’t be afraid to be bold. Paint that wall a bright or an unexpected color. It won’t hurt the resell value, because you can paint over it if you leave. Enjoy the life you are living now. Let it be colorful. Let it have beauty. Make room for art. Hang up things you find inspiring and attractive, and hide the things that aren’t. A wise man once said, “Keep nothing you do not believe to be beautiful or find useful.” I would argue further that useful things can also be beautiful. That’s why I use rainbow utensils instead of plain silver ones. If I must eat all those colorful vegetables, I am going to do it off a purple fork! ♦

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Belle Schmidt  
**SHORN SHORT**  
*whether you want it or not*

There are plenty of wonderful Barber Shops in the world, but this wasn't one of them. Alas, my husband did not know this until it was too late. It had been in continuous operation since 1872, and the red, white and blue barber pole held a certain appeal. Barber poles have their own history. The red represents blood. Barbers were once known as barber-surgeons. They often pulled teeth and did minor surgeries, like removing skin tags and moles.

It certainly looked impressive enough! As you approach the shop, you glimpse four padded green and black barber chairs, complete with footrests, through the large front window. Behind each

chair is a heavy cast iron, white enameled sink. It's like stepping back in time.

One day, my husband announced, "I'm going to get a haircut at that barbershop. I want to sit in one of those old barber chairs."

"See you later, honey." Off he drove. Maybe he thought it would be an interesting experience, like being in a Chicago gangster movie about Al Capone. The set was ready and waiting for the shooting to begin.

A short time later, I heard the car drive into the garage and I went to check out the haircut. He slithered out of the driver's seat, ducking his unrecognizable shorn head. I noted each imperfection in the scalp, old scars, a mole or two, and its unique shape. Was this really my husband? I caught his sheepish smile. It gave me a clue to the fact things didn't go as expected.

He told me, "The barber asked what service he could provide. I said, 'just a haircut.' Got draped in that big chair and before I could say anything more, I saw my long curls falling around me like leaves in a windstorm. There was no pampering or snip-snip sniping one-sixteenth inch at a time, no fussing. No questions asked for feedback. No, 'Does that look okay?' There was no point in holding up a mirror to see the back. It was the same as the front, no hair. I'd bet he shaved heads in the army! You ask for a haircut there, you'll get one that lasts for some time."

I laughed. "Did you give him a tip?"

I guess you could say he got his money's worth. The haircut reminded me of Elvis Presley's televised shaved-head haircut when he joined the army. I couldn't help myself and started singing, *You're in the Army Now*. "Want to march around the kitchen island? Left, right, left right. Pick it up. You're in the army now," I sang, dragging my husband by the arm to

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encourage his participation. Luckily, my husband has a good sense of humor. It didn't lead to hurt feelings. We both had a good laugh -day. I could empathize. I remember leaving a beauty salon in tears when my long hair got hacked off. But men don't cry. They deal with the situation; they fix it and treat it as a learning opportunity.

Today, I noticed my husband's curly locks had grown back. "Your hair's getting long," I said. "You may need a little trim. Will you go back to the same Barber Shop?"

"Right. It's taken six months for my hair to grow this long."

"Maybe ask for just a bit off the back, say a half-inch, this time?"

"No," he said. "I think I'll try one that hasn't been there a hundred and fifty years!" ♦

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**Remembering Grandma Jenny!**

Suzan L. Wiener

**My Grandma Jenny** was a gentle, caring soul. After her beloved husband Jerry passed, she moved in with my parents, sister, and me. To me, she became everything. But for my older sister Terri, four years my senior, Grandma sometimes seemed to be a bit of a nuisance. Terri adored rock 'n' roll, a loud rebellion on her part that Grandma Jenny didn't appreciate. I tried to bridge the gap, suggesting games or maybe a little dancing, hoping to find common ground. But Grandma was a tough nut to crack, and nothing seemed to take. I even wanted my family to take her to eat lunch out, but she felt contented to sit in her chair and talk to me when I came home from school. I really loved our talks. Grandma was wise beyond her years, and I learned a lot from her. She even taught me to knit and crochet. She was so good at it.

Too soon, Grandma's eyes began to fail, and she struggled to see clearly. I felt helpless, aching to ease her burden, yet she never complained or showed a trace of bitterness. She loved doing crafts, so it was especially hard for her. Despite her modest means, she'd always slip a chocolate bar to each of us, a small luxury she never forgot. I loved her and the chocolate bars were so good.

One day, I read to her. I sat by her side, book in hand, and she listened with her usual serenity. To my surprise, Terri wanted to join in, taking turns reading to Grandma, sharing that quiet time together. They grew very close in those hours. This outcome made me happy, truly—if I admitted it though, maybe, just maybe, I felt a little envious too. ♦



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INTERVIEW WITH A LOCAL SMALL BUSINESS OWNER

# A Little Something for Everyone

**Smack in the heart of the local community**, next to the Elizabeth Post Office, sits a small business with a cheerful owner inside. Cara Wirth greets me with a warm smile when I enter her shop, **Elizabeth Tack Trunk**, a lovely spot full of candles, clothing, tack, art by local artists and photographers, treats, socks, and much more, many of them made in the USA. Though the theme is horses, she says, “I make sure there’s a little something for everyone. You don’t have to own a horse to come in and find something to love.” (This includes the cute stuffed animals that catch my eye. She grins and

says, “you warm them up for a few seconds in the microwave and snuggle up to them at night.”)

A transplant from elsewhere in Colorado, Cara’s life has always revolved around horses. She recently had to say goodbye to her closest horse friend of 25 years. She says, “Cheerio taught me the loyalty and friendship that can exist between species. He was the kindest, most majestic creature I ever met. He won over everyone who ever worked with him. It’s almost like he achieved sainthood in our horse community.”

Her new horse, Riviera, is also a favorite, although Cara has a regular menagerie on her small farm (named The Big C Ranch after her beloved Cheerio, who also got called “Big C”). She has six horses, two donkeys, including one who loves to break out regularly (“Clyde goes

where Clyde wants,” she laughs, and shows me a picture of him gleefully stealing a bag of carrots), and a cantankerous mini-pony. Not to mention the assorted chickens, ducks, and the geese who, while raised from infancy by her own hands, have now turned hostile. Maybe it’s because she sells their eggs at the store!

“I moved out here for a change of pace,” Cara says. She worked as a business executive recruiter for a small company in Denver, and post Covid, when the company closed, she decided to “stop chasing people around for a living. I enjoyed doing it, but something

needed to change.” She moved into our community, and noticed all the horse trailers parked at Safeway. She realized, “We need a horse-flavored store.”



Cara on Lafonda, with her foal.



In that store, you’ll find unique items you can’t find anywhere else, including the “Best Ever” brand saddle pad. “Horse owners rave about it, and I think I’m the only place in Colorado where you can buy one,” she says.



Cara and Cheerio.

It’s a little risky opening a brick and mortar store in the days of the internet, but Cara says, “Horse owners love to touch things. We want to feel leather and run our hands over the saddle pad.” To try on a shirt, and smell a candle, and see a piece of art up close!

Cara has always adored horses. She grew up with them, learned the rules in Pony Club, and competitively jumped as a junior rider. Then she tried western riding and won \$20 as a teen in a barrel racing competition. The day I met her, she’d just returned from a jumping competition in Arizona. “It was over a hundred degrees there when I arrived,” she laughed, “then my flight home got delayed because of unstable weather!”

She loves to find interesting items for her store, especially those where some of the profit goes to a rescue. Many are one of a kind. “These shirts,” she tells me, showing one off with a gorgeous pattern, “are painted by an artist who donates some proceeds to an animal sanctuary.”

Cara doesn’t want to stock anything you can find at a box store; she wants things that are fun or different and that supports small business owners. “A lot of them are women, too,” she adds, which is delightful. She has English and Western pieces, saddles, and styles. She found it a little overwhelming to open a business at first,

but now looks forward to meeting people. “I like to help them solve a problem, or find the perfect gift,” she says. “My motto ‘love the horse more than the sport.’ I try to ride whenever I can, as much as I can, even if that means hurrying home after closing for the day to get in a ride before sunset.”

Cara also thrives on learning new things and on challenging herself. “I’m hoping to try Working Equitation next, if they open a local chapter,” she says. It involves at least four competition areas, where you do dressage, ease of handling, speed, and cattle wrangling.

Whether you’re looking for a halter for your equestrian best friend, gift shopping for a horse-lover in your life, or just want to buy a hat, a helmet, a photograph, or a perfumed candle, Elizabeth Tack Trunk is the place to find it. Drop in and meet Cara today! She’ll be happy to talk to you! ♦

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# An Unexpected Guest

Janna Benkelman

The year 1965 held many significant events for Americans. It was the height of the Vietnam War, space exploration aimed to land on the moon, and the hippy movement revved up on many college campuses. However, for me, an eight-year-old girl growing up in the small town of Longmont, Colorado, life revolved around simpler experiences.

I lived in a small bungalow house on Second Street with my parents in the historic section of town. My mother, a housewife, attended Sewing Club, my father owned a Cabinet Shop, and my parents square danced once a month. The neighborhood kids rode bicycles to and from school. We ate Campbell Soup for lunch and drank Kool-Aid in the summer with nobody worrying about the sugar content. With our piggy bank money in hand, us kids walked to the “Little Store” where we bought jaw-breakers for a penny, popsicles for five cents and Twinkies for ten.

My older sister Jackie left for nursing school when I was only three years old. Five years later, she embarked upon a career in nursing, but more importantly, made her first serious purchase. In pursuit of her lifelong dream, she bought a fifteen hand, feisty little Appaloosa mare named “Pepper.”

One very eventful spring day, the last bell rang at Central Elementary and my best friend and I exited the school and strolled onto the playground hand in hand to start our eight block walk home. I looked up, and there, parked near the curb right by the crosswalk, sat my sister’s pickup truck pulling a trailer with her brand-new horse Pepper inside!

This was the surprise of a lifetime! We ran to the truck and Jackie helped us open the side door. As the entire elementary school student body watched, we got to pet a horse! Excited beyond belief, we clamored into the pickup and drove off, an object of curiosity and envy for the other students who reluctantly wandered home to their humdrum and lackluster lives.

Jackie pulled up in front of my parents’ small white house and parked. She and Pepper were going to spend the night. *Spend the night? With a horse!?* This is too good to be true, I thought as I watched her untie Pepper and open the tailgate to back her out.

My mother rushed out of the house to get in on the excitement, and several neighbors emerged to stand in their front yards, hands on

hips, assessing the situation and speculating why a horse munched the Kentucky Blue Grass in our front yard. Soon, a small group of neighborhood kids gathered across the street from our house and were talking excitedly about this unexpected surprise. I beamed with pride not only because of my older sister’s arrival but also as the chosen child to take part in the activities that occurred because of this wonderful event! Jackie and I pulled out her grooming supplies, and brushed, combed and polished Pepper until her coat gleamed and her hooves shone. Then we saddled and bridled her and Jackie mounted up. My mother helped me climb on behind, and off we went.

We wandered through the quiet neighborhoods nearby, me holding on to Jackie’s waist and relishing in the side-by-side movements of Pepper’s rump as she walked. Her fur was warm, her hips soft and padded, and the smell of being close to a horse delighted me. I felt hooked. This was by far the pinnacle of my thus far shallow and boring existence. In an instant, this doe eyed, soft-nosed angel on hooves transformed my life. When we returned to the house, we led her into our backyard, a large grassy yard with several large trees, lots of flower beds (not yet in bloom) and surrounded by a white picket

fence. This would be Pepper’s home for the next twelve hours. Jackie closed the gate, took off Pepper’s halter, and there she was... a real, live, walking, breathing, eating horse in my backyard! We found a bucket for water, which she put me in charge of filling, and Pepper took a long, satisfying drink. I spent the rest of the afternoon and evening keeping Pepper company, supervising her activities and submersing myself in “horse.” Before bed that night, I watched her from my bedroom window, so I could reassure myself it was all true.

The next morning, we all got up early and gave Pepper a ration of hay prior to her trip home. Our entire family watched her explore the backyard and nibble the grass under the apple tree. Even my father, not normally an animal person, enjoyed this adventure.

Jackie eventually loaded Pepper back in the horse trailer... and they were gone.

Shortly afterward, our doorbell chimed. Surprised to have an early morning visitor, my father opened the front door. There stood our neighbor Preston. “Your horse ate my tree,” he said in a not so friendly manner. Shocked, my father joined him in the now empty backyard and sure enough, our neighbor’s fruit tree had been totally munched! As my father took out his checkbook to cover the neighbor’s loss, I realized we would probably never have another guest like Pepper. ♦



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# Don't Water the Mud

BB Bunting

“Of course I don't want to come.” My wife hated fishing, although she could make a truly exciting meal when I brought some home. Here we were again, me trying to enjoy a day on the water, she trying to find a reason why I shouldn't. We'd had territorial battles for twenty years and each knew which ones we'd win. “I have a bad feeling about your going today,” she tossed out, hoping I'd realize she's psychic. But she knew better.

“I promised to meet him at the lake, so I have to go,” I explained.

She shrugged. “I can count on something for supper, then?”

I went, leaving a bit later than intended, but early enough for a couple of catfish at a special corner of the lake my fishing buddy knew. I sped along. The county roads to the lake are dry and dusty. I reminded myself my wife would hate riding in the car as much as she'd dislike watching us swing the fish from the water. I didn't feel guilty—

much—and crossed my fingers for a good day. On a country road, you drive along at fifty-five, spinning a quarter of a mile of tail dust behind you. You know when someone's approaching, because his tail is visible for at least a mile. So accidents are pretty rare. Today, the county had been covered with a couple of inches of snow, and the sun melted it quickly. The road ahead was clear of snow, although there were a couple of patches in the ditches where the sun couldn't reach. As I sped toward the lake, a road sign caught my eye. It said, “Unfinished road surface ahead.” Fifty-five is okay for back roads if you don't mind having to wash your car. This one time, however, the road wasn't dry and dusty. A farm truck sped towards me without a warning tail. The driver didn't seem to notice that I moved out of his way, either. Although I moved a couple of feet to let him pass, he didn't return the favor. County roads being what they are, I had no room to pass, so I touched the brake. Just a gentle tap. That's when the slimy clay we have in Colorado beckoned to me from the ditch. I fought with the steering but the car kept going toward the incline. Braking, shifting gears, turning into the slide, nothing altered the inevitable, and I ended up stuck, leaning at an angle of forty-five degrees. I slid out of the car. Slid being the operative word, because my feet shot from under me as I tried to leave the ditch. My back was now suitable for growing corn, but I stood. Naturally, the farm truck had long since sped out of sight, without a care in the world.



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Walking a couple

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of miles and meeting no one, I cursed my lack of a cell phone. “Shall I wait for someone to pass, or abandon the car and walk ten miles to the lake?” I dithered, thinking maybe my buddy would have gone home by the time I got there. Perhaps the lake was closed today, or no-one came from my direction. I went back to the car, loaded with enough mud to ruin my upholstery and with my shoes raised a good four inches with the stuff, sat there and prayed.

That must have been the right thing to do, because about an hour later, an REA truck meandered up the road and slithered to a stop beside me. “In trouble?” he grinned.

“Oh, no,” I shook my head, “I'm just practicing for a sailing course this summer.”

Luckily, the driver didn't take off, but he couldn't help me either. “I haven't anything to tow you out with,” he said.

“Oh, but could you call for a tow truck?” I asked, plaintively.



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“I don't guess I can do that, either,” he apologized, “but if I see someone with a tractor that can help, I'll let 'em know you're here.”

Not exactly the best offer of help I'd ever had, but stuck where I was, I felt grateful. Ten minutes later, I saw a monster tractor barreling down the road. “Robbie from REA told me you needed help,” the farmer told me.

“I sure do. How much do I owe you?”

“Assuming I can get you out of there, I'd appreciate something to cover the fuel with diesel like it is now,” he said.

Ten minutes later, having chaperoned me to the highway, I offered him cash, and he mostly turned it down. My wife had dark suggestions why I didn't bring in those catfish, but I convinced her by letting her have my shirt to clean. I think she really believes I went to all that trouble, so she wouldn't want to come fishing with me in the future. Or maybe not. ♦

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# HAPPY mother's DAY. GRAMMY

Cap Greycote

Charley wound up and hurled a fast pitch over the flat rock that served as home plate. I gripped my bat and swung.  
“Strike 2,” yelled Eddie.  
Stepping back, I readied for another pitch and swung. CRACK!! When I came to, Charley and Eddie were on their knees looking at me.

“Are you okay?” somebody hollered.  
Then I felt a cold wet cloth on my face. Grammy’s loud voice said, “If you’re going to kill him, don’t do it with a baseball.” This was my tenth birthday, May 1985. Kinda ruined the cake and ice cream party we were planning for later that day.

Grammy had a May birthday too; hers in 1925. She raised me after I lost my mother at five years old. As youngsters, when Charley and I got to chattering and giggling, Grammy would look at us and say, “Children should be seen and not heard.” As teenagers,



people. He’s on every board and committee that comes along. Charley talks to people in the grocery store checkout line. I’ll even bet Charley talks in his sleep. If you’re planning on having a conversation with him, be prepared not to do much talking yourself.

Grammy once said, “Charley started talking when he was a little over two and hasn’t shut up since.”

I had another childhood friend, Florence, who was pleasant but quiet. She only talked if she had something worth saying. When Charlie and I got into big arguments, Florence would step in, calm us down, and make peace. Grammy knew how hotheaded I could be, so she said, “Cap, you better snag onto that girl to keep you out of trouble.” Twenty years later, I did just that and haven’t regretted it for a minute. At our wedding Grammy said, “It’s two for one in this deal. She’ll help you keep your temper under control, but she won’t nag your head off doing it.”

Eddie lived near Florence, Charley and I. He came to our birthday parties but never stayed long. He got good grades in school but only took part in group activities if forced. Grammy noted, “If this was the middle ages, that boy would become a monk and take a vow of silence.” Eddie became a wildlife biologist living in remote areas. We exchange Christmas greetings and have seen each other three times since High School.

Left a widow at a young age, Grammy worked harder all her life than anybody I’ve ever known. “When I die, it’ll be standing up and still in the harness like an

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old plow horse,” she told me on her ninety-second birthday.  
Charlie and I are still good friends and see each other often. He still does most of the talking, but I enjoy being around him. Florence is usually “gone” when Charlie comes to visit. Though blunt, Grammy had a heart of gold. Her selflessness left a good example for us all. She is in my thoughts almost every day, and Florence and I do our best to carry on her legacy. Sometimes when I’m working in our vegetable garden, I’m almost sure I can hear Grammy yell, “Don’t just stand there! Hoe those weeds!” ♦

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Charley and I got into big, loud discussions about who knows what. She’d holler, “Better for people to wonder if you’re stupid than start jabbering and them know it.”  
Now that I’m in middle age, I can see that Grammy was a wise old gal indeed.  
Life used to be so much simpler. You didn’t have to try to remember a password to pay a bill or make a phone call. At the grocery store, if you wanted bread, there was white, whole wheat or rye. Potato chips were plain or ruffled. Your car had a few buttons, knobs, and levers that did everything. I’m not against so called “smart” conveniences if that’s what they really are. I am against that feeling of being overwhelmed by how complicated most things have become. In my younger days, people didn’t have constant interruptions in their lives from newsfeeds on their phones or selfie pictures popping up we really didn’t want to see. Grammy would often say, “Don’t expect to make good decisions if your head is full of noise and mush.”

It takes a while to know what you’re really like deep inside. Do you like to be around

people a lot, part of the time, or not much at all? My friend Charley likes to be around

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# My First Job

Judy McMillie

My dad owned an ice cream store in Onawa, Iowa, in my childhood, but he sold more than just ice cream. We had a small café in the back with a few booths and tables, and an eight-stool counter. My mom handled the grill, and the hamburgers and other grilled sandwiches tasted so good.

In the third grade, they let me serve coffee to the people at the counter. Though small for my age and a tomboy, I enjoyed pouring for the customers. Mostly farmers came in for coffee and conversation, but sometimes Dad's friends or other businessmen in town dropped by.

One incident stands out in my mind. It happened one day while I was "working." I served a customer a five-cent cup of coffee. He gave me a quarter. I knew I needed to give him change in return, but didn't know how much. I went to the cash register and took a dime and a nickel after putting in the quarter. When I returned the change to the customer, he told me I still owed him a nickel. I felt mortified! In those days, students started learning how to do math in their heads in the third grade. I wasn't very good at it yet, and it felt like that customer gave me an F on my homework. I considered for a bit, apologized, and returned to the cash register for a nickel. Later, I asked my dad if I did the right thing, and he said yes.

It was the best lesson I could ever have learned. Being a nice guy, he corrected me with kindness. He caused me to think about math, and to realize I needed to spend more time practicing sums in my head and making change by counting up from the bottom instead

of depending on our cash register to tell me the sum.

I loved hanging around my dad's store. A big newsstand sat in the front where I could spend hours, if allowed. I loved reading the comic books and the movie magazines, and I liked a music magazine that printed all the words to all the popular songs. I read and reread everything. The "magazine man" came once a week to update all the display items, much to my excitement. The newspaper boys brought the daily and weekly papers each morning. I fell in love with periodicals back then and still love them today.

I don't believe I got paid for my work at the coffee counter, but we kids always got an allowance. Our parents expected us to do our chores, mind them, and behave ourselves. We took part of our allowance with us to Sunday school each week for a tithe. Mom tied my pennies or nickel into the corner of my hanky. I felt proud to put it in the collection plate. I spent part of my weekly sum at Daddy's store. We couldn't eat there unless we paid for our food. My parents deducted money from my allowance to compensate for my laziness, my insubordination, or to pay for something I broke running and playing around the house. There never seemed to be enough money each week. Another life lesson!

When I got older, I moved from serving coffee to the ice cream counter. The hand-held scoop made serving that stiff ice cream a challenge. Dad's ice cream cones had room for two dips, side-by-side, and that item sold for a nickel. We also hand-packed our pints and quarts, which made for hard work for a puny kid like me. We made sundaes, banana splits, sodas, malts and shakes. To make a malt, we placed all the ingredients in the metal cup, then put the cup on the malt machine and waited for it to mix it to perfection. Home style malts used the same ingredients, but we had to mix them by hand. It took a while to get the stiff ice cream to mix with the milk and cream, but it tasted enough better that people paid extra for it. I was too much of a weakling to make a home style malt.

My dad made his own ice cream in the two machines he had, and he experimented with all kinds of colors and flavors. One of his favorites (not mine!) was black walnut. He loved lemon custard and strawberry/banana.



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I learned about hard work at a young age, and I still love to work today. My favorite jobs through the years supplied me with a regular

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paycheck, of course. By the time my children were old enough to work outside our home (age 10), they worked as farm labor for friends and neighbors, or as hired hands during the haying or irrigation season. They got regular paychecks. All three of them are productive civic-minded citizens today, and I attribute that to early training. Loving to work is an important attribute. ♦

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# A Mother's Guide

Jerry Bloss

An angel appeared to a new mother whom God gave the beautiful role of being her guide. She learned that this gift from heaven would stay with her all along her road of life. When she saw it the first time, she asked, "Is this a long way?"

The angel answered, "Yes, and it is hard. You will be old when you reach the end. But the end will be far better and brighter than the beginning."

It made the young mother so happy. She couldn't believe there could be anything better than these first years. She played with the children and gathered flowers with them all along the way. She bathed them in clear spring waters and watched as the sun shone upon them. A deep happiness bloomed in her heart when she knew nothing could ever be lovelier than this.

Then the night drew down upon them and their path became dark. The children shook with fear and cold. Mother drew them near and

they grew weary. But all along the way she told them, "Have a little patience. We will soon be there." They climbed and climbed. When they reached the top, they told her, "Mother, we couldn't have done it without you."

When mother rested at the end of this day, she gazed at the stars. "This was a better day than yesterday, because today these earthly angels of mine have learned fortitude in the face of extreme difficulties. Yesterday, I gave them courage. Today, I gave them strength."

On the morning of the following day, dark clouds descended upon us. Clouds of evil, hate, greed and war. Mother's children groped and stumbled and through the thunder Mother cried out, "Look up. Lift your eyes to the light. It's there, above the clouds. It's always there. Believe it. Find it. See it. And the children looked. They found an everlasting Glory. This Heavenly light took them far beyond darkness of any kind.

When night finally came, Mother told the angel, "This is the best day of all, for I have shown God to my children."

The days went on, followed by months and years. Mother grew old and felt the pains of age. Her children grew tall and strong. They walked with courage. When the path turned rough, they lifted her, for she had become as light as a white feather. At last they came to another hill. Not as high as those difficult ones. When they reached the top, they looked beyond and saw a shining road with the gates of a one hundredth birthday. Gates that so many seldom find. They were



flung wide, and the air filled with voices singing, "Happy birthday, great, great grandmother. We all love you so dearly. Thank you for staying with us so long and for all our lives!" ♦

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covered them with her mantle. They looked up into her loving eyes and said, "Mother, we're not really afraid, for you are near and we know no harm will come." The morning came and there before them was a hill. They knew they had to climb it and before they reached the top,

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# Pearl Hart

**How does a respectable young woman** from a well-to-do Ontario family wind up in Arizona’s notorious Yuma Territorial Prison?

Although many details of Pearl Hart’s life story are obscured by the legends that sprang up around her in the last days of the Old West, we do still know basic facts. Pearl Taylor Hart grew up in Lindsay, Ontario, part of the upper-middle-class Taylor family. Her parents were religious, well-educated, and wealthy enough to give their children excellent educations. They enrolled Pearl in a ladies’ boarding school, no doubt expecting she would emerge a polished Victorian lady who would attract an appropriate husband.

Instead, Pearl eloped with a gambler and con artist named Frederick Hart, running away from her boarding school to marry him at seventeen. Over the next few years, the Harts moved from place to place, sometimes together and sometimes not. Reportedly, Frederick was abusive, especially when intoxicated. Like so many abusers, he could also charm and persuade, and Pearl reunited with him repeatedly.

Frederick found a job as a barker at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893, and Pearl traveled there with him. While there, she attended lectures by influential women such as Julia Ward Howe, the abolitionist poet who wrote *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* and advocated for women’s suffrage. Pearl also attended Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, where she became fascinated with sharpshooter

Annie Oakley and the idea of the Wild West. Fueled by the fiery words of female lecturers and the dazzling prowess of Annie Oakley, Pearl mustered up the courage to leave her abuser. She took a train to Trinidad, Colorado, where she found work as a singer and a cook, but reluctantly went back east when she realized she was expecting her first child. Pearl stayed with

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her mother was gravely ill. She had no money for tickets back to Ohio, but she was desperate to return to her mother and her children. Pearl’s new paramour, Joe Boot, suggested they could rob a local stagecoach to get her train fare. Somehow, this seemed like the best option. She cut her hair short, dressed up in men’s clothing, and helped Boot rob the stagecoach that ran between Globe and Florence, Arizona. Hart and Boot got away with over \$400, but they got lost while trying to evade a posse and were captured after a few days.

Pearl Hart was held in jail in Tucson, and her story caught the attention of the national media, who dubbed her the “Bandit Queen.” She happily posed for photographs for reporters, signed autographs, and gave interviews. She even briefly escaped from jail before her trial. And she won her trial

and got them both off the hook for armed robbery with her impassioned speech to the jury, claiming all she wanted was to see her dying mother one more time.

Alas, this didn’t work at their second trial for tampering with the U.S. mail. They were found guilty and sentenced to Yuma Territorial Prison, Pearl for five years, and Joe for thirty. Boot eventually escaped and disappeared, while the Arizona Territorial Governor pardoned Hart after serving less than half her sentence.

Pearl Hart joined Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show briefly, under an alias. She gave lectures on life inside the prison at Yuma and attempted to write and publish her life’s story. Slowly, she faded into obscurity. Census records show she married a respectable rancher named Bywater and lived on his Arizona ranch until they both died in 1955, within four months of each other.

Although not the only woman to rob a coach, Pearl Hart’s reputation as the Bandit Queen endured long after the facts about her life blurred and faded away. ♦

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# A Cow in the Kitchen!

Don H. Homan Jr.

“Bernadette Montoya’s grandparents just bought a boat!” my granddaughter announced over a mouthful of mashed potatoes during dinner. “They plan to use it every weekend until school starts in September! Can we get one too?” She knew her requests of Grandma and me were slam dunks in her favor. “We can meet her family at the lake and park our boats next to each other at the marina!”

“That’s all we need,” I responded. “No milk machines for me!”

“Milk machine?” she asked. “Who said anything about a milk machine? I was talking about a boat! You need to get your hearing checked, Grandpa!”

“Let me tell you a story, pumpkin.” I wondered how in the world I would connect the boat my granddaughter envisioned with a bulky, stainless-steel milk refrigerator and dispenser my parents were lucky enough to receive following the retirement of my Aunt Miranda Casados and the closure of her longstanding family restaurant, Miranda’s Mexican Kitchen.

Back in the early 1960s, when I was only ten, my Aunt Miranda retired and closed her little restaurant. We were sad to see it go, having had dinner there at least once a week for as long as I could remember. When she closed it up for the last time, she sold the tables and chairs, serving trays, dishes, kitchen implements, and appliances at auction. Nobody bid on the old, dented milk refrigerator and dispensing machine she had used for decades, so she asked my parents if they wanted it. My parents, being frugal people, couldn’t pass up on a bargain, so they brought it home and made room for it in our kitchen.

“This will make breakfast much easier,” my mother said, “everyone will just fill their cereal bowls with cereal and sugar and add frosty milk from the machine! No milk bottles to mess with, no spills or broken glass, and we never run out of milk! The milk arrives on our front porch in a five-gallon plastic bag within a cardboard box, fits snugly inside the machine, connects with a snap to the delivery tube, and *voilà*, fresh frosty milk on tap!”

Her children, all five of us, let out a collective cheer heard around the globe.

We loved our milk machine, referring to it as the “Cow in the Kitchen.” It quickly became a member of the family and became known far

and wide by our many friends who found themselves in our kitchen in late summer, filling their bellies with ice-cold milk as we took breaks from our play. Drinking regular tap water (or directly out of the garden hose) had fallen out of fashion, and frosty milk became a staple in the lives of my siblings and the neighborhood children. Why not? The milk was nutritious, delicious, and oh so plentiful! Who wants a regular drink of water when 16 ounces of frosty milk beckoned from the shiny stainless-steel milk manufacturing shrine that occupied the space next to our avocado-green Philco refrigerator? The one dwarfed by the shiny, imposing, lactose-dispensing behemoth?

“Let’s go to Donny’s for refreshments on the way to baseball practice,” Scott said, inviting himself and the entire infield to my house to pay homage to our always willing to please metallic bovine. And with a snap of the fingers, six parched, sweat-soaked, and rail-thin boys found themselves in our kitchen, filling up on the life-giving fluid I eventually learned was rapidly transporting my modestly frugal family directly to the proverbial poorhouse.

“You have to be kidding me!” my father bellowed from his roll-top desk in the dining room. “There’s no way we could have consumed that much milk! Family meeting, now! You kids that don’t live here need to go home. *Now!*”

When we were all assembled, my father moderated his tone, but the veins in his forehead bulged like a network of gulches and creeks following a heavy rain. “Have you kids been bathing in milk? I have the bill from the dairy company and it nearly equals the budget for all our monthly groceries. How in the world has this happened?”

“I don’t know, Dad,” I responded. “We just like milk, I guess.”

“I think we’re all to blame,” Mama said. She knew the parents of the milk-thirsty brood were the ultimate architects of the moo-juice fiasco, having invited the infernal budgetary black-hole into our kitchen in the first place.

“Well, that monster is going to the scrap heap as soon as the last carton is empty,” Father declared.

We knew, then and there, the dairy-land express was leaving the station for the last time, never to return. Within two days, the glorious dairy-dispenser had left our kitchen. Mother replaced it with the desk and

bookshelf containing her recipe books that had occupied the space prior to becoming the temporary home of our own sacred cow.

“That’s why we won’t be getting a boat,” I told my granddaughter. “They’re like milk machines. Easy to get, great to have, and expensive to keep and maintain. I’ll talk to the Montoya’s and ask them if we can join them at

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the marina from time to time and let them know we’d be willing to help them cover the costs for fuel and towing the boat to and from the lake. I think they’ll be more than happy to accept my offer, particularly after they’ve owned the boat for a while.”

“Okay, Grandpa,” my granddaughter replied, obviously disappointed by my refusal to purchase our own floating milk machine. “By the way, what happened to your milk machine?”

“They scrapped it for the sheet-metal and used the materials to build a boat!” I said with a wink and a hug. ♦

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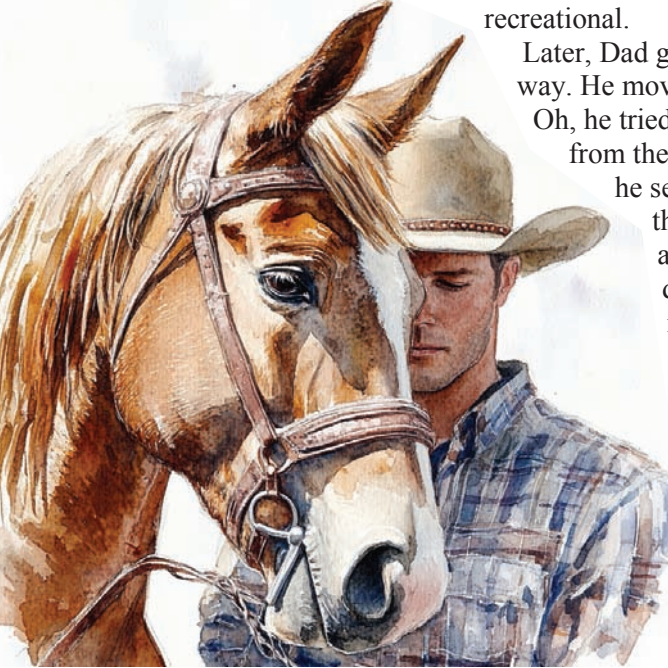
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Victor T. Anderson

# Cowboys Anonymous

Hello, I'm John. I'm a cowboy. Oh, sure, I denied it for many years, but as I stand here before you now, I have to admit it. I used to call myself a stockman, or a ranch hand, but I am a cowboy. My dad warned me. He was raised on a homestead and began to fool with horses at a very young age. Fortunately, the depression came along and he could no longer afford the habit. Oh, he kept a few horses around "for work," a socially acceptable reason in those days. But in this modern world, work is not an excuse. For most of us, it is recreational.



Later, Dad got into it in a big way. He moved to Montana. Oh, he tried to get away from them, but later on he seemed to feel there was no alternative. I don't think he realized how important horses had become to him. At one time, he had 100 teams of work horses, 200 draft and half-draft horses. The heavy stuff. He involved his friends and acquaintances. Men came from everywhere. They would be all day in the fields, driving horses hour after hour. To make it better, they'd change teams two or three times a day. They'd have the horses pulling various farm implements, nearly in a frenzy to cut and stack hay or get a piece of ground ready for seeding before rain came and made

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them stop. When it rained, they'd fret and stew, pace, smoke cigarettes and comment on the vagaries of the weather, concerned the moisture would keep them from going back out.

Once I learned to ride, I used the family horse to bring in the milk cow. When I grew older, I began going to other ranches every chance I got, riding horses to chase cows, or driving them while hauling hay. It made no difference whether I drove or rode them. I had to be

around them. I even began riding them on weekends at rodeos. If I got bucked off, I got back on. I didn't want to be away from them. Gentle or un-tamed, I wanted the thrill. Mother also loved them. When she became pregnant, she kicked the habit, but she told me about her prior life. A mother's warning. Did I heed her warning? No.

I recall the day I bought my first horse, a mare, from a "friend," who had several of them. He also had a stallion. I am convinced he intended to use the "cute little colts" to entice me into his herd. He offered the use of his stud. I held myself back from floundering even further into the manure and said no. I didn't realize how base I had become, until I turned the mare out in my parents' barnyard, right where my younger brothers and sisters would be tempted. I told my siblings, "Sure, ride the horse."

The next day, when I came to get her, there were seven children on her, tainted by "Ride the horse." Such a simple statement. How many children have been

drawn in by my saying, "Yes, you can ride the horse?"

Anyone who becomes a cowboy will never kick the habit. Once you become a cowboy, you remain one. It will haunt you for the rest of your life. You may move into town, or to a larger city, but you won't escape. I thought I had it licked once. I married and took a respectable job in

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the city. I became successful. I wore a suit and a tie and went to seminars and workshops. I sold my saddle and my spurs and lost my hat. I didn't know it then, but I was on top of the world.

Then, one day, an acquaintance asked if I would help brand calves. I dug out my riding boots from the back of my closet. Oh, how comfortable they were. I had flashbacks of glorious days gone by. When I got home that night, I cleaned them up and kept them in the front of my closet. After all, I told myself, I paid good money for those boots. It's a shame not to wear them. But, I'd only use them for branding or for dancing.

The next weekend, I went to help at the ranch again. When I came home that night, I put the boots away without cleaning them. I guess I knew I'd be using them again soon. Then I began wearing them to work. I called a rancher to see if he needed help riding. I'd irrigate, fix fence, or whatever he asked, if he'd let me move cows, check the bulls, or whatever he had. I told my wife it was so we could have money for those extras, the things we couldn't otherwise afford. I knew I was slipping back into old habits, but I couldn't stop.

Soon, I was back where I started, manure on my boots in public places. Instead of ties with a tie tack, it was Chinese silk neckerchiefs with a braided rawhide slide. Instead of cufflinks, spurs. You can't kick the habit. One day you're driving a mini-van, the next, a pickup truck. Instead of going to ball games, you find yourself at a team roping. On anniversaries, you buy your sweetheart a silver mounted bit instead of a bracelet with diamonds; chaps, when she wanted a negligee. Mark my words. Someday, you will tell your grandchild you were a cowboy, hoping to warn them. It won't work.

You are a cowboy. You always will be. By telling your story, no matter how tragic, you will have planted the seed into your young charge's mind. That's when you will find the final damnation. Yes, you have seduced another young, unsuspecting child, who will now want to be a cowboy, and follow the cowboy creed. I am a cowboy. May God help me. ♦



## Line-Dried Clothes

In today's world of Instapot cooking, fast-paced entertainment, and 24-hour news, the simple act of hanging out the laundry might seem inefficient or obsolete. Gone are the days when cooking was a labor of love, or meal preparation brought families together. Instead, digital distractions pull us in, whether it's the latest movie or an endless stream of advertisements. Yet for me, and perhaps many others, this routine provides a moment of calm. Stepping into the fresh air, gripping the laundry basket, I escape the pressures of deadlines, notifications, and my endless to-do list.

The rhythmic motion of pinning each garment to the line is meditative. As the sun warms my back and the breeze rustles the leaves, I am reminded of a simpler, slower way of living. One that feels precious in our modern world.

My earliest memory of hanging laundry is standing beside my mother, handing her wooden clothespins from the wicker basket. She'd take two from my hand, hold one between her teeth, and clip the edge of a towel with the other. The pulley squeaked as she pulled the line taut and clipped the towel in place. Pin, pull, squeak, pin. The rhythmic music continued until the basket emptied and the damp pile of laundry fluttered in the breeze.

With mittened hands, Mom hung laundry outside until the first snow of winter. Once the weather warmed and the snow melted to allow enough clearance for the laundry, our clothes again swayed in the crisp spring air.

Today, I continue this tradition, taking advantage of the dry heat of the eastern plains. Here, clothes dry quickly under the sun's steady gaze, which not only wicks away the moisture, but kills bacteria. There is satisfaction in knowing that nature is doing the work with no chemicals, no noise; just sunlight and air. Line-dried clothes have a crispness I love. Towels, stiffened in the breeze, provide a gentle abrasiveness that is invigorating after a shower. I remember my mother's embarrassment, though, over

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those same rough towels. Feeling her city-dwelling parents might judge her, she always tossed them in the dryer to soften before their visits.

I approach the task methodically; towels on one line, precisely folded over the line, creating a natural crease for easier folding later. Shirts hung right side out and clipped carefully at the hem to avoid crimping. When they are dry, I am just as methodical about removing them from the line as my mother. She folded each piece before it went into the laundry basket, making the next step of putting them away easier. Unless, of course, she was trying to beat an impending downpour. Then the clothes came off the line at record speed.

The weather report or an overflowing hamper dictates when I do laundry. It's never done according to the rhyme "Wash on Monday, iron on Tuesday, mend on Wednesday..." Early colonial times followed or created this "rule" which allowed time for the clothes to dry and be ironed just in time for church, the following Sunday.

There is something profoundly satisfying about slowing down and letting nature do the work. This meditative practice of hanging the laundry is a gentle reminder that sometimes the simplest acts can bring the greatest sense of fulfillment. ♦

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Linda O’Connell

# Mama’s Girl

As a child, I wore dress ups, played with baby dolls, and emulated my mother. On hot summer evenings, I sat on the gently sloping lawn, thick with clover flowers, and listened to my parents talk about the day’s events. While other mothers wore make-up and teetered on high heels, mine never did. This morning, as I slipped my feet into my new pair of wedges, the shoes Mom used to wear, I took a nostalgic stroll.

As a high-school freshman, I swapped clothes and purses with Mom. She didn’t allow me to wear make-up like the other girls, but even though she could come across as overprotective, Mom was okay and called me “her girl.”

When I became a senior, I didn’t want to be anything like the woman I strongly resembled. Complete strangers would stop us and comment we looked like sisters. The last thing I wanted to hear was, “You look just like your mother,” given the twenty-year gap between us. I sought my own identity and independence, and I didn’t want to be anything like my mother. I planned to get married and start my life. I couldn’t wait to get away from Mom’s restrictive rules.

In June, Mom turned forty-two, and I celebrated my twenty-second birthday. Every other day, she walked a mile to our house to dote on and spoil Tracey, her first grandbaby. She referred to her as “MY Girl.” I enjoyed Mom’s company again, plus she was always available to babysit her girl.

“Mom, why don’t you let me put make-up on you?” I begged until she finally gave in. I poofed her hair into a bouffant, tinted her lips, rouged her cheeks, and smudged sky blue eye shadow across her lids. “You look beautiful!”

She dashed to the mirror and said, “I look painted. This isn’t me,” but she left the makeup on to please me. As we

sat across from one another dunking Danish—she always brought bakery goods—I had to stifle a gasp and laughter. One of her heavy eyelids sunk into the socket, and the blue eye shadow disappeared into the fold. She looked like a clown with one bright blue lid.

“You’re probably right, Mom. You look great without makeup.” I reached for the cold cream.

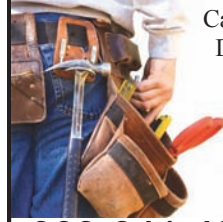


Mom decided lipstick made her look youthful, but she only wore it when going out. One day she smiled at the next-door neighbor with bright pink lips and no front teeth. Her mouth sunk in like a collapsed clay pot. She had forgotten her dentures. I felt totally embarrassed for her and myself. “I’ll never be like that!” I vowed.

I was forty and Mom was sixty when we watched with joy as my twenty-year-old daughter’s baby, Ashley, ripped wrapping paper off her first birthday presents. I overheard my daughter whisper to my mom, “Gram, I adore you, but Mom drives me crazy! I hope I’m never like her.”

The years piled up. At fifty-five, I strolled into Mom’s hospital room. What a place to celebrate her seventy-fifth birthday. I asked if she had a nail clipper. She handed me her

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purse. I discovered a bottle of moisturizer and a razor wrapped in a paper towel. “What is this for?” I asked. She smiled self-consciously and tapped above her top lip, rolled her eyes and said, “You just wait!”

No wonder her kisses sometimes felt abrasive. I shook my head and silently vowed never to act like Mom. She had become a real embarrassment with her bristly lip, droopy lids, sometimes toothless grin, and unfiltered comments.

The doctor poked his head into her room and laughed at the sight of Mom’s birthday cake with candles blazing and three generations singing Happy Birthday. When my daughter, Tracey, left the room, her teen daughter,

Ashley, shared with Mom and me, “My mom knows nothing! I can’t wait to go to college and get away from her!”

I chuckled, remembering.

After I cleaned up the party mess, I washed my hands, looked into the mirror and admitted that I resembled my mother more each day. I massaged moisturizer into my facial creases and wondered when my eyelids got so heavy. I listened to the conversation in the room, and I smiled when my daughter returned and joked, “Gram, we all have the same family traits: your sassy mouth and heavy eyelids.”

Ashley groaned, “Mom, how embarrassing!” She uttered the same phrase under her breath repeated by multiple generations, “I hope I never act like that.”

After everyone departed, I walked over and planted a kiss on Mom’s wrinkled cheek and said, “I love you.” I expected her to reply with something sweet. Instead, she motioned me close to her face and whispered something profound. She tapped her lip, pointed at mine. “Honey, my razor’s in my purse if you want to use it.”

We laughed out loud.

Mom was always spunky, God-fearing, and fun-loving. I entered the hospital elevator, sent up a silent prayer for our family matriarch, and rubbed the space above my top lip. With tears in my eyes, even with my image blurred, the mirror reflected what everyone told me: “You look so much like your mother.” ♦

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# Out in the Wilds

Beth R. Kiteley

Something woke me. Not a sound—my sleep had been just under the surface. Not light—the sun barely tickled the treetops around our camp. Not wind—the air was a calm pool under barely blue skies.

I sat up to lift the tent flap at the foot of my sleeping bag. Dark eyes met mine. A deer stood twenty feet away. She looked at me. Sitting like a stone, I gazed back. Satisfied that I meant her no harm, she turned her head and strolled on through our campsite and into the surrounding forest.

Shivering with cold, I draped the flap over a nearby gearbox and huddled back into my sleeping bag to watch the sun come up. What a way to begin a camping career! I never saw another deer in our campsite, maybe



What small faith I had. The little animal opened and ate a half-full package of oatmeal cookies, and went on his way, not leaving a trace of his presence. Our camping experiences thus ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Friends taught us to camp, and the first time we tried it on our own, we loaded the car with necessities, then unloaded and started over, since we hadn't left enough room for passengers. By the time we gave up camping, we could stow the necessities in the trunk of our Mercury with room to spare. Breakfast consisted of a foam cup and a plastic spoon for each person, a pot of hot

water, a jar of Tang, a container of instant cocoa and a box of instant oatmeal packets. In our cups we made Tang, drank that, then oatmeal and ate that, and topped things off with a cup of cocoa. Cups were washed and recycled, or if too dilapidated, burned or trashed.

One camping trip we admired red-faced Mars; another, long after everyone else slept, my oldest daughter and I watched an enormous moon sail across a star-studded sky.

Many times, I got so cold I shivered all night. No matter how many pieces of clothing I donned, nor how many blankets I piled on top, my midsection always was cold. Only morning and a campfire to huddle around could warm me up. Once, however, camping on the

Colorado River in June, we were so hot no one could sleep.

Rain nearly always accompanied our camping, and wind could complicate things too. One evening on the Columbia River, I held the tent's center pole as the rest of the family stretched out the canvas. The wind suddenly picked up, and left me standing by the pole, wrapped in canvas, while my family, having let go their respective ropes, howled with laughter.

But the bookends of all those experiences are the deer our first time out, and on our last, a sunset that spread from horizon to horizon in wild splashes of red, gold and orange, until my son gasped, "Is it the end of the world?" No, just a glorious way to end an era of camping. ♦

the nearest town. I knew we wouldn't have any edible food for breakfast.

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because in later years, we used established campgrounds populated by other campers. We even stayed in Yosemite's tent city one uncomfortable evening.

At Cedar Breaks in Utah, we had a small campground all to ourselves. Tired after a long day driving east across California deserts, we turned in early, leaving our gear outside the tent. Almost asleep, I heard rustling, and grabbing the flashlight, again sat up and lifted the tent flap.

This intruder didn't look at me, nor thank goodness, did he turn his back. Instead, the little skunk continued to explore the contents of a box. I watched a moment, then lay down, wondering how far it was to



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# Unintended Plus One?

Barbara Melendrez

**Stretching her legs onto the ottoman**, Lynn always enjoyed her end-of-day routine. Since leaving the hectic schedule of being a full-time ER nurse, she got accustomed to her evenings being peaceful. Lynn knew something was amiss when she heard loud squawking out near her enclosed chicken coop. This coop was more like a house. As it ran heat, lights, and, when

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Lynn gathered eggs, it even featured soft classical music. Grabbing her jacket, she flipped on the yard and coop lights. Unfortunately, the loud cacophony continued as she rushed down the back steps. There, in the fenced area around her property, next to the chicken yard, was a plump red hen running up and down the fence line. The squawking was more like frightened and frantic screaming, as if the poor bird was yelling, “Help! Let me out. Help! Help!” Lynn was sure the bird was going to get hurt as it ran

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close to the fence. She grabbed her garden gloves, and she spoke in her quietest voice to calm the anxious biddy. “Alright now, little one. Shhh, it’s okay,” Lynn cooed as she approached the fluffy bird. To her surprise, the bird seemed to take a breath as they made eye contact. Well, it felt like eye contact to Lynn. *What in the world?*



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Wending her way around the lawn chairs, Lynn set the hen on the picnic table to check for injuries, but the little creature seemed to prefer being close to her, and not on the tabletop. That’s how they ended up in the mudroom. As Lynn sat on an old farm chair, the hen nestled on Lynn’s warm lap. “Well, girl, where did you

come from?” she asked, knowing the abandoned bird had been left in her yard. The fence was simply too high. As she stroked the red-feathered neck, Lynn startled as the hen moved its beak toward Lynn’s bare wrist. Expecting a peck, the hen merely rubbed its beak softly to the left, and then to the right; back and forth, apparently ‘petting’ Lynn.

She chuckled, realizing this chicken must have been someone’s pet. It was as if the grateful red lady was expressing gratitude for being rescued from the strange yard. Being close to bedtime, and with the temperatures outside dropping low, Lynn carried the bird to her enclosed shower. “Okay, but just for tonight,” warned Lynn as she made a ‘nest’ using a pink towel. The little red pullet settled into the curve of the fabric. Placing down some newspapers and a dish of fresh water, Lynn told the chicken good night and went to bed. There she reminded herself that she did not need another mouth to feed and then slept the sleep of those who expect to rest well.

In the morning, Lynn wondered if she had dreamed of the rejected farm bird as she had not heard a peep, nor a chirp, from the bathroom. Upon checking though, the bright-eyed hen clucked her cheerful greeting as Lynn looked into the shower. Not a dream. Lynn kept her Monday schedule of volunteering at the library but was sure to close the bathroom door. No need for Snow, her big cat, to become curious about their guest. That afternoon, the red hen enjoyed some fresh air and sunshine inside the old dog run.

At sundown, Lynn brought the bird inside. “This is a temporary situation. After all, you were not invited, nor are you paying rent,” mentioned Lynn. Just for fun, Lynn set the hen on her lap as she watched a *Bonanza* rerun. “Adam is my favorite, but Little Joe is more



popular,” confided Lynn as she patted the hen’s back. The hen rubbed Lynn’s wrist gently. Then they were off to the nest and to bed for another sweet sleep.

Upon awakening, Lynn was ready to begin re-homing the chicken. This little lady fowl would not be joining her flock members: Wilma, Jolly, Mable, Muriel, Kati, Tar, or Heather. Nope, this no-name bird had to go. Everyone knows an existing brood won’t easily accept a new member. So, there won’t be a need to name this little lady. But first it was time to get no-name out into the sun, thought Lynn.

As Lynn opened the shower door, she lifted the hen and took a long breath. To her surprise, a bright olive-green egg lay in the middle of the pink nest. “Aw sweetie, I stand corrected. You do plan to pay rent. Lynn smiled. “That’s it then. Rosey Posey, you’re invited to stay. I’ll call Handyman Stan. He’ll need to reassemble the old, small coop just for you. Welcome home. I hope you like watching *Jeopardy*.” ♦

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# Afternoonified

Kathy Padgett

I loved spending special afternoons with my Aunt Myrtie, “Auntie M.” She was a “true blue, Victorian Lady,” compassionate, refined, and inspiring, with a house full of unique Victorian Era furniture and valuable historical antiques inherited from her parents, grandparents and great-grand parents.

Auntie M believed it her duty to make sure I was completely afternoonified (a Victorian word meaning the art of becoming refined, intelligent, and sophisticated). So we spent many tickety-boo (delightful) hours in her parlor, an elegant room showcasing two heirloom Louis XV Dancing Lady tapestry armchairs, a throne-like Louis XV gentleman’s chair, and a vintage English Country loveseat. I felt like a princess when I sat on the loveseat and ran my fingers over the upholstered smoky green, regal damask fabric seat that highlighted the ornately carved mahogany frame with its intertwined ivy vines and roses. Sixty years later, the “princess feeling” still lingers in my heart and mind when I relax on Auntie M’s loveseat because it has a prominent place in my master bedroom.

I knew when it was time to be afternoonified, because Auntie M looked all giggle-mugged (smiling from ear to ear) as she opened the elegant, extra large parlor door. An artfully etched design of a huge urn overflowing with roses, chrysanthemums, and twirling vines adorned the bottom half of the frosted glass. Five butterflies led the way upward to a robin, with three musical notes coming out of his mouth, sitting on a foot high letter “J” which represented the family name of Johnson.

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Stepping into the parlor, Auntie M said, “Good afternoon, Lady Kathleen. You’ll find your teatime gown on the loveseat. Quick! Don’t lollygag! Pull it over your head! Then sit in the small Dancing Lady armchair. Our Darjeeling tea is brewed and ready.”

I owned a favorite dress made of soft, light blue cotton. It was bell-shaped and floor-length, with lovely lace embroidery on the sleeves, neckline, and hem. Auntie M wore a cotton emerald green Edwardian style skirt, floor length with a short pleated train in the back, and an olive green velvet jacket with long

puffed sleeves, embroidered white lace neckline and five decorative brass buttons up the front.

I wanted to start a jolly (clap my hands with excitement) when I saw the table!

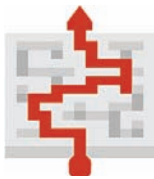


A basket of fresh flowers from her flower/arbor garden held the place of honor in the center of the rosewood white marble top. Fragrance from the large pale yellow Peace Roses, with soft pink swirly edges, blended with the slightly spicy scent of the white lily of the valley, made me sneeze. An elegant sterling silver tea set sat on an extra large floral scrollwork silver tray. The teapot had a swan’s neck handle and rested on a warming stand next to a sugar bowl, creamer, tongs, and tiny teaspoons. Its highly polished brilliant shine demanded the

place of prominence on the left side. The woody/floral aroma of the Darjeeling black tea made my nose tingle and my mouth water. I enjoyed the zippy taste of the grape-like fruity flavor of the hot tea. Auntie M believed only Darjeeling would improve my concentration and give me a high level of mental clarity for the entire three-hour tea time. She didn’t want me to have any macfluffers (lapse of memory).

A place setting of a dessert plate, cup, and saucer from the world famous Havilland company, makers of elegant china, marked my eating place. We needed no cutlery. Finger food only. Whenever Auntie M wasn’t watching, I ran my fingers over the graceful pattern of blue flowers, encircling a scalloped golden edge on each piece of china. Skiamainkly (secretly) I dreamed of “knights in shining armor” to rush in and proclaim me Princess Kathleen forever!

She filled her three tiered mahogany tea caddy with shiny sliver trays full of homemade treats. Piled high on the



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Brenda Flipse

bottom were mini open-faced cucumber sandwiches, grape and almond filled chicken salad sandwiches, and “angel eggs” (not “deviled”). The second tier had bowls of freshly whipped cream and strawberry jam to put on three kinds of mini buttermilk scones—cheddar, lavender, and date. Mini sponge cakes and rose petal vanilla cookies decorated the top tier. With great pride, Auntie M used real pink or red rose petals from her backyard garden to accent the tops of her cookies, and fresh lavender buds in her scones.

Victorian etiquette required we eat from the bottom upwards. For the first hour, Auntie M used silver sugar thongs to place sandwiches on my plate. During the second hour, I got scones and jam, and we finished with cookies. No kruger-spoof (lying) after this classy food filled event, I didn’t feel hungry for quite some time!

While we sipped our tea and munched on sandwiches and sweets, Auntie M introduced me to *Jane Eyre*, *Oliver Twist*, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, *Black Beauty*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Heidi*, *Hans Brinker*, *Little Women*, Christopher

Robin, Shakespeare, Jane Austen, *Anne of Green Gables*, *Alice in Wonderland*, Monet, Van Gogh, Picasso, Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Handel, and Biblical heroes Moses, David, Esther, Ruth, Dorcas, and Jesus. They all became my dearest chuck-a-boos (friends). She taught me how to identify and name each flower in her rose arbor, rock garden, and herb patch. I never got bored or tired because we never barked at a knot (wasted any time) or got the morbs (felt sad) as we enjoyed our food, laughed and cried as we read books, looked at pictures of great works of art, and listened to music from the thick 78 records as they played on the antique Colombia Grafonola. Each session ended by doing the bear (hugging).

Sixty years later, I continue to be enthuzimuzzyed (completely enthusiastic), energized and passionate about all the nanny narking (excited fun) I had. Auntie M gave me a meaningful, lifelong appreciation for books, music, art, sweet smelling flowers, and tea and crumpets. I’m thankful! ♦

For odd words, see *Ware’s Victorian Dictionary of Slang and Phrase*.

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Dorothy Miller

# Tumbleweeds

Before I became acquainted with them, I loved tumbleweeds. It charmed me to hear stories of pioneers who told of decorating huge tumbleweeds and using them for Christmas trees. One day, I drove out and picked up a tumbleweed, spray painted it, and took it to the Adams County Museum. On the days when I volunteered at the schoolhouse, I had the children make brightly colored paper chains for decorations, just like in the good old days. I felt proud of that tumbleweed.

I found the advertisement of the tumbleweeds that went rolling over to watch a TV screen so cute. I loved the music of the Sons of the Pioneers' song, "See them tumbling down, pledging their love to the ground, lonely but free I'll be found, drifting along with the tumbling, tumbleweeds."

But my love for tumbleweeds is gone. Now I pity pioneers who were right in the path of all those rolling stickers. My enchantment with tumbleweeds has turned to disgust. Since we

live in a new development on the wide open spaces, those little and large darlings came flying across the rolling prairie, did some high jumping across our fence and imbedded themselves firmly into a big (did I say big? I mean HUGE) pile in the corner of the yard.

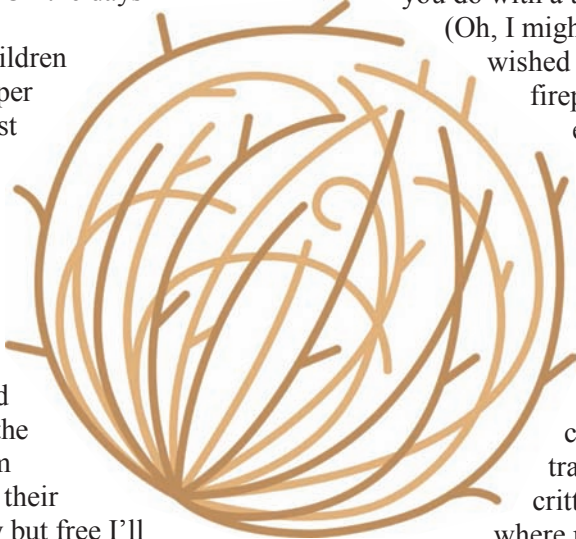
On their journey, many of them stopped to rest on the lawn. Just like picnickers in the park, in the summer, they left their trash all over the place. It frustrated me, to say the least. What can you do with a thousand tumbleweeds.?

(Oh, I might exaggerate a little.) I wished I could burn them in the fireplace, but since ours is electric, I couldn't do that. There are ordinances against burning them outside and they appeared to be quite comfortable in their resting place.

Watching how the neighbors handled it, I copied them and transported many of the critters across the street where new houses are being put

in. Did you ever try to pick up a tumbleweed? It's indescribable. Ouch just doesn't cover it.

The next time the wind blew, some of those tumbleweeds traveled on down the street to a vacant lot, but many of them liked our lawn so much they paid us a return visit.



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After telling my sad tale of woe, I discovered other people visited by tumbleweeds. One friend told me they had a lot of them when they first moved to town, but they solved the problem of the unwelcome stickery visitors by burning them. She suggested I wait awhile and string Christmas lights on them. That sounded like a good idea, but I got busy and didn't get that done.

I piled many of them in a large plastic



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furniture bag and dragged them to a ditch in an empty lot, this time a couple of blocks away, but the picnickers had left their mess. I spent part of two days raking and still didn't get through it all. I knew I was getting old when I found that raking is work!

Relief came (temporarily, I'm afraid) when my daughter Linda and her two sons came from New Mexico to see us. They too have



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tumbleweeds and the boys told me their dad burns them in their fireplace, but it seems they leave a foul odor in the house. That made me glad I never tried it.

The offer of crossing their palms with silver brought life to the situation, and both boys pitched in real fast to rake and clean the yard. Eleven-year-old Dustin didn't last long, but sixteen-year-old David did a good job. Our stickery visitors were soon lodged in trash sacks. I breathed a sigh of relief when I waved goodbye to those pesky tumbleweeds when the trash man picked them up.

I better enjoy it now; it probably won't be long until we have more of the little dears. ♦

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# Every Day is Easter

Prairie Parson

Easter mornin', I got up real early in the dark feelin' kinda cranky. "The darn wind's blowin' again," I mumbled.

"How long have you lived in Colorado?" the missus asked.

I jerked and looked around, not knowin' she was there. "About 70 years, I reckon. Why?"

She sighed. "And you're surprised?"

That's true. Not a lot of days around these parts ain't got no wind.

We headed off to the little canyon where the folks I pastor were gatherin' for a Sunrise service. It wasn't so bad in the canyon where the bluffs and ancient pines slowed down the wind. Slim, one of the fellers in our group, was already strummin' his guitar, gettin' ready to lead us in a few songs. After some singin', it got light in the east, so I read the Easter Story in the Bible to the folks. That wonderful age old story about the empty tomb. Somebody'd brung a folding table and chairs.

After the service, we all helped ourselves to warm breakfast burritos and cinnamon rolls somebody else had toted along to put on that table. It was heart warmin', sittin' around talkin' about things we each cared about.

Amy asked us if anybody knew about her neighbor Sue, whose husband landed in the clinker because of a DWI. The police had impounded their truck and her old car barely ran. Dutch said he had a little extra cash to get the truck out and would do it tomorrow. Slim

offered to take a gander at her car, to see if he could make it run at least until she could get it to the shop.

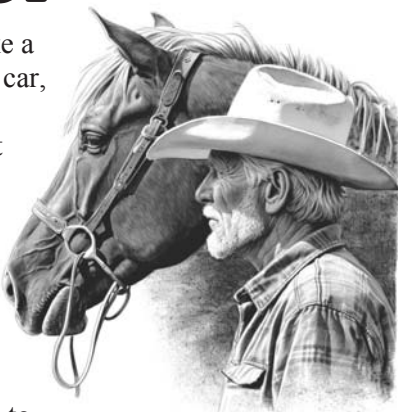
Another couple, Tex and his wife Rosa, offered to do the ranchin' and help out Sue until she could bail out her husband.

It ain't the first time those boys have offered to be nice to someone who ain't even in our church. It don't matter to them who needs help, just to do the helpin'.

That put me in a quiet frame of mind. It dawned on me that I'm surrounded by good folks, both in and outside my little church. The kinda folks who would drop everythin' to help out, no questions needed. Some showed up with trailers to haul people's horses out of the way of a fire a few years ago. Didn't even know the folks, just knew they needed help.

That's what Jesus told us to do, to treat others like we'd like to be treated. He even told his own disciples if a Roman soldier forced them to carry his stuff for a mile, to carry it an extra mile as well.

Sometimes, you're gonna meet Jesus-like





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folks in church, and sometimes you ain't. Jesus said anyone who's ever doin what's best for other folks is doin' His work. What we do every day matters. Each new day is a blank slate we get to write on. Certain days, we're gonna wake up to a bitterly cold southeast wind and feel cranky, but we can choose to see the good instead of focusin' on how that empty feed bag keeps blowin' around out in the pasture.

I can't make the wind stop blowin'. But I can try to be available for whatever The Good Lord wants to teach me or do. On Easter mornin', he reminded me that though the winds may blow, you can weather life's storms with the good folks he directs your way. It doesn't much matter how hard it blusters, or what the wind kicks up dirt-wise, if'n you treat each day like Easter, with goodness towards your fellow humans, and do right by 'em, the same way Jesus would. ♦

## Stop the THUD

How to stop birds from killing themselves on your windows.

We've all heard the sickening thud against a glass door or a window. Sometimes the bird lives, sometimes it doesn't. (If they are laying on their backs, turn them over onto their feet so they don't pass out and die.) But it doesn't have to mean the end of its life.

With this simple method and a few hours of work, you can reduce birds from flying into windows by 90—100%. You just need paracord. It's easy.

Choose a dark paracord, because birds can see it (dark green, black, or dark brown, not pastels or blue).



Pre-soak the paracord in hot water and untangle it. This will reduce shrinkage later. (You don't have to do this, but you should allow for 2-12% shrinkage if you don't, and make the cords a lot longer than necessary to avoid bird strikes under the cords.)

Cut the paracord into the vertical lengths you need (it looks best if it runs several inches below the bottom of your window, and don't forget to add an inch for every knot you make—so if you intend to knot the top and bottom, you need to add 2 to 4 inches). Then either knot the top and bottom, or knot the top and melt the bottom with a match to stop fraying.



slip in the 7 pieces of vertical cord. Then tighten each one, making sure they are evenly spaced.

Secure the top cord to the frame around your windows, near the top. You may need a middle screw or hook to hold it in place.

For glass doors, do separate panels for each and secure them with outdoor light clips (or you can alternatively use electrical tape, which will need replaced as the wind can tear it loose).

I installed these late last summer and have had no bird strikes since then. They will tangle up sometimes in our Colorado "gale winds," but you can untangle them if they're on the first floor. I recommend securing second story cords at the top and the bottom, if you have no way of untangling them.

You may notice them for the first few days, but soon your eyes get used to them and they no longer seem to "obstruct the view." They also sway in the breeze for a calming effect.

If you need more exact directions, or want to see a YouTube video on each step, you can visit this website to order premade cords or DIY your own: [www.birdsavers.com/make-your-own/](http://www.birdsavers.com/make-your-own/) ♦

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Measure your window, then note how many pieces of paracord you need to space them 4 inches apart. Let's say you need 7 vertical ties for your window; you will need to make 7 knots, 4 inches apart, which means adding 7 inches to your paracord. (You also need 2 to 4 inches for the side double knots, and however many inches you need for the frame depending on where you want to place screws around your windows.)

It is much easier to use a spare piece of wood with headless nails spaced 4 inches apart for this next step. Create 5-7 nail loops, leaving them loose enough to



George Rice

# CHARLEY

I grew up on a cattle ranch in the dirty thirties. By age six, I rode out with my father to check on the cattle. One day, I saw a little coyote pup sitting sad and forlorn at the foot of a hill below a badger hole. A coyote had borne a litter there, and one pup had tumbled down the hill and couldn't get back up to the burrow. I thought he would make an ideal pet and pleaded that a hawk could get him before his mother found him. I promised to take good care of him.

My father gave in, but cautioned me that this was a wild animal and I shouldn't expect it to be like a farm dog. I got down from my horse, walked up to the pup, took off my jacket, and dropped it over him. He was a furry little guy, not much bigger than a teacup, with a pointy little nose, ears, and tail. I tucked him inside my shirt and he kept quiet all the way home. I didn't take him out of my shirt until I got inside my room with the door closed. As soon as I put him down, he scurried under the bed.

I taught him to drink by dipping my finger in

a cup of milk and letting him lick it. Then I put my finger closer and closer to the milk until finally he lapped it up. His pointy little tail wagged. After he filled his belly, he went under the bed and started to whine, no doubt missing his littermates. I crawled under the bed with him and he snuggled up to me. I couldn't very well stay under the bed with him, so I put him on the bed. He snuggled up to my pillow and fell sound asleep.

I'd had a friend named Charley, whose parents (victims of the dust bowl years) had moved away. I named my new pal in his honor. I fed him milk four times a day. Then cereal, ground meat, and finally the same things the dogs ate. He was thoroughly house trained.

Charley and I became best friends, and we romped all over the yard. He would sneak up on me, slinking closer and closer while I sat still. Then he pounced, growling little puppy snarls, and pretend to chew on me. He would run away, and I would chase him, but he was always too quick and I could never catch him.

We played like that all summer. Charley's puppy fur became sleek, silky hair, and

his pointy little tail grew into a respectable brush. When it was time for me to go to school, I had to go without him, but I looked back halfway there and found him

following me. The next day, I locked Charley in my room. When I got home, my mother said Charley had cried all day, so I made him a collar and tied him up in the yard. After a few days, he would follow me across the yard to the driveway and wait there until I came home. He accompanied me on my chores and we played until suppertime.

Early the next spring, I came home from school one day and found Charley tied up again. My mother said he had tried to dig into the chicken pen and my father reminded me Charley was still a wild animal. We talked about it and agreed that Charley should be tied up in the daytime, but he could still play with me when I was home and sleep with me at night.



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One night, a week later, Charley didn't want to stay in my room. He woke me up several times, and when I let him out, he sat out in the yard and looked around until I made him come inside. The next night was the same, and when I let him out, there was a big full moon, and coyotes were vocalizing in the pasture. I watched him trot out to the far side of the garden and stare toward them. We came back inside, but Charlie paced all night. His habits changed. He no longer wanted to play all day, but slept and became restless at night. After a couple of days of this, I let him out and sat on the porch to watch him on a beautiful spring evening. The stars and the moon were really bright, and crickets were chirping. Charley trotted to the far side of the garden and sat down, looking toward the pasture, then tilted his nose to the sky and answered the

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coyote calls. He ran back to me, licked my face in farewell, jumped over the garden fence, and ran off to join his friends. Somehow, I knew Charley had said goodbye and would never be back.

All that summer, whenever my father and I went riding, I called to him. Charlie would come up to us, yip or snarl and invite me to chase him, but he had returned to his roots. That fall we moved into town, and I never saw Charley again. For one wonderful year, Charley was my very best friend, but in the end, he was still a wild animal. ♦

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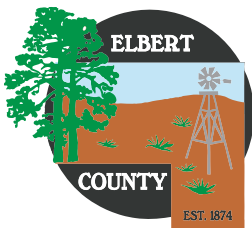
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**L to R: Mike Buck Commissioner District 1, Byron McDaniel Commissioner District 3, Dallas Schroeder Commissioner District 2**

What is the most effective way to engage a community in their local government? You’ve told us – and we agree – that we can be most effective in our service to you when we demonstrate that we are listening...that we not only welcome your voice, we also want to provide you with as many means as possible for your voice to be heard. Transparency is our priority. Join us for Town Hall Meetings and Public Hearings. Engage with us on Facebook and Nextdoor. Attend our Commission Meetings and provide comment under Citizen Public Comment.

We also encourage you to visit the County’s website [www.elbertcounty-co.gov](http://www.elbertcounty-co.gov) where you will find information about road construction, traffic and other safety alerts; volunteer opportunities, the means to sign up for CodeRED emergency notifications, Board of County Commissioner Meeting notices, as well as meeting agendas and videos of meetings you may have missed, that are now streaming on the site.

On behalf of all Elbert County employees, thank you for your engagement with us. We are proud to be of service to you.

## YOUR COUNTY ROAD & BRIDGE PROJECTS

Elbert County will perform several major projects during 2025. Below are three of the larger projects slated for this summer. The county welcomes public engagement and understands the significance of these infrastructure improvements in boosting local accessibility and economic activity. Residents are encouraged to check the website regularly for updates and further information on how these projects might impact local travel. Project updates can be found at, <https://www.elbertcounty-co.gov/237/Road-Bridge>

### COUNTY ROAD 166 SCHEDULED FOR SUMMER REPAVING PROJECT

County Road 166 will be repaved from County Road 13 to County Road 29 in a project that mirrors last summer’s successful repaving of the section from County Road 13 to Delbert Road. This expansion reflects the county’s ongoing commitment to enhancing roadway quality and ensuring safe and smooth travel for residents and visitors alike.

This project is part of the Capital Improvement Program under the asphalt rehabilitation section, signaling its importance in the county’s broader transportation plan. Currently, the project is out to bid as county officials work to secure a qualified contractor. Once the bidding process is complete and a contractor is selected, additional details including timeline specifics and any potential traffic adjustments will be posted on the county website.

The expansion of the repaving project, building on last summer’s efforts, represents a proactive approach to roadway maintenance and a dedication to the long-term safety and efficiency of the county’s transportation network.

### COUNTY ROAD 125 (9 MILE) GRAVEL ROAD REBUILD BEGAN APRIL 21, 2025

The long-anticipated rebuild of County Road 125, also known as 9-mile road, began on April 21, 2025. Originally identified in the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for the year 2028, this project has been prioritized and moved up due to significant repair needs following the 2023 flooding. This accelerated timeline reflects the county’s commitment to addressing critical infrastructure concerns in a timely and efficient manner.

The rebuild will kick off at the south end of County Road 125 and progress northward throughout the summer months. This comprehensive project will involve reshaping the road, enhancing drainage systems, and applying a high-performing gravel mix to ensure a durable and resilient roadway. These improvements aim to not only restore but optimize road conditions, benefiting residents, commuters, and businesses that rely on this vital route.

The County Road 125 rebuild stands as an integral step in bolstering the region’s transportation network, demonstrating proactive measures to ensure safety, accessibility, and long-term performance of county roadways.

### COUNTY ROAD 9-15 AND SURROUNDING AREAS TO RECEIVE CHIP SEAL TREATMENT THIS SUMMER

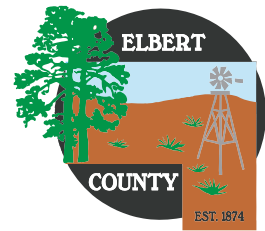
The county is preparing to go out to bid to obtain a qualified contractor for a chip seal project this summer to enhance the longevity and durability of several key roadways. The treatment will be applied to County Road 9-15, County Road 132, South Pine Ridge Street, and South Elbert Street. Chip sealing, a maintenance process that involves applying a protective layer of asphalt and aggregate, is designed to extend the lifespan of asphalt roads by an average of five to seven years.

This proactive measure is part of the county’s ongoing effort to maintain road quality and ensure safe travel conditions for residents and visitors. By investing in preventive maintenance like chip sealing, the county aims to reduce long-term repair costs while providing a smoother and more reliable driving experience.

Updates regarding the project timeline and any potential traffic impacts will be shared on the county website as the summer work progresses.

Public Works Department  
Road & Bridge Division  
Office 303-621-3157  
11330 State Highway 86, Kiowa, CO, 80117





# Elbert County Connection

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## YOUR COUNTY SERVICES

### ROAD AND BRIDGE

- Performs all aspects of road maintenance on county-maintained roads within the county.
- Performs snow removal and other emergency operations (such as the flooding of 2023) on county-maintained roads.
- Assists emergency services operations (such as wildfires) when needed.
- Oversight of road building and road improvements associated with development.
- Oversight of road improvements performed by contracted companies initiated by the CIP and other assessment processes.

<https://www.elbertcounty-co.gov/237/Road-Bridge>  
303-621-3157

### HUMAN SERVICES

- Community Support Division
- Financial Assistance (Adult Financial, TANF)
- Food/Medical Assistance (SNAP, Medicaid)
- Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP)
- Child Support Services
- Low Income Energy Assistance (LEAP)
- Protective Services
- Adult Protection
- Child Welfare
- Foster Care System

<https://www.elbertcounty-co.gov/208/Human-Services>  
303-621-3149

### CSU EXTENSION ELBERT COUNTY

Do you sometimes feel like you’re on information overload? With hundreds of television channels to choose from, social media options such as X and Facebook, and more and more websites popping up every day, it’s challenging to know which information to trust.

#### Colorado State University Extension

provide relief by offering reliable, research- based information to help you make informed decisions. The Extension Office serves as the communitys front door to Colorado State University. Our county office puts Extension resources within easy reach. Whether you have a question about health, financial literacy, pasture or livestock management, weeds, pests or gardens, 4-H or youth development, renewable energy, elder or child-care issues, CSU Extension can connect you to the latest, most accurate data and experts.

#### CSU Extension flagship programs include:

##### 4-H

For ages 5 - 18, youth benefit from Extension’s 4-H programs by participating in hands-on projects including: environmental science, rocketry, foods and nutrition, animal science, photography and more. As a result, they learn valuable life skills such as leadership, ethics, decision making, record keeping, responsibility and community service.

##### Colorado State Extension Master Gardeners

Certified and trained volunteers work to enhance Coloradans’ quality of life by extending knowledge-based education to local communities, helping individuals make informed decisions about plants and fostering successful gardeners while protecting neighborhood environments.

<https://elbert.extension.colostate.edu/>  
303-621-3162

### OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

OEM provides the following daily public facing services:

- Support CodeRED education and sign up
  - Provide public education annually on emergency preparedness and response
  - Act as a liaison/conduit between emergency services and the public
  - Review event permitting for event communications, evacuation considerations, and severe weather monitoring
  - Facilitate organization & large event preparedness planning with emergency responders
  - Provide public preparedness communications via social media
  - Facilitate disaster recovery and mitigation efforts for the public and other government agencies
  - Coordinate reunification, warming center, and evacuation sites and related support
- <https://www.elbertcounty-co.gov/174/Emergency-Management>

### PUBLIC HEALTH

#### Clinical Services:

- Primary Care Clinic (including sick care, reproductive health clinic)
- Maternal Child Health (including pregnant & lactating Moms, and children up to age 21)
- Lab testing (i.e., blood tests, lipid panel, blood glucose, basic metabolic panel, liver

panel, etc.)

- Adult Child Vaccination program
- Care coordination (community resource navigation)
- Tuberculosis testing and case management
- Workplace drug testing
- Sports physicals for student athletes

#### Environmental Health Services:

- Onsite Wastewater treatment Systems (i.e., septic) permits and inspections
- Retail food permits and inspections (including restaurants, food trucks, and school cafeterias)
- Child care center inspections
- Epidemiologic investigations
- Rabies investigations
- Public swimming pool inspections
- Environmental hazard investigations (i.e., chemical spills)

#### Vital Records

- Birth Certificates
- Death Certificates

#### Emergency Preparedness

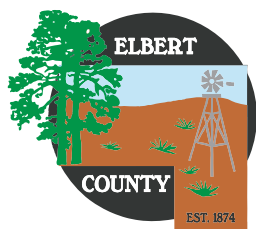
- Emergency Support Function #6 – Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Housing, and Human Services
- Emergency Support Function #8 – Public Health and Medical Services

#### Health Promotion

- Healthy Aging Promotion & Education
- Tobacco Education, Prevention and Cessation
- Behavioral Health Promotion & Education
- Blood Donation events

<https://www.elbertcounty-co.gov/206/Public-Health>  
720-595-3620





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## YOUR COUNTY ELECTED OFFICIALS' DEPARTMENTS & SERVICES

### ASSESSOR

<https://www.elbertcounty-co.gov/264/Assessor>  
303-621-3101

- Valuation
- Agricultural Classification
- Notice of Values
- Appeal Process and Abatement
- Assessment Rate
- Certification of Value & Recertification for Taxing Authorities
- Senior Exemption
- Veterans Exemption
- Situs Address Application
- Personal Property & Declarations
- Oil & Gas & Declarations
- Title Conveyance- Ownership Records (We do not provide legal advice regarding conveyance or the forms)
- Manufactured Home Ownership Change, Purge, movement, destruction
- Radius Reports

### COUNTY SHERIFF

<https://www.elbertcounty-co.gov/181/Sheriffs-Office>  
303-621-2027

The Sheriff of a county has many duties and responsibilities, but the primary focus is on the safety of the residents of the county. State statute requires the Sheriff, through his or her deputies, to operate a jail. We typically have prisoners awaiting trial if they are unable to post bond, those who have been adjudicated and are serving their sentence, and those awaiting transport to other facilities that have been arrested in the county. We are responsible for the safety and welfare of prisoners. We have a part-time medical staff and mental health professionals. We oftentimes have many prisoners needing to be transported to a hospital or even for dental care. This requires posting deputies to guard the prisoner if they are in the hospital.

Civil process service is also a required task. We serve a variety of civil papers to citizens and businesses throughout the county. The Sheriff acts as the Fire Warden in all unincorporated areas for prairie, forest, or wildland fires outside the boundaries of a fire protection district or where the fire exceeds the capabilities of the fire protection district to control or extinguish. It is the duty of the Sheriff to transport prisoners to a correctional facility or other place of confinement.

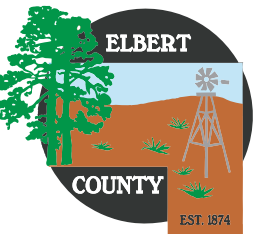
The Sheriff, through his undersheriff and deputies, shall serve and execute all writs, processes, precepts, and orders issued by a lawful authority.

The Sheriff is to preserve peace and command aid. It is the duty of the sheriffs, undersheriffs, and deputies to keep and preserve the peace in their respective counties, and to quiet and suppress all affrays, riots, and unlawful assemblies and insurrections. For that purpose, and for the service of process in civil or criminal cases, and in apprehending or securing any person for felony or breach of the peace, they, and every coroner, may call to their aid such person of their county as they may deem necessary.

The Sheriff is responsible for court security. We have full-time deputies that screen every person and package that comes into the courts. We additionally provide security during court proceedings.

The Sheriff is responsible for all search and rescue activities in the county. There are many other commiserate activities that the Sheriff, Undersheriff, and deputies do during their duty day to provide safety and service to all members of the public. Additionally, we assist, and handle calls in incorporated towns during their off time or when they have no one available.





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## NOTICE OF PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION FOR SENIOR CITIZENS, VETERANS WITH A DISABILITY, AND GOLD STAR SPOUSES

A property tax exemption is available to senior citizens, qualifying veterans with a disability, the surviving spouses of Gold Star Veterans and the surviving spouses of senior citizens or veterans with a disability who were previously granted the exemption. For those who qualify, 50 percent of the first \$200,000 in actual value of their primary residence is exempted. The state pays the exempted portion of the property tax. Once approved, the exemption remains in effect for future years, and the applicant need not reapply. The General Assembly may eliminate the funding for the Senior Citizen Exemption or Veteran with a disability Exemption at their discretion in any year that the budget does not allow for the reimbursement.

Application requirements are as follows:

### SENIOR CITIZEN EXEMPTION

The exemption is available to applicants who: a) are at least 65 years of age as of January 1 of the year of application, b) owned their home for at least 10 consecutive years as of January 1, and c) occupy it as their primary residence and have done so for at least 10 consecutive years as of January 1. Limited exceptions to the ownership and occupancy requirements are detailed in the qualifications section of the application. The exemption is also available to surviving spouses of senior citizens who previously met the requirements. The application deadline for 2025 is July 15. The application form is available from and must be submitted to the county assessor at the following address:

Elbert County Assessor, 221 Comanche St., PO Box 26, Kiowa, CO 80117  
303-621-3101  
Email: [assessor@elbertcounty-co.gov](mailto:assessor@elbertcounty-co.gov)

### VETERAN WITH A DISABILITY EXEMPTION

The exemption is available to applicants who: a) sustained a service-connected disability while serving on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States, b) were honorably discharged, and c) were rated by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs as one hundred percent permanent disability through disability retirement benefits. Starting in tax year 2025, applicants who do not have a 100% disability rating but have been awarded individual unemployability status as determined by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs are also eligible for the program. In addition to the disability or unemployability qualification, the applicant must have owned and occupied the home as his or her primary residence since January 1 of the year of application; however, limited exceptions to the ownership and occupancy requirements are detailed in the eligibility requirements section of the application. The application deadline for 2025 is July 1. Applications are available from the website of the Colorado Division of Property Taxation at <https://dpt.colorado.gov/forms-index> or the county assessor of the county in which the property is located. As of January 1, 2024, Senate Bill 23-036 requires completed applications must be submitted to the county assessor for which county the property is located in.

### VETERAN WITH A DISABILITY SURVIVING SPOUSE EXEMPTION

The exemption is available to surviving spouses of veterans with a disability who had the veteran with a disability exemption and who passed away prior to January 1 of the current year. The property must be owner occupied and used as the primary residence of an owner-occupier who is the surviving spouse of a qualifying veteran with a disability. The application deadline for 2025 is July 1. Applications are available from the website of the Colorado Division of Property Taxation at <https://dpt.colorado.gov/forms-index> or the county assessor of the county in which the property is located. Completed applications must be submitted to the county assessor of the county in which the property is located, at the above address.

### GOLD STAR SPOUSES

Beginning in January 2023, this exemption is available to surviving spouses of "Gold Star" Veterans. The property must be owner occupied as of January 1 in the year of the application and used as the primary residence of an owner-occupier who is the surviving spouse of a qualifying Gold Star Veteran. The application deadline for 2025 is July 1. Applications will be available from the website of the Colorado Division of Property Taxation at <https://dpt.colorado.gov/forms-index> or the county assessor of the county in which the property is located. Completed applications must be submitted to the county assessor of the county in which the property is located, at the above address.