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November 2024

Janna Benkelman

One Blessing Less

Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday next to Christmas, because of the wonderful feast my mom cooks. Our family is pretty traditional, so we always have an enormous turkey baked in the oven. She sometimes tries different recipes, like wrapping it in foil or baking it in a plastic bag (not so great), but usually she just bakes it in butter, which is really tasty! My brother Michael and I get to sample the turkey while it cools when it comes out of the oven. He likes the heart and I prefer the gizzard, but once Dad slices it, we're delighted to try the other parts, too.

Today, the turkey cooking, the homemade cranberry sauce simmering on the stove, and the apple pie is sitting on the counter, cooling, fills the house with wonderful smells.

Michael is in the living room watching our brand new Zenith colored TV. For the first time, we're able to watch the Macy's Parade in color! It's so strange; the TV has a knob that lets us turn the screen green or yellow or red. We've had a lot of fun turning people green.

We all got up early this morning, since Mom was in the kitchen slicing up dried bread and onions for the stuffing. I love the smells of the herbs she adds, especially the sage and thyme. The entire house smelled great even before breakfast. The only disgusting thing about Thanksgiving is the oyster casserole. Michael and I can't stand the sight or the smell of it, but for some reason, the grown-ups seem to love it.

Our family has Thanksgiving dinner at two in the afternoon. Afterwards, the grown-ups sit around and watch football games on TV and nap on the couch. Boring! Me and Michael are planning to walk to the park where at least there will be something fun to do.

This year, Aunt Erma and Uncle Sam are coming. Our cousins will be here too, but they're teen-aged girls and all they think about is makeup and boys. How annoying! Michael and I don't even give them the time of day. Crazy Aunt Rose is coming too. She's not really insane, but she is, I don't know... different. She's either lovey-dovey or grouchy, and I'm not sure which is worse. I hate the hugs she drags me into, since she almost smothers me. She smells funny, like stale perfume. Michael tries to stay on the other side of the room from her, but she always tracks him down for that disgusting hug.

There goes the doorbell. It's 1 pm, so people are arriving!

"Kevin, get the door," I hear my mom holler from the kitchen.

"Hi, Aunt Erma. Come on inside. Mom's in the kitchen."

"Kevin, you are growing more every time I see you!" Uncle Sam plants himself on the couch and my cousins park themselves at the dining table.

A few minutes later, the doorbell chimes again and I let in Aunt Rose. Just as I feared, she smothers me in a gigantic bear hug. I back up and off she goes to pursue the other kids. "Whew, I'm glad that's over with," I mutter.

I wander into the kitchen to check out the food situation. Mom is setting out all the dishes for lunch, and the turkey smells better than ever! Hot rolls are steaming on the counter and the green bean casserole is cooling. My mom

looks puzzled and then kinda like she's in a panic. "Oh, my goodness! I forgot to make the mashed potatoes!"

Aunt Rose, who has come to the kitchen to supervise, whirls around and her face shifts from a slight smile to a look of horror. "You've ruined Thanksgiving!" she gasps.

"Now Rosey," says Aunt Erma, "we have lots of other things prepared. No one will even

notice a lack of potatoes."

My mother is anxiously looking at all the dishes ready for the dining room table. Dad finishes cutting the turkey. The gravy has

thickened, and it sure looks to me like we're ready to eat Thanksgiving dinner.

"Stella, everything is ready and dinner is beautiful just as it is," Dad says, and moves the platter to the dining room table.

My mother, still fretting, lifts one of the side dishes. "Kevin, will you help carry the rolls to the dining room?"

I pick up the platter, but Aunt Rose wrings her hands and whines, "We can't have Thanksgiving without potatoes! Everything's ruined! What a mess!" She looks pale and hysterical, shaking her head and acting as though someone died.

Once we assemble everything on the table, we pick our seats. I find a spot just as far away from Aunt Rose as I can get. I feel sorry for anyone who gets stuck listening to her go on and on about her life in general and the missing mashed potatoes in particular! Aunt Rose is still sniffing and gasping for air while trying to absorb the shock of a Thanksgiving meal without them.

Dad says grace. We all pass the food around and everyone digs in. I think to myself if I had to do without something on Thanksgiving, it just might be Aunt Rose! ♦



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FROM THE EDITOR

CHARITY BISHOP

Too Big to Edit?

I've noticed a phenomenon with famous authors called "Too Big to Edit Syndrome." It goes like this. Their first book is really good, tightly plotted, well-paced, with sparkling dialogue and grammar. Two or three books down the line, you notice their writing seems to have slipped. Maybe a lot. Now the books are twice as long, the grammar is poor, the sentences may be messy, or there's more description that slows down the plot.

What happened?

Simple. They got too big to edit.

The publishing company decided *not* to edit them, because "people will buy it anyway." Which is poor business practice, because after being disappointed in an author's books, people stop buying them.

J.K. Rowling's first *Harry Potter* book was 76,000 words. Her final *Harry Potter* book was 200,000 words. I enjoy her stories, but she had 100 pages in the middle where the kids do nothing, and one of her later books had tons of run-on sentences (two or three sentences connected with commas instead of periods setting off the beginning of a new, clear sentence).

Stephen King's first few books were short. He even wrote a successful book on writing that told authors to be concise, get rid of adverbs, tighten your sentences, and get to the point. His novel *Carrie* was 64,000 words. His novel *It* is over 300,000 words. He has forgotten his own advice.

This isn't limited to books, either. It also happens to television show writers. The first season of *Stranger Things* revolved around a bunch of kids in an 80s setting looking for their missing friend Will. All the characters had a reason to be there, the plot was engaging and straightforward, and it became an instant sci-fi hit. Four seasons and ten years later, the series is still good but suffers from bloat—characters are there despite having no relevance to the plot (plus many new ones), the subplots are meaningless, and flashbacks pad the running time from an hour per episode to two or three hours per episode. Why? It got famous, so Netflix said "do whatever you want."

When you have no limits, it's human nature to go way overboard and ruin your own product. (This is why I set a word limit for every novel and refuse to go past it.)

So, what has happened to editors? Well, for one thing, they've been fired. I found out a lot of major publishers laid off their entire editorial

departments years ago (and it shows), because it costs \$1,000 to \$5,000 to edit a novel (by noticing plot holes, irrelevant characters, purple prose, and bad grammar, and telling the author what needs fixed). They will work with a debut author to make their book shine to attract readers and generate name recognition, but after the first two books, they no longer want to take a chunk out of their profit by restructuring the author's work. It's more important to sell books quick than to train an author to write good books by asking them to do tough revisions and rewrites.

Max Perkins is one of the most famous book editors in history. Thanks to him, you know who Hemingway, Wolfe, Fitzgerald, and many others are, because he worked with them to shape their stories and saw potential in their messy first drafts (one of his authors won the Pulitzer Prize for literature). He loved to find and nurture writers, and to help them write a better yarn. Max famously labored with Thomas Wolfe to

trim 90,000 words off his debut novel. It took them two years to put out his second, because Perkins laid down a strict word count and Wolfe kept bringing him more and more pages of needless prose.

I don't know about you, but as I look around in the library in search of reading material, I see bloat and 900 page debuts. What the world needs is another Max Perkins, who cares enough about the craft to say "tighten this." ♦

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Nancy Fischer

AN UNLIKELY FRIEND

Like many children, I had an abundant supply of toys in my early years. I enjoyed playing with my collection of plastic horse figures by myself, or cut out paper dolls with my mother, Barbie dolls with my cousin, and board games with my brothers. I slept with my stuffed animals as a child, surrounded by their soft, friendly faces and warm, squishy bodies. There were the proverbial teddy bears and stuffed rabbits. A patchwork dog handmade by a loving and crafty senior babysitter. Even a few fluffy stuffed yellow chicks. But I had a particular favorite... a four-foot-long pink stuffed snake named Pinky.

I find this hilarious today, because the sight of a snake in my yard or garden will send me quickly to the house to find my husband to move it to another place. If a grandkid wants to show me their latest "treasure" after they've been out in the woods and captured a thin little garter snake, I visibly shiver. I don't even like to see pictures of snakes on television or on the internet.

But I adored this stuffed snake. I don't remember where it came from, but I dragged it along with me when we went camping or I went to a friend's for a sleepover. We moved quite a bit, and Pinky went with me from house to house and made my new room feel like home. Pinky slept on my bed during the day, waiting to keep me company and scare away the shadows of the night. New homes can take a long time to feel safe. Pinky helped me get through all the newness and strange sounds of the new place.

I've seen pictures of me and Pinky and he was almost as long as I was! Over the years, his eyes fell off and his red felt tongue shredded to an indistinguishable red thread. But I hugged and cherished him immensely as my constant friend and companion. ♦



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The Kitties Who Came to Stay

© Katie Martin

Mama Cat appeared on a sunny day and sat on our porch. Much taller than most cats, she had a beautiful black and white coat and her paws looked like white boots. All the animals eat out of our mulch pile. The deer come by and check out what is there, from time to time. Mama Cat helped herself and then disappeared. It surprised us when she reappeared the next day with three small kittens. After she licked each one clean, she disappeared again. It was obvious she was trying to wean them, and they weren't cooperating. We took pity on them and gave them a saucer of milk. After two days, Mama Cat returned and this time she stayed.

By that time, the kittens had made themselves at home. Mama Cat moved in also, and out of nowhere, Papa Cat appeared and stayed. I guess the food must be okay. We are not sure who the cats belong to, but it is obvious someone is taking care of them. We think they have a regular food route, as they disappear at the same time every day.



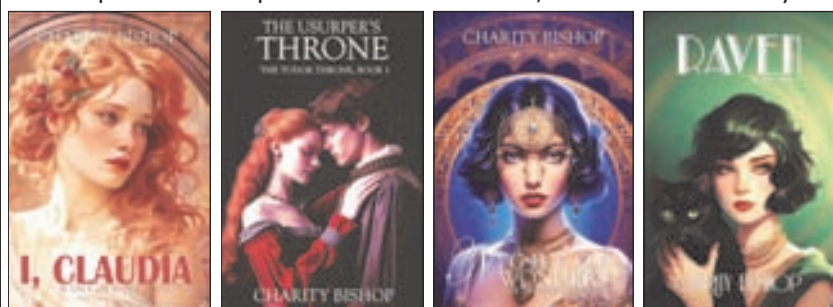
We started calling the tiniest kitten "Little One." He is extremely affectionate and knows how to steal your heart. As time wore on, we looked forward to our time with the cats. They were a source of joy and laughter whenever they came and went. "Little One" is into everything and has "adventures." He loves to play and forgets he has claws. If he wants you to listen, he climbs the tree nearest you. When he gets where he can look straight into your eyes, he will "meow" his story or complaint. He has changed both our names to make us part of his family. Paul is now PAWL. Katie is now KAT.

None of them are interested in coming inside. During a heavy rain a few days ago, I wanted to make sure Little One still got a full meal and stood out in the downpour, tossing his food under the porch. I stood there in the mud, with sopping wet hair, and soaked to the skin, talking to the cat about the weather while he wondered about my sanity. I heard his sigh of relief as I turned and went in the house.

"Some people," he muttered, "don't know how to get out of the rain." ♦

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Brenda Flippe

Autumn Leaves and Black Walnuts Please

Kathy Padgett

As a young child, when the first day of autumn arrived, my Uncle Bob loved to greet me with an enormous hug, a giant grin and a robust “Autumn leaves and black walnuts please!” Then he’d hand me a large glass of ice tea, guide me to his screened-in back porch, sit me in the swing, and say, “Listen for the thud, thump, and the swish and rolls.”

As we sat in the screened-in porch, and not outside anywhere near Uncle Bob’s gigantic sixty-five foot high black walnut tree, we were safe. It was harvesting joy time for Uncle Bob. His black walnut tree dropped two inch round, hard nut fruits that looked and sounded like tennis balls as they hit the ground. Uncle Bob had to wear a hard hat whenever he went out to pick up the fallen nuts. To get hit on the head by a falling black walnut would be painful.

I called the screened-in porch sanctuary my “laughing place” because Uncle Bob looked and acted like a frolicking clown who felt stressed, obsessed, yet blessed by the challenges of harvesting black walnuts. Besides his hard hat, he wore a bright red floppy shirt, (resident squirrels skilled in stealing black walnuts for their winter food storage disliked this color) baggy faded blue farm pants, scruffy knee-high boots, and thick disposable rubber gloves that reached to his elbow. I always giggled when he waved his hard hat and shouted, “If’n yur not liken my autumn outfit, then just leaf me alone.”



I joyfully answered, “Your cleverly colorful secret is safe with me. I walnut tell a soul.”

Harvesting Uncle Bob’s prized black walnuts proved to be a messy, difficult, and time consuming task. But the bold, rich, earthy flavor of the black walnuts in Auntie Mae’s honey black walnut bread, made extra yummy with her flavorful homemade black walnut flour, let every toilsome minute of the month’s

long process worthwhile. The first step of removing the green outer husk covering the inner nut shell is difficult, even dangerous. Uncle Bob had to keep his energy level high and stay balanced while stomping on each of the fallen black walnuts. One time, his feet

tired of little jumps and hard stomp, so he got out his riding mower and tried running over the husk covered nuts. “Why was I so nutty,” remarked Uncle Bob, “rubber mower tires did nutin to squash those outer husks.”

Once he got the hard outer husks broken open, Uncle Bob picked each one up and peeled it the same way he peeled his breakfast orange. This is a messy process because the husk has a chemical called juglone in it that irritates skin, causing it to turn a dark brown, almost black color. “No shell shocked hands for me ‘cause my robber gloves walnut disappoint me. No stains on my hands,” laughed Uncle Bob as he tossed the husk rinds into one large bucket and the inner black walnuts into a second bucket.

Whenever Uncle Bob started his bucket toss, it left me free to leave my “laughing place,” grab the garden hose, and rush to be his “prized helper.” My job? Wash and splash the black walnuts in the second bucket, fish out the floaters with undeveloped nutmeats, and discard them. Since black walnuts with fully developed good nut meats sink to the bottom of a bucket of water, I could pick them out and toss them into a third bucket with holes in the bottom. I needed to keep water running over those black walnuts until their shells were completely free of all the leftover debris from the outer husks.

Once the black walnuts were clean enough, I helped Uncle Bob put them into his large homemade wooden box with a wire screen bottom and no top. We placed the box in my “laughing place,” away from nut stealing squirrels, so the nuts could get dry. To keep from becoming a total “nut case” for having to wait weeks for the nuts to dry out naturally, Uncle Bob got out his large electric fan and sped up the process.

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When the black walnuts were dry to the touch, I counted out forty-five of them at a time while Uncle Bob put them into netting produce bags, then hung them in the cool, dry air of his basement to cure for several weeks. This curing process brings out the unique rich, bold, earthy flavor of the black walnuts, and helps to draw out any moisture in the inner nut meats.

Several days before Thanksgiving, Uncle Bob, Auntie Mae and I began the arduous process of cracking the cured black walnut shells, which have the reputation of being the hardest of all tree nuts to crack. Uncle Bob began our nut cracking session with a question.

“Why didn’t the black walnut go to the ballet? Because it was afraid of the nutcracker!”

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All the nuts in our kitchen needed to be afraid of our nutcracker, Uncle Bob, who deftly used the steel blade of his pocketknife to pry each nut open at the seam, breaking it in half to expose the meats. Auntie Mae and I used our fingers to carefully remove the meats and put them in green glass refrigerator jars. Uncle Bob made sure our nutty kitchen adventure ended on a joyful note when he said, “Yep, we sure made those nuts laugh! We cracked ‘em up!”

All the long days and months of black walnut harvest time were rewarded when Auntie Mae created Thanksgiving and Christmas treats that included Sweet Potato Casserole with toasted black walnuts, Black Walnut Pumpkin Pie topped with homemade black walnut ice cream, and black walnut



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Autumn Leaves, Continued

and wild rice stuffing for turkeys.

Since Uncle Bob was an avid historical buff who loved digging out unusual facts about rare topics, we spent many evenings in my “laughing place” talking about the Rolls Royce of nuts, the black walnut.

My favorite nutty tidbits include:

- Ancient Greeks and Romans called black walnuts “the imperial nut” because only royalty could eat them.
- George Washington ate black walnuts by the handfuls and planted several black walnut trees at his Mt. Vernon home.
- The US Navy cleans their ships/submarines with ground up black walnut shells.
- In the 1970s rust and dirt were removed from the Statue of Liberty by using ground up black walnut shells.
- Black walnut hulls are used to make a toxic free, dark brown dye for dying hair and fabrics.
- Ground black walnut shells are used in pet litter, athletic turf fields, and garden mulch.
- The cosmetic industry uses ground black walnut shells in soaps, lotions, and scrubs.

Because Uncle Bob shelled out his advice to me about the entire nut-ritional value of black walnuts, I celebrated National Nut Day October 22, 2024, by sprinkling black walnuts on my oatmeal, over my luncheon salad, and into my dinner soup. All day long I snacked on handfuls of protein rich, cholesterol free black walnuts, and finished my day with a cup of hot tea and a generous slice of Auntie Mae’s Honey Black Walnut Bread.

I walnut let go of Uncle Bob’s shell-arious black walnut daze. ♦

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Travis Johnson

Lawrence & the Chicken

My friend Lawrence is a hard-working, no-nonsense farmer. He grows crops, raises hogs and chickens, and works his land. In doing his chores recently, he had to clean out the henhouse and gather up messes around the barnyard, including chicken poop, sawdust, trash and debris into a large tarp on his trailer. He folded the tarp by its four corners and tied it down for the trip to the county dump site.

When he arrived at the dump, he unfolded the tarp to drop his refuse and, to his surprise, a chicken ran out from under it into the dump. The men running the dump told him he couldn’t leave it there, to which Lawrence replied, “I ain’t gonna go try to catch that chicken. You want it, go get it.”

One man was a tall man with long legs. He took off after that chicken and chased her around the piles of trash until he cornered and grabbed her. He proudly returned to Lawrence and told him to take his chicken and go home. Lawrence reluctantly put the chicken under his arm and got back in his truck and drove off one-handed, holding that chicken.

This wouldn’t have been so strange had he been able to drive back to the farm unnoticed, but when he got near town he had to stop at a stoplight where some people spotted him with a chicken sitting on his lap in the driver’s seat. Lawrence tried to act like nothing was out of the ordinary, but couldn’t deny it was an awkward situation. Townsfolk were speculating about this and wondering if he was partial to that chicken and liked to take it for a ride, or maybe he was selling it and delivering

it to its new owner. People in the other vehicles laughed and pointed at Lawrence and the chicken, but he acted like nothing was unusual about this. He was just driving

around town with a chicken on his lap.

Nothing to see here.

Lawrence returned the chicken to the henhouse, no worse for wear, and the chicken returned to scratching and digging, laying and roosting along with the other hens.

Life went back to the normal routine, but that

chicken will always be one up on the others of the flock: she’s the only one that got to go for a ride home from the dump on the farmer’s lap. ♦



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Richard B. Whitaker

Kindness Knows No Bounds

My protection by the angels of both heaven and earth began at a young age. My first experience with my heavenly companions working alongside their earthly counterparts came at two years old.

In 1946, Christmas approached. After the war ended, my father returned home after serving three years in the entertainment arm of the United States Army Air Corps. Our weekend family activities increased. These often included a trip down Crenshaw Boulevard to the Tinker Town Amusement Park with its various rides and wonderful Ferris Wheel.

On a beautiful Sunday in mid-December, my parents and members of my mother's family visited Tinker Town. Because of my closeness in age to the cousins, I sat in the backseat of Uncle Frank's large Buick with four others. Our ages ranged from two to six, with me next to the right-rear passenger door. My parents followed in their vehicle.

The plan for the day involved taking everyone to the amusement park and returning to Uncle Frank's house for dinner. As we travelled, the activity in the back seat became a pushing match with Uncle Frank occasionally

turning his head and shouting into the back, "Settle down, you kids!"

His commands had little impact, for after a couple of shouts, suddenly, the right-rear passenger door opened and out I flew, my head smashing into the pavement. Although we were only traveling thirty-five miles an hour, what occurred next was miraculous.

The car behind Uncle Frank's was not my parents, but a vehicle occupied by two older Catholic nuns driving slowly on their way home. They watched in horror my ejection from the car and as I rolled and tumbled across the dark asphalt. Later they shared with my parents that, "After he struck the ground, it looked like an invisible

presence picked him up and carried him, then he bounced and got picked up again."

Slamming on the brakes, the nuns came to rest just behind where my little body lay in the street. With my head covered in blood and me crying louder than they had ever heard any child cry, they scooped me up, blood and all, and were holding me as my parents drove up. Needless-to-say, my mother was distraught.

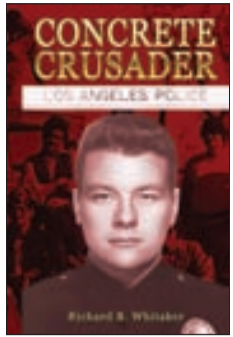
Fortunately, the Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital was not far away. Cradling me in her

arms, my mother climbed into my dad's car and off we went, followed by the nun's vehicle and Uncle Frank. Within minutes after arriving at the hospital, my parents rushed into an emergency room where an attending doctor and a nurse appeared out of nowhere. The doctor examined me and, to his astonishment, found except for an extensive abrasion to my forehead, and several small holes in my scalp caused by the imbedding of small pebbles off the street, I had no other scrapes or injuries anywhere on my body. As my mother held me tightly, the doctor



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painstakingly removed the gravel from my skin. Afterward, the nurse carried me to the x-ray machine, but they could not find one broken bone or any evidence of internal bleeding or other damage. The hospital staff couldn't believe it.

As I calmed down, the doctor ran additional tests to guarantee my serious concussion hadn't damaged my sight or my hearing. As the eye tests began, they discovered I had gone blind. My mother burst into tears, but the kindly doctor explained since I had suffered severe blunt force trauma to my skull and my body was in shock, the resulting blindness was an aftermath of my accident and that it, as well



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as the resultant concussion, should both be only temporary.

They finished the exams and released me to go home. Before my parents left the hospital, they stopped and thanked both Catholic nuns for stopping and for their help.

My sight returned the next day and within a few weeks, the abrasion on my forehead had scabbed over, as did the small holes in my scalp.

To this day, I am grateful for not only the unseen protectors that guaranteed I was not seriously injured but also the two wonderful Catholic nuns who were upon the Lord's business and positioned in the right place at the right time which allowed them to come to my assistance and provide comfort and protection when I needed it. And so it is that my mortal journey began, as did the constant protection provided me by both seen and unseen hands. ♦

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My Bookshelf

Don Boyer

Memories and emotions fill my bookshelf. Books are supposed to do that, aren't they?

But many of mine evoke feelings without me opening them.

Some books emit dread, like the classics I bought intending to read, but am afraid of their contents, style, or length. Shakespeare comes to mind (but I purged myself of that book quite a while ago).

Several books bore me just to see them there. They are mostly technical books I use as a reference for looking up specific topics rather than digesting the entire subject. I have many publications on how to write, but their authors failed in the art of "practicing what they teach." They tire me to read.

A few books frustrate me. I read a fascinating fantasy series by Stephen R. Donaldson. It is a series of nine volumes, starting with *Lord Foul's Bane*. I highly recommend the early novels, but as it progresses in later ones, the plot becomes vague, storylines obscure and the books expand with more grandiose descriptions of scenery. I have his last book in the series,



The Last Dark, which is 535 pages I will never read, and regret having purchased.

My bookcase also holds old friends, books I will come back to some day and read again by people like Mark Twain (16 books on my shelf) or Robert Frost (one thick book of poetry containing a million things to think about).

I have a shelf of paperback books for light reading. It's in a constant state of revision. I burn through these books at a steady pace and replace them with more "literary candy" as I find it. These are the books I go to sleep with, one chapter or more a night. They are mainly high adventure science fiction or fantasy and they flow me gently into slumber. And if I should drop one on

my face, there is no harm done.

There are rainy day books waiting for my review. These are political or historical books. I enjoy reading about past presidents, their problems, and accomplishments. But I must read them at quiet times with a cup of tea nearby.

Finally, I have my reference tomes. These stalwart allies are there to help me



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find the right words, correct data, or needed clarification to help me complete my current task. My *Roget's Super Thesaurus* and my *Top Pop Singles 1955-2018* help me most in my two hobbies of writing and music collection.

Opinions and thoughts fill my bookcase, and it is much too small. I would fill it ten times over with things I want to read or should read, but I don't. I need to pace myself and get rid of the books I don't need, but I find that hard. You don't end friendships that easily. ♦

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The Blue Goose Remembered

Ernie Hartnagle

In early spring of 1942, we were deep into WWII. All materials and supplies belonged to the war effort. Nearly all of our eligible young men were entering the military service to defend our country.

Uncle Earl was one of the first to be called. He dressed well and never subscribed to gainful employment. Liquidating his personal assets involved giving his beautiful knee length overcoat to a friend, finding a home for his trusty old Model A Ford Coupe, and kissing his current girlfriend goodbye. When Uncle Earl gave the car a new facelift, he got a gallon of Baby Blue house paint and a brush and painted the entire structure, then christened it "the Blue Goose."

Meanwhile, "back at the ranch," I desperately needed a set of wheels to drive to school and to take me to odd or seasonal jobs on weekends, but the urgent demands of the war effort superseded all civilian needs. My quest came to its end when Earl's Model

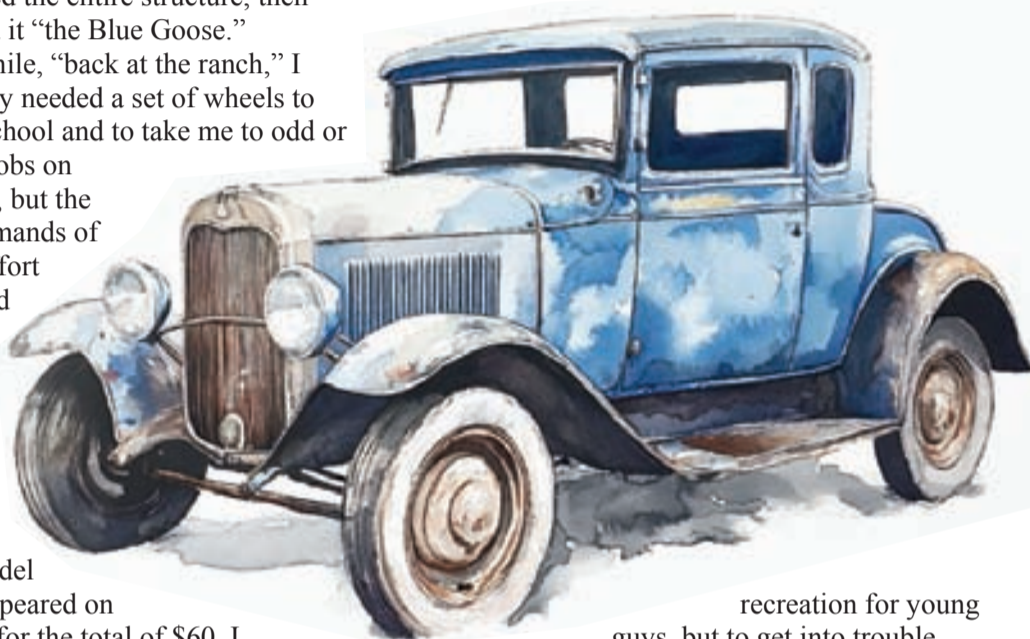
A Ford appeared on the scene for the total of \$60. I felt privileged to keep, use, and enjoy this old Blue Treasure for as long as she would run.

Proud as I felt of my first car, it needed a few things. The diesel fuel Earl used as a coolant in the radiator had its telltale odor, and lifting the panels on the hood revealed the diesel fuel had caused the head gasket and the hoses to leak. My father recommended I take it to the Catchpole Garage in Boulder to get it fixed. Mr. Catchpole took an educated look at my old Model A and told me it needed a complete overhaul—new rings, valves, seats, and gaskets. The bill would come to \$16 dollars.

Mr. Catchpole noticed when he removed the head there were more threads on the bolts showing than usual, indicating the head had been planed down. He went to the Ford garage to pick up the new parts, but when he tore the engine down, he found the new standard parts were too small. None of them fit! He also noticed that Earl had installed a racing cam and was using a larger Model A truck carburetor.

When I picked up the newly overhauled car and paid him, he warned me to be careful driving it; the engine was hot and had been worked over some time in the past. I didn't know exactly what he meant until later. When you "romped" down on the gas pedal, it would literally dig and spin as an immediate response.

This old tag top had seen better days. The sixteen inch wheels, which replaced the original 19 or 20 inch wheels, sported a set of well-used tires that had ample tread at one time. It did not warrant a second look, but she went fast. There wasn't much going on for



recreation for young guys, but to get into trouble, stealing a few watermelons, wrestling, or killing time. We got into drag racing, but the night cop, Blind Joe, took a dim view of that and ran me and the Blue Goose out of town. (By the way, the Blue Goose got a reputation for laying down fast rubber on the graveled streets.)

One Sunday in late August, my buddies gathered at our place just to waste away the time. This elite group included old Baxter, a dedicated nicotine slave who ran four bricks short of a full load. He also had a Model A Ford Coupe that he kept looking like new. He never drove it more than 35 mph to town and back. I was just returning from somewhere and parked the Blue Goose beside his Model A. He looked contemplatively at the "Goose" with a jaundiced eye and advised me I "shoulda bought a good car instead of that junk pile you got there."

I looked at Baxter and said, "I'll race ya."

He took me up on it, thinking he'd show this smart-aleck a thing or two. My buddies were gloating. They knew the Goose well.

We drew a line across the road beside our house. We would go a quarter mile to Saint Peter's mailbox. Baxter fired up his first with his engine at idle. I pulled the Blue Goose

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next to him, decreased my spring loaded clutch pedal, and tied the tranny up into second gear because the torque of the Goose would pop it out of gear. I opened the exhaust cut out for atmosphere with my foot on the gas feed and we were ready. When the starter dropped the hat, I popped the clutch with my engine wide open. The Goose roared ahead, kicking gravel all over Baxter's crate. We were registering 55 mph less than a block up the road. I looked in my rear-view mirror and saw Baxter nowhere in sight, as he never left the starting line. The Goose got to 67 mph as we flew past the mailbox.

Ridicule and laughter fueled the side show that ensued. To shield his embarrassment, Baxter offered to whip anyone that wanted to fight. The tide turned serious at that point. All my buddies lined up around Baxter and were ready to clean his plow. Baxter pulled out a new cigarette to climax the whole deal amicably.

Years later, I found the real reason for the neglected appearance of the Blue Goose. The very sight of her led people to believe she was just a Junker driven by an old unkempt has-been, when in reality he used her as a whiskey runner during prohibition days and she could outrun any car that tried to catch her.

As the Marty Robbins song goes, "and the swiftness of the Goose is still talked about today." ♦

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City Cousin, Country Cousin

Squeeg Holbeck

My daddy had nine brothers and sisters who each had their own families of four to nine children. Just picture our family reunions, with an enormous supply of cousins chasing each other all over the place. We always had so much fun when we got together.

Our family lived in Masters, Colorado, which our cousins considered way out in the country. They were big city folks who lived in Greeley. Our home sat less than a mile from a shallow stream that furnished us with many hours of entertainment. We fished there with our hands or nets and, sometimes, with a pitchfork, and dragged the catch of the day home to put into the horse tank across the road from our house. This wonderful, mossy tank got used as our swimming pool. We had no problem sharing our pool with the various catches of the day, kept captive there among the hoards of darting water bugs.

One especially hot summer, two big city cousins came to spend a few days with us to soak up a little country learnin'. This could be anything from learning to drive or fish to what it

feels like to go to bed dead tired from a day's work in the sun. Daddy "let" us kids help when he worked at various jobs for neighbors or did chores around our place. (I still refer to it as him "letting" us work. Boy, did he have us trained or what?)

The city cousins loved nothing more than riding in the back of our pickup. When Daddy had to change the water for a neighbor, we nearly knocked each other down getting into the back of the pickup, because he was going to "let" us help him. There were no irrigation tubes or sprinklers; you simply cut gaps into the ditch and when the row was down, you had to shovel the gap closed. The most prestigious job in this operation was keeping track of which rows were down, and which ones needed more time to reach the end. We took a vote and appointed a designated row counter. He had the honor of being in charge of the pencil. You should have seen the grin on that city cousin's face when we handed him that pencil.

Off we went, loaded in the back of the pickup, the city cousins, the country cousins, and the smiling pencil keeper, across the road, past the horse tank and into the field. Daddy was "letting" us help him irrigate. He wore his big rubber irrigation boots, but we didn't need any, because we had last year's

school shoes, which were now converted into this year's summer play shoes. We geared up to meet the challenge of who could cake the most mud on the bottom of those shoes and still be able to walk.

After what seemed like forever of working and playing in the blazing sun, Daddy and his crew of six incompetent, rowdy kids had all the running rows counted and recorded. Now the race began. We were all about six inches taller because of the mud caked on the bottom of our shoes and it wasn't easy to run, but run we did. How else could you get the choicest seat in the pickup for the return trip home?

We were moving at last; the breeze felt great on our hot, sweaty, muddy faces as Daddy slowly drove his crew home. The pencil keeper carefully tucked the coveted pencil into his pocket for safekeeping, now free to join in the fun with the actual working crew.

Namely us. We left the

field and were heading toward the road when, as we passed the horse tank, the pencil keeper decided he wanted to take a little swim. He stood up—and stepped off the end of the moving pickup. All I remember was dust,

muddy shoes, knees, elbows, and ten wide open, shocked eyeballs, looking down at one scared city cousin.

Daddy stopped, walked back to the cloud of dust, picked up our poor mangled, muddy crew member, and loaded him in back with us. Not one of us moved an eyelash, we were all so scared. Daddy drove home and gassed up the car for the trip to our doctor in Greeley. Our city cousin miraculously escaped with a broken arm and assorted scrapes and bruises.

Our not so smart city cousin is now a corporate lawyer in Washington, D. C., an indispensable counselor for several big companies. With him, carefully tucked in the back of his leg, is a portion of the pencil, as a souvenir of his irrigation book keeping days. Just goes to show you that what city cousins learn from country cousins stays with them for the rest of their lives. ♦



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Growing Old

Richard L. Wilde

I'm sure you've heard the adage, "Growing old ain't for sissies." I concur. No longer can I run a mile under 4 minutes (actually, I never could). I no longer have long golden curly hair and can't fit into a size 29 x 30 pair of trousers. There is a long list of things I can't do that tell me I am no longer a young fellow.

Then I stop and look back over my life and decide I really don't miss certain activities, such as getting up at the crack of dawn to take my morning run. Nor the fun filled 75 hour work weeks I put in for so many years. Or the constant urge to accomplish more in less time.

I rather enjoy sitting on my front porch watching the humming birds feeding, particularly when the wild turkeys stop by for a snack. The current crop of mule deer fawns cavorting in the trees is a magnificent sight.

I don't miss the challenge of trying to get employees to see my point of view while ignoring the urge to give them a healthy whack with the admonition to *do it or die!*

Growing old has certain advantages. Friends and family alike are more prone to forgive missed appointments and late arrivals (scratch that, I have never been late and do not intend to be late for anything). However, if I *want* to be late, I am sure they'd forgive me for being an old guy.

Tasks involving heavy lifting, bending, and other related physical contortions are beyond my capabilities. I admit to feeling down when I must ask for help.

Deciding anything is a real challenge, but I am not faced with major earth shattering problems. Some problems I have to resolve are rather minor. Such major issues such as oatmeal or raisin bran for breakfast are among the most complex and most difficult.

Aging is a problem almost everyone faces, so I can only offer such advice as... enjoy old age. It's a pleasure denied to many. ♦




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STORM BABY

Judy McMillie

Thanksgiving 1960 came and went with no baby in sight. A young mother living twenty-two miles from the nearest town on a ranch in the middle of Nebraska, I had a two-year-old son and a due date that came and went. My parents and my little brother had made the 250-mile trip to our house for the long Thanksgiving weekend and when it came time for them to go home Sunday afternoon, my mom stayed on with us so we'd have a built-in babysitter when my body finally decided to give the baby up and let it be born.

We cleaned the house and changed the sheets, then went to bed. An hour later, I woke up and realized my water had broken. I woke the others, and my husband and I got ready to leave for town, which had the only hospital within 100 miles. We turned on the yard light and saw a huge winter storm had arrived while we slept. That presented a very precarious situation.

We had a fairly new car and lived on a sand-hill trail road a mile and a half from the gravel road that led to town. My mom kissed us goodbye and with trepidation, we advanced out of the yard. The snow fell thick and hard,



stay on the road. With just one more mile to go, the windshield wipers on our 1958 Chevy sedan quit working, which sounds like a huge problem for a husband ferrying his in-labor wife to the hospital, but the snow was so fierce we barely knew we lacked wipers. This was one heck of a snowstorm. The 22-mile trip had taken us two hours.

When we got to the hospital safely, the nurse on duty gave me a hypo, and my pains immediately slowed down, so my husband took that opportunity to drive our car to the

truck stop at the edge of town to get the wipers fixed. I labored a few hours and about 4 am the nurse called the doctor who lived two blocks from the hospital. Little did I know my husband was trying his best to get back to the hospital a few blocks from the truck stop. Eventually, he made it, but not before our baby arrived.

Snow banks piled high on all the streets and road. My doctor got first one of his vehicles stuck, then another, and after stalling out the third car, he walked over to the hospital and into the delivery room just as my sweet little daughter entered this world. Dr. Shiffermiller turned and caught little Laurie Ann as she slipped from my body. He was cold and wet, but he was there and signed her birth certificate.

We spent three long days in town before the roads opened up and we could drive home.

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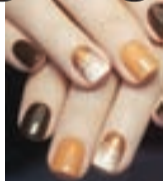
It took another two days to find our cows that had drifted with the storm into a blowout where they hunkered down all this time. They were hungry and thirsty and ready to be on the move to the nearest windmill, where we spread hay and cake for them. Our family and our cattle were lucky to be alive. Many lives and livestock were lost in this storm.

Little Laurie Ann has been a beacon of light to all who know her since she entered our world on a dark, stormy night.

Praise be to God! ♦

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obscuring our vision to the point of me having to lean out my window and watch the ridges along the side of the road and directing my husband to stay within them.

16 miles later, we reached the blacktop road, signaling we were just six miles from town. I could pull my head inside the car and roll up my window. My husband rolled down his and watched the center stripe on the blacktop to

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THE PROPER ROLE OF GOVERNMENT *Beyond Budget Roads & Land Use*

At its core, the role of government has always been a topic of debate. Some view government as a necessary force to protect freedoms, while others see it as a potentially overreaching entity that must be closely limited to avoid infringements on personal liberties. While most public discussion of county government focuses on budgets, road maintenance, and land use, the extent and focus of our county government and our exercise of its authorities in all aspects of our citizens' lives is a matter that is foremost in our minds as your Commissioners.

Fundamental Purpose of Government

The proper role of government can be distilled down to a few fundamental responsibilities: protecting individual rights, providing security, and ensuring justice. These responsibilities are grounded in the principle that government's role is not to dictate or micromanage but to create a stable environment in which individuals can exercise their freedoms responsibly.

In the United States, the Founders viewed government as a "necessary evil," an institution created solely to protect the rights to life, liberty, and property. They wrote the Constitution with the intent of limiting federal powers, believing only when government operates within these bounds can true freedom be achieved. Beyond enforcing laws that protect citizens and ensuring a fair justice system, government should act as a facilitator, not as a master of society. This vision of the proper role of government is enshrined in our state's constitution. By extension, as a political subdivision formed by the state, Elbert County has the same responsibilities to its citizens.

Striking a Balance:

Limited but Effective Governance

The notion of "limited government" doesn't imply an absence of government but rather a government that carefully measures its actions, intervening only when individual rights are at risk or when there is a need to ensure public safety. Most would agree that a government that respects this boundary fosters individual innovation and accountability while encouraging self-reliance.

Take, for instance, the county government's role in establishing building codes. A limited but effective government should aim to provide basic frameworks and resources to ensure homes are built to a minimum standard when it comes to the safety of future occupants and the ability of emergency responders to have access to evacuate citizens in the event of fire or medical emergency. Over-regulating via code would not only increase the costs of already expensive homes but also hampers innovation and application of new construction techniques.

Government, at all levels, must respect that

builders and homeowners should have the final say on which features and amenities they wish to have in their homes. We must put in the money and efforts required to avoid onerous codes that are improper and potentially limit valid and reasonable individual choices by homeowners. The government's role here should be to support choice, quality, and accountability—not to enforce one-size-fits-all solutions that hinder freedom and stifle innovation.

Protecting Against Overreach

When government oversteps its role, it risks infringing on individual rights and freedom. For example, the current high cost of living in Colorado, particularly in housing, often stems from excessive government regulation and land-use restrictions that limit supply and drive up prices. As a local government, we've worked hard to ensure we don't impose zoning restrictions and permit requirements that delay construction, limit development, and make housing unaffordable.

We have focused much effort over the years to prioritize flexibility and efficiency in our county's regulatory processes, balancing safety and innovation while leaving room for the free market to operate effectively. Governments that overly restrict the construction industry fail to recognize the economic strain these restrictions place on citizens, especially those looking for affordable housing solutions. A properly focused government would promote policies that streamline approvals and reduce unnecessary hurdles, encouraging a housing market that is both competitive and accessible.

As a local government, our interference in private enterprise has been cautiously limited. While some oversight is necessary, too much regulation stifles entrepreneurship and small business growth. Excessive compliance costs and bureaucratic red tape, often justified under the banner of "protecting consumers," can be burdensome, making it harder for startups and small enterprises to thrive. These barriers harm local economies and make it difficult for hard-working entrepreneurs to achieve their dreams. The proper role of government in business regulation is to establish clear, necessary guidelines that protect consumers and uphold fair competition without crushing the spirit of innovation and enterprise.

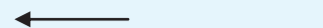


Defending Individual Rights and Local Autonomy

A proper government must defend its citizens' rights to self-determination and ensure respect for local autonomy. In Elbert County this has taken many forms. During COVID, many actions were taken to preserve the fundamental rights of our citizens—even when that meant pushing back against state mandates. The County Commissioners, as the local Board of Health, took a stand against restrictions placed on churches. We declared worship to be an "essential public function" and did not interfere with the operations of our churches. When outdoor gatherings were restricted, we declared the county's first annual "Meat-In" to be protected political speech. While our state tried to ban safe and peaceful celebrations like these, they also allowed mass riots to take place in our capitol. We found their hypocrisy unacceptable, and protected the freedoms of our citizens and respect for their ability to make rational decisions for themselves, their families and their communities.

In response to the "Red-Flag" law, which truly infringes on an individual's right to self defense and on the rights of all citizens to due process, we barred the use of any taxpayer funds or county resources to enact this law locally. In cases where there has been concerns regarding the mental stability of a citizen and a red-flag order was threatened, we used informal intervention directly with the citizen and family members to ensure a safe transfer of firearms to secure storage without the "force of government" being used.

Other examples, large and small exist every day. When scores of new laws are passed annually in Denver, we often find ourselves in a position to use our discretion in terms of local enactment or



enforcement. In every case, we look for the maximum way to reduce the impact on individual freedoms.

Local governments like our county and its municipalities, which operate closer to the communities they serve, should retain autonomy over most issues. When power consolidates at the federal level and state levels, government becomes disconnected from the citizens it serves. By decentralizing power, the government becomes more accountable, responsive, and able to reflect local values and needs.

A Vision for a Properly Limited Government

The proper role of government goes beyond balancing budgets, fixing roads, or determining land use. It is about respecting individual rights, minimizing interference, and fostering an environment where people are free to build their lives without unnecessary constraints. This vision of government, one that stands back and protects freedoms rather than stifling them, is both timeless and foundational to America’s principles.

By adhering to a limited, well-defined role, government can create a society in which citizens are free to innovate, create, and pursue their vision of happiness while ensuring safety and justice. A proper government enables freedom; it does not dictate it.

As your Commissioners, we strive to serve without adding a burden to our citizens. Elbert County should be a place where our citizens can live out the American ideal our founders envisioned. Our duty has been to ensure we have a county government that enables people to live their dreams, not restrict them.

Respectfully,
Chris Richardson,
Commissioner District 1
Dallas Schroeder,
Commissioner District 2
Grant Thayer, Commissioner
District 3 ♦

BUDGET DEVELOPMENT

Budgets are required by the State and provide spending authority to towns, cities, and counties.

Budgeting is an ongoing process that involves collaboration between multiple departments. Elbert County begins looking forward to the following year in July every year. The process involves a timeline with specific due dates throughout the year.

The first rough draft is usually due in August with one-on-one meetings that include Department Heads/ Elected Officials to review the requests for the upcoming year. A major aspect of the budget process is the Assessor’s Certification of Values, due to the State in late August. Per these values, the County can determine the revenue that will be generated. Ongoing review of the budget with departments complies the rough draft presented to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) by October 15th. After this presentation, the public is notified of the Public Hearing of the draft budget, usually in November.

This year the Public Hearing will be held on November 6th at 9:00 am in the BOCC meeting room.

While the upcoming budget is being reviewed, departments are updating the current year projections. This provides insight into the end of year status for



the County. In December, the Assessor will update any re-certification of values and each taxing authority must certify their mills to the County for approval.

By December 15th, the County approves their budget as well as the County’s mills at a BOCC meeting. After mill resolutions and the budget are approved the budget is submitted to the State by January 31st and posted to the County website each year. The public can find all budget and financial documents on the County website <https://www.elbertcounty-co.gov/202/Budget-Financial-Documents>, current and archived. ♦



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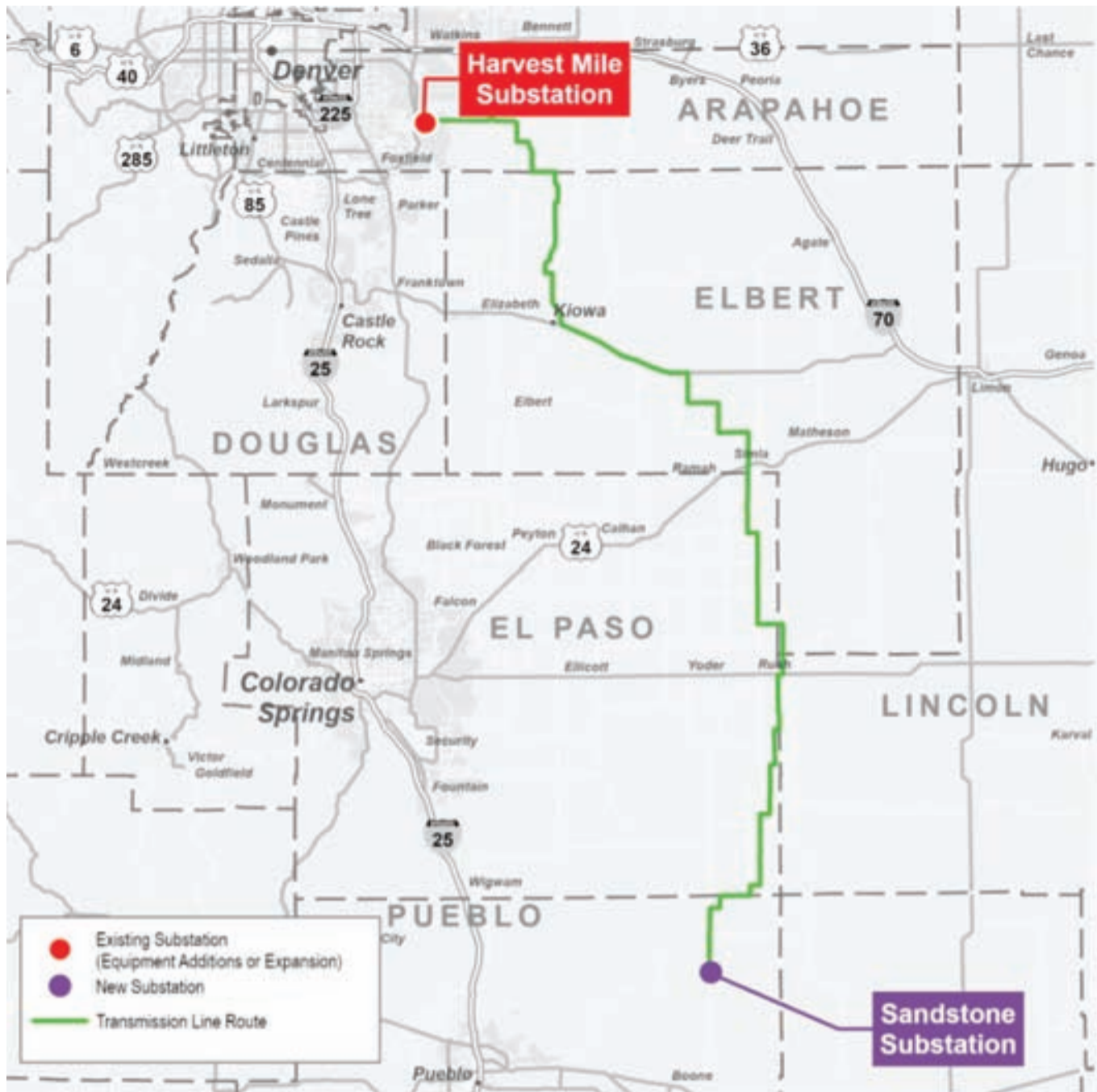


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STATUS: No Change—Xcel’s Colorado Power Pathways Project
 What Happens When An Application is Received?

At this time, the County has not received Xcel’s application for the portion of their “Colorado Power Pathway” that could transit Elbert County. Colorado’s Power Pathway is a \$1.7 billion project intended to improve the state’s electric grid and enable future renewable energy development around the state. Xcel claims the Power Pathway will increase electric reliability, boost the regional economy, and create jobs during its construction. As envisioned by the utility, the system will span twelve counties, primarily in Eastern Colorado, and include approximately 550 miles of new double-circuit transmission line, four new substations, and equipment additions or expansion of four existing substations.

The portion of the project that may transit Elbert County is referred to as “Segment 5” and is depicted on the map. You can find a full description of the project online at: www.coloradospowerpathway.com/project-description/



While news of the intended project broke years ago, several public meetings have been held in the county, and many landowners on Xcel’s preferred route have been contacted in attempts to acquire right-of-way for construction, no application has been submitted. A “pre-application” during which staff relayed all the requirements for application was held on July 25, 2023. Since that time, many dates for formal application have been given, and all are now past. The county’s planning department, while prepared to review the application, is now waiting.

So, what happens next?

Applications of this type are handled via the County’s 1041 Regulations, which govern projects located within the county but which have statewide significance, statute, and requirements emplaced by the Public Utilities Commission (PUC). Once an application is submitted, the county has 28 days to review it and determine if it is complete or if additional information is required for processing. If the latter, which is highly likely considering the scope and complexity of this project, the application will be returned to Xcel with the directions regarding the additional information. At that point, Xcel has as much time as they need to address the deficiencies noted. This process could potentially take place multiple times, but once the application is deemed complete, a 90-day clock begins.

During the statutory 90-day period, the application will be referred to other impacted

governments and agencies (Fire Districts, Soil Conservation Districts, etc.) and scheduled for public hearings before the Planning Commission and the BOCC for a final determination. Without having seen the application or taken testimony in hearings, it is currently impossible to project what the outcome might be. In any land use hearing, the BOCC determination can be to Approve, Approve with Conditions, Disapprove, or Continue. But regardless of the determination, 90 days is all we get.

So then what?

Regardless of the decision of the BOCC, the appeal authority is the PUC. If denied, Xcel can ask for permission to proceed from them. If approved, impacted land owners can ask for the PUC to overturn the BOCC’s decision. If an appeal is made to the PUC and their determination is still a cause for concern, the matter could (as in all land-use cases) proceed to the courts. We make no prediction on the outcome or the probability that any of these steps will be taken, but want our citizens to know and understand the complexity and length of time this process could take.

We are asked for status in each BOCC meeting and will continue to provide updates if and when they occur. We haven’t yet received a formal application, and based on the time required to do all the things discussed above, it is clear that any public hearings that do occur will take place in the coming year after the two newly-elected Commissioners

are sworn in.

If you do have questions on this, or any other issue regarding the County, please don’t hesitate to reach out to us.

Respectfully,
 The Elbert County Board
 Of County Commissioners ♦



WINTER DRIVING SAFETY TIPS

- **Plan Ahead—Check Road Conditions**
- **Stay Alert**
- **Avoid Distractions**
- **Slow Down**
- **Buckle Up**
- **DON’T CROWD THE PLOW**

The Importance of Tree Removal in the Right-of-Way

Understanding the importance of tree removal within the right-of-way, Elbert County's Commissioners adopted a tree removal policy in 2016. The purpose of the policy is to help ensure the safety and integrity of the County roadways.

Tree removal is completed for a multitude of reasons, the first of which is ensuring that the County can maintain properly to protect life, health, and safety. Trees located in the ditch from the edge of the roadway to 18 feet out are generally within the right-of-way. A tree of any size within this area often impedes maintenance of the roadway. Motor Grader blades must be able to reach this area without obstruction to bring material onto the road surface and establish proper drainage.

The other issue widely seen in the northwest portion of the County is drooping limbs into the driving lanes after a wet, heavy snow.

The County, being fire wise, also considers fire mitigation an extremely high priority. Removing trees within the right-of-way aids greatly in saving structures when a wildfire arises.

When an area is deemed problematic, each tree in the area is assessed. Sometimes removing limbs eases the area with snowfall issues, but more often trees within the right-of-way need to be removed to alleviate issues with road maintenance. Crews are very selective and try to leave any tree that is not problematic.

Elbert County Road & Bridge makes every effort to alert residents in the affected area when tree removal efforts will be made in accordance with the tree removal policy.

You can find this policy at Road & Bridge | Elbert County, CO (elbertcounty-co.gov). ♦



Goldfinch Dr in Elizabeth in the Pines Subdivision after a snowstorm in January 2019. The center of the road is in the middle of the motor grader. Limbs have fully succumbed the driving lanes.



Before and after tree removal operations on Verdos Drive in Ponderosa Park Estates Subdivision. Trees were removed to proceed with ditch establishment. Ditch lines were restored after tree removal and road shaping were completed.

HAPPY THANKSGIVING

from your public servants at the Elbert County Government.



Elbert County Tax Lien Sale



The Elbert County tax lien sale is being held live on Tuesday November 19, 2024, at 9 AM at 215 Comanche Street Kiowa, CO 80117 in the BOCC meeting room.

Registration starts at 8:00 AM.

Registrations forms and delinquent list will be available on the Treasurer's website in mid-October.

We recommend you pre-register and send all forms to sherry.hewlett@elbertcounty-co.gov.

Delinquent publication will be advertised in the *Ranchland News* in October.

Please call our office with any questions 303-621-3120.

The Quilt Maker

Berene H. Ingram

Our first quilt maker lived in a cottage in the woods near our farm. She was a collage artist, approaching 80 years when I met her. She stood at my eighth-year height and wore a floor length dress covered with a flowered ruffled bib apron. Her farm-woman uniform included brown lace-up shoes, a scarf that encased most of her gray hair, and round lens glasses. Her strong grandmother's voice commanded our attention.

Mom made us three girls' clothes, which included dresses, blouses, skirts, pants, shorts, and her own dresses and nightgowns. She made summer shorts for my four brothers, and summer seersucker pajamas and flannel winter pajamas for us kids. Year around, the girls were required to wear dresses or skirts and blouses to school, so the fabric type mirrored the seasons. Mom, a private clothing factory manager, sewed for the family.

Mom sewed clothes with cloth from the fabric stores in town and flour sacks from the grocery store. One printed flour sack made a blouse, and another made summer shorts when we were young. At the fabric store, our hands feeling the fabric, and eyes determined which cloth felt good on the skin and would make a nice outfit. Replenished sewing notions included rickrack, ribbons, buttons, zippers, and lace. We studied the pattern books for new styles and sizes. As we girls grew older, we became contributing members of the family sewing factory, and ultimately more scraps for the quilts.

We took the fabric scraps, quilt batting (insulation fabric), and quilt backing to the quilt maker, which provided the blank canvas for the quilt maker who made patchwork quilts for us. To design the blocks, she considered the sizes, colors, textures, and patterns of fabric pieces. She applied skills learned from her young age from her elders' guidance, under the mother's, grandmother's, or aunt's guidance, and built her reputation as a quilt maker within the community. The final touch included the

small stitches dashed side to side across the quilt, anchoring three layers, quilt top, batting, and backing. The woman's art object arrived at our house when she finished.

We sought pockets of warmth in our farmhouse, including standing in front of the space heaters, in the kitchen while food is cooking, and curled up in bed under the quilts for the best consistent heat source. We recognized the fabrics in the quilts because they matched our clothes. Winter season dictated at least two quilts per bed on top of the sheet.

Mom used the hot water bottle because her feet were always cold. We wore socks day and night to keep our feet warm. The three upstairs bedrooms arranged hotel suite style around the bathroom had no independent heaters and received trickles of heat from the small bathroom heater.

Winter mornings, we shivered in the cold and stood close around the heater as we took turns washing in the sink and dressing. When turned up high, blue flames licked out of the slots around the upper portion of the white porcelain heater. We turned off the downstairs heaters before we went to bed to prevent fire hazards. Dad turned them on early

each morning before he milked the cows and worried about fires in the house. On a winter day, the cookstove's four burners provided warmth in the kitchen. When

Dad came in from milking the cows at night, he turned on the oven at low temperature and put his feet inside to get them warm.

The quilt maker lived in two cottages, facing front to back, beside a two-wheel rutted road that separated our land from the quilt maker's property near the creek that wandered through our land. Our cows walked past her house dally on the way to their grazing pastures. The back door of her primary cottage faced the front door of another house connected a few steps across a large square of concrete. A large black cast iron four-burner wood-burning stove with a chimney that reached through the ceiling of the small kitchen. Whenever she fired up her stove to cook her meals, we smelled the smoke at our farmhouse, and remarked to each other, "She's burning the chimney."

She had cooking pots on the metal covers, which she lifted with a two-prong cast iron rod hooked into the hole of each lid to add wood to the stove belly. We never entered the second house where we believed other family members may have lived a long time ago.



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Her small, crowded house had low ceilings. A narrow pathway drew us from the kitchen, through the living room, and toward the front porch where she made the quilts. A foot-treadle sewing machine sat there, surrounded by all her sewing supplies and tools and baskets of fabric. She rocked her foot on a metal plate, toe to heel, and activated the



needle to stitch the fabric. Garlands of empty large and small brown wooden thread spools decorated her workspace. Her gray unpainted house had the wood burning kitchen stove as its only heat source. She used kerosene lamps at night as a light

source. Did she go to bed with the sun or make quilts during the day only? Did her hands get cold? Did she wear gloves? We never knew. ♦

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Thankful

Avis Jaenson

In the late 1950s, we centered Thanksgiving as a “family get together” around giving thanks to God for our lives and health, and being with each other.

My dad sat at the head of the table, my aunt and uncle on either side. We kids sat at the other end of the table by Mother, who did her own form of table aerobics: jumping up to run back into the kitchen for olives, the serving spoon for the potatoes, and extra gravy for Uncle George. On and on went her exercise program. Mother jumped up and down ten times or more at each dinner and even more for holiday dinners. It kept her slender and in great shape without doing yoga or Jazzercise aerobics. She just worked hard to bless our family. She grew our vegetables and canned as much as possible for the winter months. Our roast turkey came from a nearby farm, and Mother baked all the rolls.

Dad watched as she served and shook his head in amazement as she met everyone’s needs without looking stressed. He looked

down the table at her and at his children’s faces and smiled, feeling blessed to have a woman like her. Dad made a good wage as a plumber and on payday came home with a paycheck in hand. He knew he had a great wife and didn’t need to hit the bar for a beer with “the boys.” His happiness radiated out onto us and made him a great dad. That is why his thanksgiving blessing for our food rang so true. We saw his faithfulness to God in his everyday actions.

When he prayed, we all bowed our heads and closed our eyes. Out of respect, people never called during the dinner hour. They knew it as family time. If I’d done something wrong in



school, I never got scolded at the dinner table, but in private in my room. My dad and I straightened it out and resolved it. I now realize it as a gift from him; the time he took to straighten my behavior molded me into a good student.

One Thanksgiving, one of our neighbors interrupted our meal: his pipes were spewing water all over his kitchen and he asked Dad to come and help. Dad never hesitated, but looked at my mother and smiled. She shrugged and stood to give him a kiss goodbye. “I’ll have a nice hot meal waiting for you when you get home.” He nodded and I could tell he didn’t want to leave us, but I saw something else in his attitude. Serving others made him tick. He worked hard and treated his time with

his family as special, but I saw him change his mind almost immediately when he left with his tools and changed into “worker mode.”

That evening, we turned off our black and white television and all went into the kitchen to have our dessert with Daddy. He washed up, kissed my mother, and sat down to eat his hot meal and apple pie with his family. He never complained about the hard work he’d done and although he never mentioned it, I was sure he hadn’t charged our neighbor a penny for fixing

his pipes. Thanks and a handshake were all he wanted. He was a humble, kind man and a loving father to us, and that was a lot to be thankful for at our table.

We had a roof over our heads, our health, and each other; it was enough for us. We had an abundance of blessings. Our family lived life walking in love. We weren’t wealthy, but we were rich in the things that matter. Now that I have children of my own who have good work ethics and are honest, good-hearted adults, I’d like to think what my dad taught me just may have spilled over into their lives. For that, I’m very thankful. ♦

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remembering hard times Harry Fleenor

In the summer of 1933, I was twelve going on thirteen. The Lord and nature had not been kind. Like most everyone, the Depression of '29 hit my family hard.

There weren't many businesses in my little town—Nate's Beer Parlor, Niehan's Grocery, the pool hall/barbershop, a drugstore that sold gas, and Kippy Howland's garage. My dad ran a country weekly, but there was no longer any advertising to put in it.

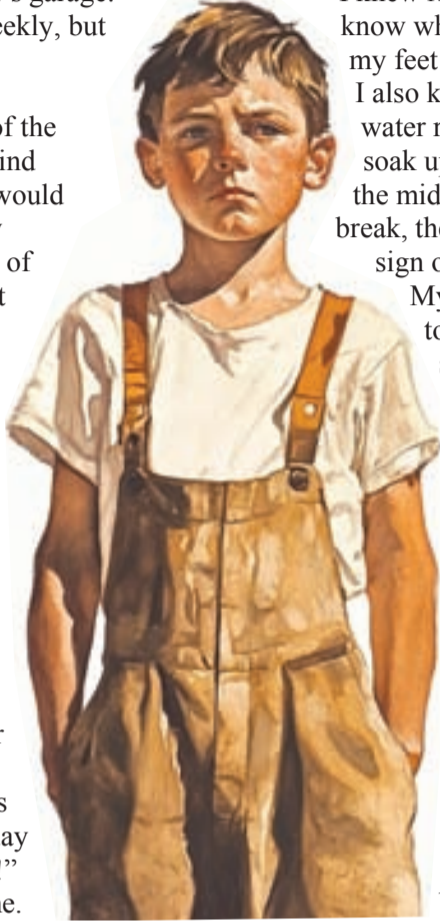
These were the times of the great dust storms. The wind would blow; the clouds would roll in and go right on by without giving up a drop of rain. If you forgot to shut the windows tight, you could write your names in the dust on the kitchen table. If you didn't make the beds in the morning, you slept in grit at night. And there were bedbugs. You tried to brush them from the bedding, but they would move to the walls. Before long, there were blood spots all over those walls.

My brothers and sisters were all in the yard the day my mom yelled, "Junior!" That's what she called me. "You go up and break that dam where the farmer is irrigating and run some water down. Our cistern is almost empty and we can't do without it."

She was right. We needed water, but it seemed like stealing.

"You get up there and break that dam," she insisted. "He'll never know the difference. Go do it!"

He'd know the difference all right. The farmer wouldn't get all his watering done. It put me in a pickle. Another scorching day blazed down on us. The clouds of dirt were swirling high, meaning there would be no change, no rain in sight. I was sweating even though all I had on was a pair of bib overalls. Not another stitch. No socks, shoes,



underclothes, hat. Nothing. That's all my three brothers had to wear as well. My two sisters had little flimsy dresses made of old flour sacks.

"Whatta ya gonna do?" one of my brothers asked.

"I'm thinkin'," I said.

I knew Mom was wrong. The farmer would know what I was up to. The ground under my feet was so hot and dry it was cracking. I also knew when I cut the dam and let the water run in our ditch, the sides would soak up at least half. Even if I got up in the middle of the night and repaired the break, the soaked ditch would be a telltale sign of my crime.

My empty stomach quivered as I went to the cow barn and picked up a shovel. I walked to the earthen dam and broke it just enough to fill our little ditch, but left half to go where it was supposed to. Mom saw the water pouring into our cistern and left me alone for the rest of the day. Dad came home late and everyone went straight to bed, but I didn't sleep very well.

The next morning, I saw the farmer coming down our road. I came out of the house to face the music. To a boy my age, he looked eight-feet tall and five-hundred pounds. The water wasn't running down our ditch anymore, but I knew I was going to catch it.

"Who broke my dam?" the man demanded in a dreadful voice that scared me.

"I did it, sir," I whispered. I didn't tell him my mom told me to do it.

"Kid, if you steal any more of my water, I'm going to call the police, hard times or no hard times."

Then I saw him look at our modest, windblown house. There were little

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eyes peering out of each window. My mother was watching as well. She didn't come out to defend me, but I have to believe she would have if the man had become violent. The look on all of our dirty faces seemed to calm him.

He turned and walked away without saying more. I decided never to steal water or anything else again, no matter what. But something happened more important than my declaration. Every day after that, until the next rain, there was a minor break in the farmer's dam that

provided us with the life-giving elixir. The Lord worked in mysterious ways. ♦

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Prairie Parson

Old Cottonwood



At the corner of the creek, there's an old cottonwood tree that I like to mosey down to on my evenin' walks before it gets too cold. Half of it is dead, and sticks up white into the sky, while the rest is a vivid green all summer long and turns real purdy in the autumn with golden leaves. Some folks would cut down the dead part, cause it ain't nothin' to look at, but there's a darn good reason I don't. Well, two. First, the hawks like to sit there and I love to see 'em, just before they stretch their wings and soar up into the sky, like I'd like to do.

Second, that old half-dead tree reminds me of myself. No, I ain't past my prime yet, but I've had losses and hardships and I bear the scars of a few storms here and there. And I reckon, when a loved one passes on, a piece of me dies with 'em. Like a bone-white branch that's still attached to me, full of the echoes of green and golden leaves. But out of loss comes more life. The other day I went down there to check the fence at the corner and saw a coon family in a hollow spot about halfway up that tree. That's the circle of life on this planet we call home; when one thing passes on to that great ranch in the sky, somethin' thrives in its roots here.

Parts of me died when my loved ones did, but the rest of me lives on and honors their memory by not lettin' a minute go to waste. There's other things that's died in me too, like some bad habits the Lord and I had to work on together for many years. There's things I cared about when I was a young feller don't seem important

no more, and stuff I care about now I didn't give the time of day as a youngster.

Autumn, for me, is a time of thinkin' and reflectin' and prayin' and decidin' what kind of a man I became in the last twelve months, and if it's headed in the general direction of who I want to be when I get to be an old tree. There's lotsa angry and bitter old folks, who ain't polite to nobody, and I don't want to be one of them or to have regrets.

One thing a lot of folks are worryin' about right now is their future, and what will happen down the cow trail. I know the advice of an old cowboy preacher ain't much, maybe it's like spittin' in the wind, but here it is: I'm old enough to have seen "the end of the world" predicted, and here I am. I've been through wars, bad presidents and good ones, had days where I didn't know where money was comin' from, from one day to the next. I'm still here, because the Lord looks after us—little kids and fools alike. It may seem silly to trust Him, but you can. I've trusted Him most of my life, but also had periods in which I yelled at Him fer things I didn't feel were fair. In time, I came to see the things I didn't like were "character buildin'." Not that the Lord sent

them to test me (I don't believe that), but cuz they happened, I learned a lesson not to sleep with my spurs on.

The way I figure it is, you can't do much about the future except pray for it and do your best to be a good person. And the way you become a good person is to work on your character. As John Wayne famously said once, "Life is hard. It's harder if you're stupid." As I stand and I look at the old cottonwood tree, scarred and battered and standing proud with half its leaves clinging on, I'm reminded we can weather about anythin' if'n our roots go deep enough to keep us up when the wind blows. ♦

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Irene Bishop

Thanksgiving

When my children were little, I wanted to make Thanksgiving a tradition they would remember. A particular one comes to mind.

One-room country schools began preparing for Thanksgiving weeks ahead of time. The younger kids listened to the older ones recite their history lessons and were often better students because of it. They looked forward to bringing home the special projects they had been working on, which would add to the importance of the most "American" holiday of all. In those days, we made rather than bought most of the decorations and did the same for dinner. It took lots of work and time to prepare the meal, but it was a labor of love.

Turkey was the staple. From the shelves of home-canned food, I chose an assortment of pickles; sweet, dill, bread and butter, and pickled beets, along with home-made jelly or jam, fruit, pumpkin, and mincemeat. The cellar furnished Hubbard squash, potatoes and root vegetables. The day before, I did most of the baking—fancy dinner rolls, cakes, and pies, which included the traditional pumpkin and mincemeat (my husband's favorites). Roasting the gigantic bird stuffed with savory dressing took six hours in the oven, and keeping the old cook stove's temperature right required many armloads of wood. I quickly got breakfast out of the way while "Daddy" finished the chores. Our special guests would be my brother and sister-in-law from Cheyenne Wells.

"What a beautiful morning," Buss said as he brought in fresh milk and thick rich cream from the milk house. Our daughters Ginger and Margie fixed the individual salad and relish plates, setting the table with the lace tablecloth, holiday placemats they had made, and my lovely new dishes. Time to get cleaned up! The two older girls brushed their blond tresses until they shined and curled down over their shoulders. Charlene's short, dark curls framed her smiling face. I wasn't sure how long she and our boy Jerry would keep Tuffy (Jerry's dog) out of my way, but ordered them to take him outside and "keep him out." That dog never seemed to get filled up! "Tuffy you watch for Uncle Jack and Aunt Fern and let me know when you see them coming," I added.

"Honk! Honk!" "They're here!" chorused the children. Jack playfully boxed with Jerry, and Fern's greeting was "Hi, Miss Wiggle! Boy, something sure smells good in here, and look



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Thank You, Friends!

O'Malley's Mercantile is closing, not failing. This difference is important to me. This place—this building, this counter, these docks, these flower beds, and those barns—they have been my lifeblood for the past 45 years. I spent most of my life now in this place we call “the store.” This place I have loved and nurtured has defined who I am, both to myself and in the community, as anyone who has built a business from the ground up can relate.

It is bittersweet to announce that it's time for Mike and me to retire. But as our son-in-law pointed out, there's a reason the windshield is bigger than the rearview mirror. It's time for us to embrace the next chapter in our lives!

O'Malley's has been much more than a “feed store.” We've watched children in the arms of their parents grow to be responsible teenagers and young adults. It's blessed us to be a part of their special events and marvel at their accomplishments. We have witnessed the proud moments of their sporting events, 4-H accomplishments, graduations, weddings, the birth of their children, and have now been a part of the next two generations completing this cycle. It brought us immeasurable joy. We will miss the social interactions, the opportunities to serve the community, and all the homemade treats you wonderful cooks have generously shared with us over the years!

As we reflect on all the big events—Checkerboard Days, St Patrick's Day, Anniversary celebrations, horse meetings and equine clinics, baby chicks, Flocktober, Ladies Days, 4-H functions and guest appearances from Ann and Thunder of the Denver Broncos—these will never be forgotten. However, the moments we will miss the most are the “mundane” moments of daily life—the conversations over coffee at the counter trying to solve our world's problems, bad jokes told with good intentions, and hearing about the lives of our patrons.

We have held keys, held hands, and given hugs. Loaded trunks, truck beds, trailers, and dinner plates. We have cared about people on their worst days and congratulated them on their best days. Held new babies and buried dear friends. O'Malley's has given us the opportunity to create incredible memories centered on people—people we care deeply about. It's our customers who became friends sharing their stories, their dreams and often, their heartaches.

Some of our best memories are of our team—we witnessed firsthand the power a job has to change a young, unsure person into a confident, capable individual. There is a “O'Malley Alumni” who are doctors, medical professionals, lawyers, executives, police officers, tradesmen, business owners, and more, all giving back to their community. We were blessed with many great workers who became more like family than employees. We want to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you who punched the clock at O'Malleys, since we couldn't have done it without you.

This journey would not have been the same without our girls, Kaitlyn, Erin, and Mary. They have worked alongside us since they were able, and without them we would not have made it to 45 years in business. We

especially thank Mary for being a dedicated and valuable part of our puzzle. She has stood by us through thick and thin, through the hard times and the good times. Without her, we wouldn't have survived. Getting to work with your children is a rare gift, but rarer still is getting to work with your grandchildren! Ours have grown up in the store—learning to walk in the aisles and maturing into valuable employees. Lucky for us, we will now have more time to spend with them—going to all their events. (Please save us a seat, and a bag of popcorn at the next ball game!)

This certainly has not been an easy or hasty decision. While this new chapter is a bit scary—what in the world will we do when we don't have to open that gate at 9 am?!—it also holds the promise of some much-deserved freedom.

From the bottom of our hearts, Mike and I thank you for allowing us to serve you, your families, and your animals. We hope your memories of O'Malley's will be vivid, wonderful, and as special to you as they are to us. If so, then every moment has been worth it.

December 21, 2024, will be our last day of business. Thank you for 45+ wonderful years. This is not goodbye—this is still our home and our community. “We'll see you soon!”

God Bless each and every one of you!!

Gratefully and sincerely,
Kath and Mike O'Malley

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at that table!” It looked beautiful. Fern's approval pleased me, as she had encouraged my culinary and decorating art through the years.

“Well, don't just stand there, Irene. I didn't drive all those miles just to smell that food. I'm hungry!” Jack teased.

Since it had been some time since we had been together, we had lots of catching up with all the activities; crops, 4-H and county fairs, their boy scout troop, church, and when were we going to get a phone? I could see Jerry was getting restless and complemented him about cleaning up his plate.

“Yeah, I noticed too. Do you suppose he has a partner in crime?” Jack winked at Jerry. “Tuffy out, or no dessert!”

“Hey, sis, I didn't know you had new dishes,” Fern said between bites and complements.

“I guess I didn't tell you. That's a story of its own,” I replied. “Since we had a good grain crop, we temporarily turned the shed we used for a garage into a granary. Ginger and her dad had made plans for my upcoming birthday and sent an order to Montgomery Ward's. The box came on the mail route and they hid it under the grain in the garage. When the day arrived, Buss carried the big box into the house.

Whatever it was, it must be very heavy, I thought. ‘Open it up,’ Ginger said as everyone excitedly looked on. New dishes! A beautiful 12 -piece set with dainty little roses and gold rims! I was overwhelmed and speechless. “Maybe she doesn't like them,” I heard someone whisper. “Oh yes, I love them,” I sniffed. “Guess we surprised you,” Buss said.

“That's one more thing to add to the Thankful List, isn't it, Aunt Fern?” Margie asked.

And indeed it was. ♦

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Sarah Spindler

Me 'n Nope

The move my family made from New York to Colorado opened the door to a whole new world of opportunity for me, only I didn't know it. Our place here in Colorado is sure fit to beat the band! We've got ten whole acres of our own, bordered by the empty grassland pastures of the surrounding ranches. Mom likes it here pretty well 'cause we're only thirty minutes from town, even if it's small.

We live only six miles down the road from my Uncle Jack, who is the head honcho on the 25,000-acre home ranch where my daddy grew up. Uncle Jack is Daddy's big brother, and one of the best all-around cowboys you could ever meet. He's my idol, and I get to work for him in the summer 'cause I don't have school. I enjoy riding fence, trailing cows up to their summer ranges, helping with the horses, and having a ball. We

get along first rate, the hands and me, but there's just one problem amid this perfect life: I don't have a horse. That puts me afoot when I'm not on Uncle Jack's old pony, and as the saying goes, a man without a horse is no man at all. I'm bummed. I've asked Daddy lots of times if I can have one, but I always get the same reply: "Nope." Daddy doesn't like it much when I press my point about how much I need a horse. He says I've got to be kidding. It takes over one hundred acres to feed one cow in this "barren desert," much less a horse, and I guess the cost of the hay and grain for my small herd of cows is an issue already. He says a cow gives you



something, and a horse is just a "feed burner." I can use Uncle Jack's pony when I go up to the ranch, but it's not the same. Having a horse of my own to train like I want would fix a lot of the problems Uncle Jack's pony and I have between us. Like taking the bit and running back to the barn every time we come within a quarter-mile radius of it. Besides, I'd have a horse to use around here on our own little "ranch" when I wanted it. But even those arguments didn't convince Daddy. He gave me the same tired, awful, "Nope."

It seemed things would go on like this forever, until the summer I turned 14 and life introduced me to a mighty helpful friend, Chance. School let out for the summer and I got invited to spend most of it batching with Uncle Jack and his hands on the big ranch,

working to pay my keep and maybe to earn some extra mullah for next year's grain bill.

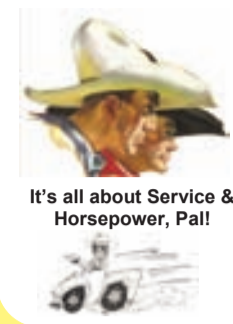
Everything looked rosy, the way it all should for a boy facing a great summer, until Uncle Jack came to see Dad one afternoon, and it had to be private. I wasn't even allowed in the house for three whole hours while Dad and Mom talked with Uncle Jack about a subject I knew had to be the summer's ranching plans. When my uncle came out of the house clutching his big

Stetson in one hand and a cold cup of coffee in the other, I pumped him for any information I could get, but he was as dry as the rusty pump by the back cow pen. All he would say was, "I'm countin' on you next week!" Dad looked beat, and all I got from Mom was a wry smile.

This is where I got acquainted with my new friend. As chance would have it, a scruffy bay mare, branded Rocking-A, had showed up at my uncle's ranch looking like she'd been used and abused for a while. Uncle Jack called the brand inspector and found that the brand had been recalled because the ranch owners went bankrupt. It seems the Rocking-A had lost some of its wilder horses while trying to load them for the sale barn, and the boss said Uncle Jack could keep the mare for all he cared. So, Uncle Jack had come to the house to ask Dad one more time about me getting a horse. He must have said the right thing 'cause for the first time in my history the answer was a reluctant, "We'll try it."

I war whooped like a Comanche for a full five minutes before settling down enough

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for Uncle Jack to tell me about my mare. She had a few rough edges to knock off, but that mattered little to me—Uncle Jack said I could have her if I would work with her. Boy, would I ever! I promptly named the mare "Nope" in memory of all the times I'd heard it... and just maybe, it was to needle Dad a little too.

The summer started like summers should, hot and dusty, with a lot of work to do on the ranch, but I still got a whole Saturday off to spend with my mare. The first time I went to saddle her, Uncle Jack had to sideline her and snub her to the corral post so she'd quit fighting me to where I could get the saddle on her, but that didn't stop me. As inexperienced as I was, you couldn't have said "skedaddle" before I bit the dust on the corral floor. Not to

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be bested so easily, I tried again. Nope went one way, and I went the other quicker than a wink. I again had a face full of dirt—it went that way all morning. The landings kept getting harder. The ground felt more and more like concrete. Nope had got my dander up to a nice roaring temper. The definition of "green broke" took on a new meaning that day.

Round about noon, I stripped the saddle off of Nope and stomped out of the corral past Uncle Jack muttering something about missing my calling and thinkin' I'd have made a better bronc rider... A strong hand

This is a paid space.



Byron McDaniel, candidate for the District 3 County Commissioner position, and his wife, Paige, recently traveled to San Diego to attend a promotion ceremony. Their son, Austin McDaniel, was promoted to the rank of First Class Petty Officer in the U.S. Navy. Byron had the honor of pinning this new rank insignia on his son. Austin serves as an Air Intercept Controller Supervisor and has proudly served in the Navy for 8 years.



to ask Dad one more time about me getting a horse. He must have said the right thing 'cause for the first time in my history the answer was a reluctant, "We'll try it."

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Ima Klutz

Hand Written, Hand Picked

Unforgettable, continued from page 20.

jerked me around by my shirt collar so that I was lookin' up into Uncle Jack's face. "Boy," he started.

"I know, I know," I cut in angrily, ripping away. "You're gonna say, 'when a horse throws you, get back on,' and I don't want to hear any of it! I've been on that of hurricane deck for purty nigh to three hours, and look what it's done to Nope! She ain't hardly broke a sweat yet, and I haven't knocked a bit of the kick out of 'er!"

Uncle Jack shook me a little and said, "Boy, how's Nope s'posed to know who's boss when you up and leave after gettin' pitched a few times? How's she gonna know who she has to respect and obey when all you do is run off? You ain't a quitter, boy, you never were before, and you won't be now. Get back out there and do yer stuff." He gave me a push in the general direction of the corral and repeated, "You ain't a quitter."

I reluctantly grabbed the saddle and started at Nope again, still spitting mad, but with Uncle's words ringing in my ears. The next tries went better, comparatively. I still stuffed my face with a fair share of dirt, but by the end of the day I was riding a fairly well-mannered Nope around the unfenced yard at a smooth lope.

Nope moved like a dream when she was under control and became something I felt proud of over the next few years. That summer went like I had envisioned in my dreams, even better because of Nope, and I started home that fall with a man-sized payroll in my pocket, a good horse between my legs, and a smile as wide as my hat brim on my face.

The summer's experiences had taught me a lot of things not only about cattle and the ranching business but also about character and what makes a man a man. Nope had taught me a lot more than how to fall on my behind. Things like patience, perseverance, and more than anything, the ability to laugh at myself when I do get thrown.

I felt real proud when I rode into our home yard and I think Mom and Dad were too. As I dismounted and rubbed Nope down that evening I told them all about the summer and what I had learned, at least all they hadn't heard from Uncle Jack or me over the phone, and they told me about their summer and all they had learned. We found we had all learned one thing: it's up to us to make or break a situation and if we don't take advantage of what we're given we lose out on once-in-a-lifetime chances. We realized we were blessed with much but weren't always using it.

I'd like to thank Nope for making me see that hopes and dreams really do come true. I'll never forget the wonderful move that changed our lives, the years until I got Nope, or the summer that changed me for the better. ♦

Last week I invited my neighbor, Maggie over to my house for coffee. While we sat at the kitchen table, our talk turned to Christmas. She said one of her greatest enjoyments is sending Christmas cards during the holidays. I asked her why, and she told me she loves picking each card and writing a personal letter for each one.

I told her my greatest joy was getting through the season without receiving a card from someone I hadn't sent one to. She smiled and asked how many I sent out.

"Oh, about a hundred."

Her eyes grew round, and she swallowed.

"How do you write that many?"

"Assembly line," I answered.

She nearly dropped her coffee cup and looked into my eyes. "Assembly line?" she echoed.

During the days that followed, I got busy getting my Christmas cards ready to mail. First, I went through my diary and made a list of everyone who had come for dinner, all the operations I'd had, every trip I'd taken over 25 miles away, and any disasters that I'd lived through during the year.

Then I listed all the wonderful things about my children I could think of. I had trouble coming up with a long enough list, so I made some things up. I figured my Christmas friends wouldn't know the difference and wouldn't care, anyway.

After I finished the letter, I invited Maggie over to show her the

"assembly line" in action.

Maggie folded the letters, Wilbur put address labels on envelopes, Junior signed the cards, and I licked the stamps and envelopes. Maggie was pretty quiet during the entire process, but I think it impressed her. I felt uncomfortable when Junior kept asking who people

were and I couldn't remember. When we were done, we invited Maggie to go with us for pizza,

but she said she needed to get home and finish her cards. I asked her if she needed any help, but she said I didn't know how—whatever that meant.

About a week later, a Hallmark Christmas card from Maggie arrived in the mail. The words, "I value your friendship this Christmas" were written above two teddy bears sitting at a table drinking coffee. On the inside, I found a short poem and the following letter:

*Dearest Ima,
You will never know how much joy you have brought me since we moved in next door. I love the times we have spent over coffee and cherish the thought you wanted to include me in your "assembly line." I look forward to getting to know*

you much better and having many nice chats over a cup of your delicious coffee.

With love, Maggie

To say I felt "special" is too light of a word. I felt exuberant and... well, loved, and for the first time I wondered if a hand-written letter inside a hand-picked card is so old-fashioned after all. ♦



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"Well, not at first. After I get the letter written and photocopied, then I gather the family and have them help me."

"The letter?" she asked. "Only one?"

"Yes, the idea of everyone getting a separate letter is old-fashioned, don't you think?"

She shook her head and took another sip of coffee. "Ima, you can never replace some things. How can a photocopied letter ever mean as much as one that is written from the heart?"

I got up from the table to find the cookies. I honestly didn't know what she meant.

The *Prairie Times* wishes you a Happy Thanksgiving!



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Unstacking Hay

Charles Oz Collins

Last week I watched a fellow unstacking hay, and it did not appear to me he had any fun. He had one of those big red and yellow stack grabbers on the back of a truck. All he could do was back up, clamp down, and drive off. Why, I don't think he even got to get out of the truck. My brother and I knew how to make an adventure out of unstacking.

We always had alfalfa stacked somewhere on the property. Those old hand stacked, over-lapped stacks were mighty solid. Some folks even took pride in keeping the sides straight and the top evenly tapered. A well-made haystack served a practical purpose. It was the perfect place to spot pheasants or coyotes. On a sunny winter's day, there's no place to equal the south side of the stack to sit and soak up a bit of warmth. But the better built the stack, the more adventure found in unstacking it.

When we were just feeding a few milk cows and their calves, my brother and I favored unstacking in the late afternoon after school. Doing it in the near-dark added

to the challenge. We also favored the pickup over the truck for hauling hay. Dad never understood our behavior and methods. In fact, I recall his advice—"Why don't you boys take the truck and get a load or two on Saturday, enough to last awhile?" He just didn't get it.

Dusk is when the pheasants are about and the ducks and geese are landing in the fields. It adds to the adventure. Driving to the stack without using the headlights tested your memory and ditch dodging skill. So did climbing the vertical side of the stack in the dark. I have since noticed that mountain climbers stole our technique, the one where you jab your hand into the cracks to get a

hold to pull yourself up. We had a slight advantage since we could use the bale twine for a hand-hold. You worried some, though, about pulling too hard on the twines. Some folks, in order to get a really straight, vertical side on the stack, set some bales out to the edge where they looked pretty but where they weren't properly locked in by an overlapping bale above. Yank too hard on this and you were likely to beat the bale to the ground.

The reason for taking the pickup instead of the truck also involved the "challenge nature" of unstacking. Any fool could throw, roll, or push bales from the top of the stack and land most of them in a big old truck bed. But it took a marksman to do that with a 1951 Chevy half-ton pickup, a bale and-a-half wide and two-and-a-half long (three long if you left the tailgate down). In

the dark, from the top of a big stack, that little rectangle made a worthy target. You also had to

remember that your brother stood somewhere down there in that small space. You never knew if he was looking out for flying bales or watching for pheasants, ducks, and the like.

Anyone who has grown up on a farm knows you try not to stack the same hay twice. We did not carefully place each bale in the pickup, especially since we would toss them to the cows soon, but calculated how many we needed to feed that night and the next morning and tried to get that many loose bales to stay in the pickup bed. We weren't interested in the esthetics of a tall, solid, straight-sided load. Leave that for the haystack. We were just hauling feed.

There are multiple techniques for unstacking into a pickup. Our favorite involved backing into the side of the stack at fourteen miles per hour. This dislodged enough bales to feed, without completely burying the pickup, but it had its drawbacks. One, it was a good way to get whiplash if you didn't expect the moment of



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impact and brace yourself. You also had to remember to have the tailgate up or you'd end up bending it or jamming it between layers of bales. In this case, two possibilities existed, neither one great.

That '51 Chevy 6-cylinder had little power or traction and you might end up stuck to the side of the stack. This could be embarrassing. You might stick that Chevy in granny low and pull and get more bales than you needed. Depending upon the height of the stack, you could find bales raining down all around you. There was always the risk of putting another dent in the cab and/or knocking the side-mirror off, assuming you hadn't done that already.

It also meant that when you came back the

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next night, you'd likely run over those bales in the dark. This broke the twine and meant you had to get out and throw the hay in by hand. We never had a fork with us. Why? You don't use a fork on baled hay, any knucklehead knows that. Suppose you put a fork in the back of the pickup. There'd be a good chance a bale would land on it and break the handle. Then what could you tell Dad? "Dad, I broke the fork handle loading baled hay!" Even if he didn't say it (unlikely) you know what he would think: "Those boys don't know better than to pound sand in a rat hole, taking a fork to load baled hay. I swear, I don't know what is to become of them."

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The upside of the battering ram method was that occasionally you got a load of hay without even getting out of the pickup.

More often than not, my brother and I had to load the pickup by hand, but we let gravity lend a hand. With that old Chevy backed snug against the side of the stack, one of us climbed up and started some bales in the general direction of that little box. If you could find a seam in the stack where the bales did not overlap too much, it might be possible to wedge oneself into that seam or crack and pry a bunch of bales loose. These hopefully tumbled toward the pickup and landed in the back. Being younger and smaller, I often "got" to be the one to climb the stack. Meanwhile, my brother had the job of standing in or beside the pickup box to give falling bales that final bit of guidance that assured an adequate load of feed.



Sometimes we actually rolled or threw bales one-at-a-time toward the pickup. Rolling bales is easier but there is some loss of accuracy. Speed more than made up for this. If the bale got a fast spin going, it would "kick" off from the edge of the stack and go airborne at an impressive distance. If it overshot the old Chevy, the bale usually exploded into several little piles of green dust.

Nobody liked loose bales, which meant you could usually play a tune on those twines. Being safety conscious fellows, we didn't use bale hooks. Our standard technique called for jamming your fingers under the twines, lifting, pushing with your knees, and letting go at just the right moment so you didn't go airborne with it. Now some folks may have been willing to jam their bare fingers in between rough twine and hay, but I wore gloves or mittens. More than once, I climbed down from a stack to search in the dark for the bale that made off with one or both of my gloves. I can also tell you that a youthful human body falls at exactly the same rate as a 65 pound bale of alfalfa.

Somebody said the Lord takes care of fools and small children.

One of these categories must include hay unstackers. The several times I accompanied a bale of hay on its way to that pickup, the Lord saw to my landing. It wasn't too bad to hit the ground right behind the bale, although it wasn't the softest cushion and sent a good amount of hay dust up my nose. Once I recall separating from a bale just prior to making my landing on a frozen hay field. The Lord provided a mostly perfect flat-footed landing in the dark.

The top layer of bales on a stack dried out in the sun and wind. I had climbed to the top of the stack to discover I could lift these bales to shoulder height and heave them toward the pickup. The first

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bale landed in the center of the pickup. The somewhat loose contents of the bale compressed and then expanded, restrained by the stout twines. I hefted bale number two, which felt lighter than the first. I sent the chunk of cow feed arcing into the gathering gloom.

First there was silence, then a thud, followed by a considerable grunt. No explanation was immediately forthcoming from below. Then I heard an angry tirade about the wisdom of causing bales to land flat instead of on their ends. As luck would have it, the second bale smacked into my brother, who had just climbed into the pickup. Thus, my brother got unstacked rather than the hay. But such are the risks on the frontiers of science and innovation. ♦

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Sometimes he wasn't quick enough to keep all the bales in the box but when this happened he always used the excuse that I tumbled too many and he had to dodge one or two as he made sure the other eleven got where they were supposed to go. No doubt!

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 Enjoy your favorite football game and wings for \$1/wing 11am til Close
KIDS EAT FREE MONDAYS
 One Free Kids Meal with Purchase of Entrée 11am til 9pm (12 and under)
TACO TUESDAYS
 Weekly Taco Specials
PRIME RIB THURSDAYS
 Salad, Loaded Mashed & Vegetable 5pm til 9pm (while supplies last)
BLOODY MARY BAR & BOTTOMLESS MIMOSAS
 Every Sunday Til Noon
DAILY LUNCH SPECIALS
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Pool Tables
Huge Bar
Big Screen TVs
 25 W Highway 40 Byers, CO 303.822.5002

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Craft Fair: Sat Nov 16 9-3. Elizabeth United Methodist Church, beside True Value. We'll see you there!

Bedroom for Rent. Furnished, utilities, fiber \$650 Elizabeth, Sun Country. 720-422-8200

Hay for Sale: \$8/bale OBO. Alfalfa/Brome mix. 1st cutting. Located-a mile South of Safeway. 32525 Pine Ridge Street & County Rd #132 Elizabeth or call 303-646-5333

For Rent in Eliz: 2 bd, washer/dryer, security system, on-site mail kiosk, across from park, close to town. \$1250/mo. No pets. 303-646-0872

2006 Yamaha 4-wheel ATV: recently overhauled with new carb, good tires, runs great. \$2500 Jackie 303-648-3286

Help Wanted: Sewer/installer, tarp fab, system install, repairs. Truckhugger -rcarroll@truckhugger.com

Masterbuilt propane/charcoal smoker: model CSMMP7. Manual & recipe books. \$100 303-648-3286

For Sale: 2006 Jayco Seneca 35 ft Super C Motorhome. 44K, 1 slide, Jacks, Queen Bed, 50 Amp, Dual A/C, New Michelin Tires, Satellite Dish, Garage Kept, \$68,000. 303-646-1735.

For Rent in Elizabeth: 2 bdrm, washer/dryer, security system, across from park and close to town. \$1250.mo. 1st and last + \$2000 deposit. 303-646-0872

Ammo cans are back: 120mm mortar, 81mm mortar, 60mm mortar, 50cal/.223. Dozens of each, \$12 to \$25 each, Buy 10 and get one free. Kevin 720-908-8821

Yamaha Snowmobile: Last ran 4 years ago. Needs a seat. \$100 OBO. 303-648-3286

Full care horse boarding: \$350. Paddock with triple wide shed. Arena and round pen. Neighborhood trails. Trailer parking. 35 acres. Eliz. Sun Country 720-422-8200

Premium horse hay grass, alfalfa and mixed. Also have cow hay most of the year. Delivery options available. Fast loading and can load after dark. Dennis 303-822-5564

For Sale: Roto-tiller, Ryobi, used for one project 2 months ago, 40 volt battery, 18 inch, self-propelled, rear tine. \$800 303-570-9213.

Help Wanted: Someone to break/ride 2 colts. Call 303-931-0291 for info.

For Sale: Custom truck bumper Ford Super Duty, with Warn winch 16,500 lbs capacity Never used. \$1200. Steve 720-231-0138

For Sale: 2000 Fleetwood Southwind 36 ft. Exc cond for its age. 28k miles. \$22,000 OBO 303-243-0488

5th Wheel Hitch: Pullrite #2600 Single point Attachment 5th Wheel Hitch, 20K Lb Towing Capacity, 5K Lb Pin Capacity. \$900 new, sacrifice at \$300 OBO Leave Message: 303-644-4635

For Sale: 4/x ft trailer \$500 OBO 303-243-0488

For Sale: Snow blower, Ryobi, used last season, 40 volt battery. 24 inch, 2 stage self-propelled. \$800 303-570-9213

For Rent: 27ft. x 50ft. Steel Barn for work shop/ Hobby shop/ Storage. Heat available. \$990 mo. Plus deposit. Available in November. John 720-231-1612

Bedroom for rent in a shared house with mellow mindful roommates. Furnished, utilities, walk in closet. \$700. Elizabeth, Sun Country. 720-422-8200

Welding and Fabrication, no job to small/ reasonable rates. Steve 720-231-0138

For Sale: 14x5 ft trailer, new rims and tires, new bed, new wiring. \$1,400 303-243-0488

For Sale: Dump trailer hydraulic lift unit . Never used, \$500. Steve 720-231-0138

Fall/Winter Cleanup: snow shoveling, fence repair. Justin 720-598-1630

Food Bank of the Rockies
 2nd Friday 10:30 am
 Franktown SDA Church
 905 N. State Hwy 83
 Franktown
 Jack 303-688-8730

Elizabeth Presbyterian Church, Helping People Walk with Jesus
 Sunday 9 am
<http://elizabethpc.org/home>

Elizabeth United Methodist Church
 Come As You Are
 We Aren't Perfect Either
 Sunday 9 am
elizabethunitedmethodists.org

TLLC Concrete:
 Specialize in barn floors, driveways, and remove and replacement.
 Any job over 400 SF.
 Call 303-646-2355

Elbert Women's Club -DINNER & BINGO-
 1st Monday of the month
 Dinner (6-7) Bingo (7-9)
-MONTHLY BREAKFAST-
 All you can eat Every 4th
 Sunday thru Oct. 8am-Noon
 Adults: \$12.50 Children \$6.25
 3 yrs old and under free

Russell Gates Mercantile Comm. Hall
 24223 Eccles St. Elbert.
 Questions: Wendy 303-243-1308

ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT TODAY'S WORLD?
 Biblical perspective on the World we live in.
 Calvary Church, 4031 Park Lane, Elizabeth, CO
Mondays 5-7 p.m.
 Open discussion and fellowship.

Nutritious Lunch Meals
Only \$3.00! Senior citizens 65+.
 Eat and socialize Wednesdays & Fridays at Kiowa Senior Center
 438 Comanche St. (behind MCR).
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