

# Stuff and Nonsense Articles

By Susan E. L. Lake

Volume 1

HubStuff

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## DVD vs VHS – Issue 1

December 27, 2002

What's all the hype about DVD? Surely it can't be all that much better, but this year DVD players are flying off retailers' shelves (which is an interesting image if you think about it). Is it just because shoppers are desperate for something to buy and like lemmings are following the crowds? Or is there something of substance here?

I have to admit that I wanted to be a hold-out. After all, the prices for VHS movies are so much cheaper than for DVD. And what about those years of accumulated favorites in VHS that I have stored on my shelves? Some of them haven't even been taken out of their wrappers. I saw them and they were too inexpensive to pass up. I had a friend once ask me why I was buying a particular movie (I think it was *Back to the Future* Part Who Knows Which) because DVD was going to replace VHS. I sneered, assuring him that I wasn't going to be suckered into that. After all, all I wanted to do was to watch the movie. Not live it.

Okay, I got suckered except that I was the one who was wrong. There is more to watching a movie on DVD than VHS. It is actually better. Much better. I don't know why, though. It's not because there are added pieces. I don't much watch those special interviews or extra endings. I did at first, but not now. I surely don't care that I can watch a favorite movie in French or Spanish instead of English although I do think that foreign language teachers might find it useful. I keep telling myself that it would be a good way to learn or improve a foreign language. So far it hasn't happened.

So why is it better? For one, it is more convenient. I can stop it wherever I want and return an hour later. I can hear you saying, "I can do that with my VCR." I know, but it just seems easier to do with DVD. I can also find a particular part quickly using the scene thumbnails, so if I took the disk out last week and want to return to the spot I left, it's easy to do.

But wait, there's more. You never have to rewind a DVD. Why on earth would one care about that? How much time does it take to push the

rewind button? For instant gratification freaks like me, too long. When I'm ready to watch, I want to watch right now. I hate sitting there watching the counter go backward.

DVDs are easy to share. For one thing, they come in pretty little cases that transfer more nicely than clunky VHS slip cases. For another, they seem more durable. While I never really worried that my tape of a video would get stretched, I know some people think about those things. I know that DVD disks can get scratched, but they seem rather immune to that.

I never shared my VHS tapes. Perhaps it's because most of us originally used our VCRs to copy movies off the television, making them sort of homemade. DVDs started out in this world as movies. They seem more important – more worth sharing.

Maybe it's because I can't copy a DVD (although there is equipment on the market that will let you). I can't copy my VHS ones either, but I could if I had two VCRs to hook up together. If you are a graduate student looking for a psychological study topic, here's one just waiting for you. It could be something like "A Study of the Personality Aberration that Makes People Share DVDs More Often than VHS Tapes."

For the moment, though, the reason that DVD is replacing VHS is mostly because movies look and sound better. Much better. I can't give you a reference point. It's more a matter of you know it when you see it, so I've spent the last few months looking for my old VHS favorites in DVD. Seems silly, I know, but I don't want to watch them on tape. I'm hooked on DVD.

## The Uncranky Critic – Issue 1

December 27, 2002

I'm no critic. I'm one of those totally accepting viewers whom television and movie makers must love. I go to a movie and walk out saying, "That was fun." Even when I can't get to see the movie I plan on attending, that's pretty much my response. As for television, my friends know that while I'm expected to like highbrow classically good productions, I'm far more likely to choose trashy just for fun. As you can see, I have no taste.

If you actually need a review that has substance, try the Web site of the Cranky Critic at [www.crankycritic.com](http://www.crankycritic.com). His reviews are excellent and will meet most needs.

Meanwhile, this column will not claim to review anything other than what I like. Trash and all. It won't even attempt to be broad in its perspective. Instead I'm only going to address at random those things that I have seen that I want to talk about.

So here goes for this week.

Don't say you haven't been warned.

This is a great time of year for viewers like me. It's when the holiday classics appear. At other times of the year, a classic movie (or television production) probably has to be a certain number of years old and have universal characteristics of quality. I'm thinking of something like *Casablanca* or *The Maltese Falcon*.

This isn't true at Christmas. During December, any movie that has been shown for at least two previous years constitutes a classic. That means that *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street* are classics without even trying. It also means that *The Santa Clause* and *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* are too. And moving into the category quickly is *The Christmas Story*.

I like all of these. I like the teary feel goodness of the early movies and I like just as much the slapstick humor of the later ones. I do wonder, though, why there's such a difference in style between old classics and new ones. Do movie producers think we are no longer interested in schmaltz (which was originally melted chicken fat – you figure out the connection)?

Can't be. Why else would we see every year a remake of Dickens *A Christmas Carol*? Come to think of it, though, most of the recent ones are more in the vein of adaptations with a twist. Maybe we are getting more sophisticated. Maybe we just need to laugh more.

What do you think? Are we too old for teary eyed feel good Christmas movies? And which ones would you put in the classic category? I'll keep a list so next year I can watch and not review your choices. I need the help

# Cameras and Technology: From Brownies to Megapixels – Issue 4

January 17, 2003

Amateur is absolutely the only way to describe my photography skills. I wish it weren't true, but it is. Photographers who talk about polarized lenses and F-stops scare me to death. I'm a point and click girl. If it takes more than that, I'm lost.

I started taking pictures back in the very dark ages with a Brownie Hawkeye, the classic box camera from the 50s. In time I moved on to the high tech version with a Kodak Instamatic that didn't require the user to roll a spool of film into the camera. All you had to do was drop the film cartridge in the camera and close the lid. It was cool and small and took the same quality of pictures I had taken with my earlier camera.

From that point on I acquired a variety of point and shoot cameras and took my share of very bad pictures. For those of you who didn't live in that world, these cameras required one to stand at least three feet away from the image, to hold the camera very still, and to accept whatever showed up in the envelope you got from the drug store two weeks after you turned it in. I have countless such envelopes stored away in a chest with images from my past.

Several years ago I got my first digital camera. My life changed. I didn't turn into a better photographer, but I did start taking better pictures. I wasn't limited three feet. Now I could get wonderful close-ups. People's faces became the focus of a shot rather than their shoes, belt buckles, and hats. I didn't have to worry about holding the camera still or that my subjects were still. I could capture bumblebees in flight as they moved from flower to flower. As for development time, it was truly instamatic. Even the improvement of development time from two weeks to an hour was no match for the digital world. I could see my photos and print them as soon as I took them.

I had become a photographer!

Two significant changes made the difference and these are the same issues that any new owner of a digital camera should keep in mind. The first was that I began to take lots and lots of

pictures. No longer was the cost of development a factor. A bad picture just disappeared (and I can assure you that floating somewhere out in the ether there are about a million of mine). Delete becomes a powerful option for a novice photographer. If I used to take a single shot of Aunt Martha and the cousins. I now take ten or twenty. Sometimes one of them is good enough to print.

The other change was that learned to get close. Very close. It's awkward at first. I'd been trained to stand back, but now I get close enough to measure nose hairs. Okay. At that point I back away just a bit. Close is so much better. With it, the picture becomes an image of what I want my viewer to see. Without it, my viewer has to guess. One of my best loved shots of the grandchild from heaven cuts off the top of her head – just a little. While everything about her is adorable, what I wanted people to see was the look as she focused on her hand. The top of her head didn't add to the image. Her fingers did.

So if you got a new digital camera for Christmas, here are the two clues to making it the best gift you ever received:

**Take lots of pictures.** Go snap snap. If one was good before, take nine with your new camera. They are free. Just print the ones that you like.

**Get close.** Don't be afraid. If you can see clearly in the viewfinder, then your picture will be fine. Experiment by seeing how close you can actually get. Snap snap. Experimenting is free. Throw away the failures. Print the nice ones. Have a good time. You are going to love this new world of photography.

## Music for the Masses – Issue 5

January 24, 2003

I'm no musician. I'm not even an educated listener. I'd never make it on a trivia show where I was asked who wrote the Grand Canyon Suite or which orchestra is famous for its performance. I'm clueless about such things although I don't admit this with pride.

As a matter of fact, I was once rather embarrassed when a friend was showing off his spectacular sound system and classical music collection. He asked me what I wanted to hear and the only one I knew to ask for was the 1812 Overture. I did know it had lots of cannons which seemed like a good choice.

With this information, you may be surprised to know that I'm actually a season ticket holder for the Lubbock Symphony. Isn't the symphony just for the rich or the knowledgeable? Nope. At least it's not as far as I'm concerned. I'm sure not rich and you already know my level of knowledge. So why do I go? I go because it's a place to hear wonderful music even if I can't tell Rachmaninoff (which I can't even spell) from Rambo. I actually find going to the symphony less demanding than going to a rock concert. At the symphony, you are just expected to sit back, relax, and enjoy the exquisite sounds you will hear. At rock concerts, you are expected to participate. This is easier.

I can hear you saying, "Yeah, but you have to get all dressed up and it costs a fortune." Not true. Last Saturday night at the Civic Center I saw everything from formal dress to jeans. Some folks are in ties and some are not. The dress code of years gone by has gone by. If you go to church, you can wear the same thing that you'd wear on Sunday morning. If you don't, then just use good judgment.

As for the cost, if you check the great web site at [www.lubbocksymphony.org](http://www.lubbocksymphony.org), you'll find a wide variety of prices. If you are a student, you can get a ticket for as little as \$10. Non-student prices are as low as \$15. Each of the masterworks this year has featured a part of the community (the last one was agricultural workers), and these people can get two tickets for the price of one. The next one features

healthcare workers. These prices make it no more expensive than going to the movies.

I hear folks saying that they wouldn't know how to act. I know the feeling. The first few times I felt like I was attending an unfamiliar church – not sure if I should kneel and how to handle communion. About all you need to know is that there will usually be three or four pieces with an intermission after the first two. Sometimes a piece will have several parts and there will be a momentary break between each part. Don't clap here. Wait till the piece is completed. Just wait for others and join in.

The program generally lasts about two hours which will go by much faster than you expect. Give it a try. You'll be surprised how much you can enjoy music with which you may not be familiar. Lubbock has as good a symphony as any town could ask for. Don't deprive yourself of a chance to hear them even if you don't think of yourself as a classical music fan. You won't regret it. I never have.

## Fast and Cheap – Issue 6

January 31, 2003

Have you ever thought about the books you find in the bargain bin at a bookstore? I recently came across five wonderful books (that happened to be about technical subjects of particular interest to me) that had sale prices on them that boggled my mind. One of them was marked \$2.99 instead of the \$24.99 listed as its original price. All five of them had similar markdowns. It made me feel guilty to buy them, but I did.

If I go to a department store and find a shirt that originally cost \$25 and is now \$3, I think I've found a great bargain and scoop it up gleefully. I don't feel any guilt at all. The same is not the case when I find a discounted book. Maybe it's because I'm a writer myself, but I grieve for the author who has to see his or her work basically being given away. I know how many hours that author put into that book. It has to be painful. I would not be pleased if I found one of my books in such a sorry plight.

I feel the same guilt when I read a 200 page novel in an evening (I'm a fast reader). I know that some writer spent months and months trying to find the perfect word and the best character descriptions. I consume words like some glutton at a banquet who is not even tasting the feast. I know that words should be taken in slowly to allow their meaning to make the impression the author intended, but I can't resist reading quickly. It's as if I'm in some kind of race that requires me to finish as quickly as possible.

So what's my point? It's that I believe we should honor and respect those who create works for our pleasure. We should treasure what someone else has created. It's our responsibility as an audience.

There are many ways to do this. We should buy books, music, and artwork. We should go to museums, libraries, and concerts. It is our obligation to give artists their due. It means that we should listen to musicians performing at local clubs rather than talking. We should stay to the very end of a movie to watch all the credits. We should not "share" our CD collections by burning copies. We should encourage new writers by

going to book signings even if we have never heard of the book. We should buy paintings and clay pots at artist festivals.

Does this mean I believe I should not have bought the "bargain" books? Should I have insisted that the bookstore let me pay full price? Should I force myself to read slowly savoring each paragraph? I don't know. Perhaps my guilt is enough payment.

# Tab Stops – the Answer to your Frustrations - Issue 7

February 7, 2003

In the days of old, spacing was easy to determine on a typewriter. If you wanted to match up one line of text with another, you could space-space-space until you reached the right spot.

The tab key could speed up the process by letting you set the spot to move to. Tab stops were set by positioning metal stoppers along a track. You merely pressed the tab key as many times as needed until you reached the right location. This was useful for actions that you needed to do frequently such as indenting paragraphs and aligning text into tables.

## Monospace vs Proportional

In the computer world, tabs are more important than they were in the typewriter world. To understand why, you must know the difference between proportional and monospace fonts. Monospace fonts are the ones used on a typewriter. Each letter takes up the same amount of space on a line, so both a letter “l” and the letter “w” have a single space allocated to each of them.

Computers use proportional fonts. This means that a narrow letter gets less space assigned to it than a wide letter. Because of the use of proportional fonts, it's nearly impossible to line up text by eye. This means that if you space-space-space until you reach the point that looks good on the screen, your document may not print as you intended. This spacing problem has been the subject of countless help desk calls of frustration.

To avoid this problem, you must tab to the point that you want text to begin if you are not keying a standard paragraph.

## Microsoft Word Tabs

In Microsoft Word the default (pre-set) tabs are set at ½ inch intervals and many folks just keep tabbing until they are satisfied. This will work if you are not too picky, but you are missing some great tab features if you limit your use to this technique.

The tab dialogue box (Format->Tab) allows you to change the default tab spacing to whatever

you want. If you know that you will frequently use tabs set at ¾ of an inch, this is the way to do it.

The easiest way to set your own tabs in Microsoft Word is to use the ruler at the top of the page. Clicking once on the ruler (near the bottom of the ruler line) will place a tab at your click point. It will appear as a small “L” if you are using a left tab. Once a tab is set, you can drag to reposition it. To remove a tab, you drag it off the ruler and it disappears. You can set as many tabs as you want and each paragraph can have a different set of tabs.

If you set all your tabs before starting your document, these tabs will apply to all your paragraphs. If you decide to add a tab after a document has been started or even completed, it's best to first select the entire document (Edit->Select All). With this action, you can set the same tabs for every paragraph in the document. If you only want tabs set for a particular paragraph, click in the paragraph and then set your tabs.

If you have the correct tabs set in one paragraph and want to use the same tabs in an adjacent paragraph, you can assign the tabs to the new paragraphs. First highlight or select both paragraphs. Notice pale versions of the tabs are visible. If you click on the “pale” tab, it blinks but appears unchanged. However, it will have assigned the tab settings to all the paragraphs selected.

Often folks set tabs and then forget to press the tab key. You must tell the line to move across the page by pressing the tab key. Your computer doesn't read minds.

## Types of Tabs

There are a variety of tab options, some of which you may have not thought about. The list includes left, center, and right tab, but there are also decimal and bar tabs. In addition, there are first line indent and hanging indent tabs available in Word 2002.

To change a tab type, you click on the obscure box located to the left of the ruler. Each time you click on the box, a different tab option appears. Keep clicking until you reach the one you want.

If you don't understand what the tab symbol stands for, hold your pointer over the tab type box and the name will appear.

The left tab is the standard means of setting a tab, but center and right can be quite useful. For example, a center tab aligns the text on either side of tab stop which can be used instead of text alignment buttons. Right tabs place the last letter of the line at the point of the tab so that text ends at the tab stop rather than starting there. The right tab is essential if you want to place text such as a page number at the farthest right margin on the page.

Decimal tabs align figures so that regardless of the number of digits, the numbers line up with the decimal. This is a nice way to enter a column of expenses. The bar tab creates a vertical line at the tab point which can be used to draw attention to your text. Unlike the decimal tab, the bar tab this has nothing to do with expenses.

The first line and hanging indent tab allow you to set quickly your indent point for each paragraph. Hanging indents create a paragraph in which the first line "hangs out" from the other lines in the paragraph.

For the more adventurous, the tab dialogue box (Format->Tab) offers additional options. You can set tabs using the numerical box, but you can also assign leaders and underlines to your tab choices. Leaders are those little dots that guide your eye across the page. They are often used in recital programs to make sure that you can tell which piece of music your child is playing (as if you hadn't already heard it a million or so times). For programs such as this, the right align tab with a leader works very well.

Now you know more than you probably wanted about the mysteries of setting tabs. Tuck away for future reference this information. I guarantee you that there will come a time when it will ease your frustration level.

## Good Things Around Us – Issue 14

Mary 28, 2003

With all the war talk and anxieties about stock markets and calamities, I was recently able to escape for a short time by reading. This wasn't escapism in your usual sense of romance novels or adventure tales (where no one ever gets seriously hurt). This literature was better – much better – for it gave me hope and a happy heart.

I was reading poems and stories written by elementary students from Christ the King that would be entered in the Rising Star Young Texan contest (<http://www.risingstarwriting.org/>). Rising Star is a non-profit organization that works to improve writing in Texas elementary schools by publishing the writing and art of Texas elementary school students in their annual magazine, *RISING STAR, Young Texan Tales*.

You may wonder how good the writing of a third grader could be. When I first started judging several years ago, that was my question also. I can tell you that I think it's good, but you be the judge in my place. Here are some that gave me the feeling that there are still many good things ahead for us and the next generation. Maybe they will give you a moment away from a world that is too much with us.

### **Plants By Matthew Dotray Grade 6**

Plants grow  
Really fast  
With water

### **From the Fields to Eat By Jack Koenig Grade 6**

God, when I come in from the fields to eat  
I think about you as I listen to my heart beat.  
I know you are so great and so good.  
I also thank you for my tasty food.  
Life is so great with you by my side  
I love to eat all the food that you provide.  
As you feed all the wild animals, the sheep, the deer,

Remember me as I sit here.

Amen

### **Dance By Ashton Craddick Grade 6**

Ballet, Jazz, Hip Hop, Toe,  
With pretty costumes and a bow.  
Hair slicked back in a bun,  
Makeup and rhinestones just for fun.  
Fast and slow, rhythmic too,  
So many dance steps to perform for you.  
Turns and jumps, I'm finished now,  
While you applaud, I take a bow.

### **Seasons By Rivu Dasgupta Grade 3**

Winter skies are white.  
Christmas trees are bright.  
Spring is hot and spring is cold.  
Spring breezes are very old.  
Summer days are very dusty.  
Summer heat makes tin cans rusty.  
Fall's colorful leaves are falling.  
Owls in trees are calling.

### **Halloween By Lucas Smith Grade 2**

Monsters crying. Witches flying.  
Mummies rising from the dead.  
The bright light goes out of sight.  
The vampires have been fed.

### **Halloween By Brianna Briones Grade 2**

Halloween is fun.  
Because trick or treaters come.  
Goblins, monsters send chills up my spine.

But when the evening is over, all the goodies are mine.

Monsters scare me in my closet.

Little monsters grow in my pocket.

Goblins are green, ghosts are white.

All the monsters scare me at night.

Werewolves and vampires are such a fright.

That's what makes Halloween a good night!

### **Winter Chill By Bridget Rampy Grade 2**

The wind will blow.

The fire will glow.

The snow will fall.

Hot soup for all.

Tonight's dark freeze.

A hot bath will please.

Tomorrow's frozen day.

Inside we will play

## Gardens and Growing Things – Issue 16

April 11, 2003

I love flowers of all kinds, but I'm particularly fond of roses. The first house we bought had beautiful roses already in place with lovely blooms that came from nowhere. It took me a couple of years to discourage this abundance. This wasn't surprising considering my lack of knowledge. What was surprising was that it took so long. These roses wanted to spread their joy in spite of my mismanagement..

My next home also had roses. These even came with little labels identifying their names. It took my toddler about three days to remove their identity, but it took me longer to reduce their blooms to infrequent splashes of color.

My third home had nothing. No trees, no grasses, no flowers. It was up to me to change West Texas barrenness into glorious color. I had to figure out how to do this with no money as just making the house payments was a challenge. However, it wasn't long before I could no longer resist the allure of roses.

These roses have survived and at times even thrived. Over the years, I must have learned something. I'm proud of my efforts, but I always knew there was more. I recently found it when I joined the Rose Society hoping to discover the secrets of these wonderful flowers.

Rose Society people know about roses and relate to them in ways I had never imagined. Listening to them talk is like eavesdropping on a hidden culture. They talk about their roses by name saying things like "Jeanne Lajoie really loves to put on a show for you." They utter with pride statements such as "Doris Morgan is doing better this spring" as if a friend has recovered from some serious complaint.

All this makes me regret that I don't know my roses by name. In my world, it's the yellow, red, or white roses. Or it might be "the pink one we got last year." But I am vowing that is going to change. I'm learning and loving it. In time I'll be able to discuss with some wisdom the advantage of own root roses versus grafted. I'll learn the language as well as the names.

And the point of this? There are all kinds of garden clubs in Lubbock. Call the Garden and

Arts Center at 767-3724 to find one that is for you. There's a whole world of flowers and gardens that most of us know nothing about. April 22 is Earth Day. What better way to celebrate it than to learn about growing things whether they are flowers or herbs or vegetables. Garden clubs are a path to that knowledge.

## Toe Dancing – Issue 17

April 18, 2003

My experience with ballet began when I was about seven and my mother took me to see Swan Lake. I think the outing was probably intended to spark an interest in dance classes. My mother always wanted to be a ballerina but never had a chance to take classes as a child. She talked about walking on tiptoe for hours on end pretending to be “toe dancing” as we called it. I was to be her vicarious means to achieving this goal. It didn't work. I took ballet classes for a year, performed in the required recital, and knew even at that tender age that lightness and grace were not my destiny.

That was the last time I had any exposure to ballet until my daughter came of age. She was long and lean with natural grace. Ballet was right for her – perhaps proof that one should live vicariously through grandchildren rather than children. She took classes from the age of three until a hip injury kept her from continuing. In the intervening years, I attended countless recitals watching children with tutus swirl and dip. It was not exactly Swan Lake. In addition, I was always as tense as my overachieving daughter fearing that she would make some fatal mistake that would send her into despair.

Long after that period of my life, I attended several other recitals of children who didn't belong to me. It was quite delightful. I loved to watch them turn and point. The big parts were always left for those who had graduated to toe which was the ultimate goal. However, I never took time to go to more professional performances such as the Nutcracker ballet performed each Christmas. Maybe I still remembered those earlier experiences.

Last Friday, though, I broke that pattern by attending the Saint Petersburg Classic Ballet from Russia. To say that this gave a whole new meaning to toe dancing would be an understatement. This was Swan Lake as well as many other pieces. The dancers did things with their bodies and arms that not only looked impossible (We later joked that they must have had bones removed before joining the troop), but they did it in such a way that music and movement blended magically.

Watching a dancer use her arms in such a way that the swan's wings became her own was only part of the delight. Extraordinary athletic ability wasn't about showing off; it was part of the dance. I could hardly believe what I saw. Time passed too quickly. Intermission wasn't a welcome reprieve. It was a jarring disruption of the beauty on the stage.

Although there were plenty of seats filled with adults, it's too bad that there weren't rows and rows of little girls in the audience. It would surely have sparked such an interest that every ballet studio in town would have been filled. Even the most awkward child would have been yearning for a chance to dance this way.

It's too late for me to become a toe dancer. I am even less graceful today than I was at seven. But what I can and will do is to make sure I attend next year's Nutcracker and any other ballet that comes to town. It's easy to forget that even if we don't have Russian ballerinas here every day, we do have other forms of the art available. We probably shouldn't miss it.

## Spring Fantasy – Issue 18

April 25, 2003

The image of spring that literature would have us accept as true consists of newly blooming flowers, freshly warm days, and growth renewing. It's a lovely picture and one that I tend to believe in during months such as February. By March and April, however, reality begins to bloom instead of flowers.

Real spring in West Texas forces me to remember that literature is a fantasy. Yes, there is a green renewal of growth. Yes, flowers that have lain dormant all winter are cheering my days. And, yes, days become warm and energizing.

But along with these lovely moments are also storms – thunder, dust, and hail. Even nastier, of course, are tornados which are euphemistically called “severe weather” by our local weather watchers. As a result, I've always believed that we were somehow on the short end of the stick when it came to spring. I thought everyone else had these lovely springs that I had read about.

Because I seldom traveled during the spring, I had no way to compare fantasy to reality. That changed recently when I had a chance to spend several spring days in the Dallas area. People in that part of the state would have us believe that they have a monopoly on good weather. They frequently denigrate Lubbock when they hear I am from West Texas. I am forced at those times to defend our home, but I always felt that I was on shaky ground when the subject of spring came up. I'd always counter our critics by agreeing that our springs are not too great, but the other ten months of the year are wonderful.

Never more. I discovered that Dallas springs aren't any different than ours. They get storms of the hail, wind, thunder, and tornado variety perhaps even more frequently than we do. True, their wind may not contain the dust “fragments” that ours do, but that's no reason to crown them queen of spring.

Yes, I know that last week's dust storm was horrendous. There's no excusing it. But I'm here to tell you that the rest of the state isn't immune to severe weather of some type or another. It may be tornadoes. It may be hurricanes. It may

be ice. It may even be wind strong enough to blow off roofs. I've now seen proof.

Let's quit believing that we have to defend our part of the country. All things being equal we can hold our heads high with nothing to be ashamed of. At times weather sucks everywhere. I think it happens less here than most places. Stand proud and don't feel that you must be mortified just because a little dust blows through here occasionally. If nothing else, it builds character that the other parts of the state may not have.

## Faris and Faris: Music Headed for Success – Issue 19

Hot Chocolate Songs and Meltdown Morning don't appear to have much in common. One is a Christmas medley, the other is rock. One represents the beginning of Scott and Amy Faris' recorded music, but the other does not represent the end. Their newest CD is more like the next stage with many more to come. This musically talented couple are clearly committed to becoming another Lubbock legend.

That's easy for me to say because I know more about Scott than most. I even remember the day he moved in across the street as a skinny teenager who had already lived in many places as a result of his father's Air Force career. He was talented then, but I've seen lots of talented teens who didn't connect their abilities to a drive to succeed. Scott has made that connection – perhaps as the result of finding a life partner with as much talent as he.

This drive to success was clear to me last week when Scott and Amy dropped by their newest CD. We talked a long time about the challenges of the music industry and the changes in their music. I wondered how they handled their move from Christian rock to mainstream. It was clear that they have thought about this and made a conscious decision to widen their audience. Amy commented, "We thought it was important to bring our music to more people. We haven't given up our Christian ideals, but the label was limiting our ability to reach people."

Along the way, they have struggled with issues that most listeners wouldn't even think about. Scott regaled me with their efforts to find a name that wouldn't violate trademark and other issues. Their band began as 100 Love Sonnets, but too often the audience came expecting one thing and got another. A great name but not for this group. They moved on to violet-I which worked. That is, it worked until the trademark lawyers did their research and found that there was a good chance that they'd be in danger of losing what they had developed. So they went on the search for another name. After a tortuous series of brain wracking sessions, Meltdown Morning was born.

I've read much about the "Napster" issue with music producers complaining loudly that they are losing money when music is shared over the

Internet. Scott's take on this is a little different. "We want our music shared. It's a way for us to get recognition. If someone hears our music, they will tell others. Sure, when someone tells me that a friend burned them a copy of our CD and they love it, I think 'Hey man. That's \$15 out of my pocket.' But I hope that soon they will buy their own."

Meltdown Morning is just now beginning to build its name recognition. Recently, the band was featured on AlternaTV, a live television show filmed at South Plains College in Levelland. The five members of the band consists of Scott on guitar, Amy on keyboard, Shane Shepherd on bass, Brian Tate on drums, and Stephen Stroepe as vocalist. With all the effort that has gone into the new CD, the band's gigs have been few and far between. They are returning to the road to perform in West Texas, Dallas, and other locations. In the past they have played as far away as South Carolina.

Discussion of their gigs brought up something I've thought would be difficult for performers to handle. Their band performs in bars and clubs. This is obviously a place where drinking is expected. What impact does that have on them? Scott was the one who fielded that question. "Sure, people drink where we are playing, but our band doesn't drink while performing. Playing music is our job. We are serious about it and know that it would get in the way of our performance."

Speaking of seriousness, I just had to ask Scott if he thought he was a flake. After all, I know that he's done visual art, web design, CD cover designs, teaching, and lots of different music. Grinning back at me (it's hard to be interviewed by someone who knew you when ... ), he had to agree that he's had a varied career. "Yes, most musicians are sort of flaky. It's part of our personality. But I'm a serious flake. I take my music seriously and work on it until it's as perfect as I can make it. That may mean staying up most of the night to get the smallest thing exactly right." Amy added, "And our band is just as serious. This band has been together for three years. We show up when we say we will. We are never late and we never miss a gig." Doesn't sound flaky to me.

This seriousness is what made it apparent to me that these two had connected their art to a drive and determination that will lead to success. Look for Meltdown Morning to be the next Lubbock sensation. Visit their website at [www.meltdownmorning.com](http://www.meltdownmorning.com) to follow their progress.

## The Stradivarius of Voice – Issue 19

May 2, 2003

I've heard vocal musicians refer to their voices as an instrument which always seemed rather contrived. After all most of us can sing – sort of. I've spent my time in a church choir "singing." I can even sing along with John Denver on the radio (although most folks in the car would rather I didn't). To call my voice an instrument would be a ridiculous overstatement. I don't think one could even describe it as an old out of tune piano.

I've heard others sing, however, who did a much better job than I. Their voices are pleasant to hear and carry a tune quite nicely. I enjoy hearing them and look forward to choral performances. But to say that any of these sounds are the equivalent of a fine instrument would be a serious exaggeration.

I have to admit that until yesterday I never much thought about what it took to create music from the human voice. However, when one closely examines the process, it is rather amazing. After all, when one plays a piano or violin, the action requires one to see a note on a piece of paper and then stroke the equivalent key or string. It's not a simple task, but it is a mechanical one. Of course, some do it much better than others and I truly admire their talents. The gifted know how to change mechanical into emotion, and that is not something most of us know how to do.

Singing, however, requires something else. Not only must the musician read the note but he or she must then adjust the diaphragm, lungs, and vocal chords to create a sound. On paper, it doesn't seem possible. There is nothing to see. There is nothing to touch. There is nothing to point to or to check for quality. The instrument is invisible. Combine this with the fact that the brain (itself invisible) must be used to choreograph all the actions.

I would say it couldn't be done to equal the level of a Stradivarius. Except that Friday night in the Municipal Auditorium, I saw and more importantly heard the impossible happen. I heard a true instrument, an instrument surely equivalent to the finest violin or piano ever created. I heard a voice that transformed my idea of what singing is supposed to be. Even the

word "singing" seems too mundane to describe the sounds I heard. Anthony Kearns, a renowned Irish Tenor, took me into a world I had never experienced before. His voice is controlled as carefully as an instrument and his passion transformed mere words into emotion both on his part and that of the audience.

Beautiful notes, achieved to perfection, filled the room. Words followed the lines of the notes as if they were one and the same. The concept of opera finally made sense to me. Words and notes should be used to carry meaning. They should not be separate entities. Kearns made me see all this. It was an epiphany in the truest sense.

I came away wishing that all words could be sung rather than spoken. It was as if the rest of us are misusing our gift of song by using speech. I now know why there are those who travel whatever distances are needed in order to hear him sing. I would do the same myself. Thank you Anthony Kearns for this gift to the world and to me.

## Wolf Flowers – Issue 20

May 9, 2003

When did wildflowers start growing along our highways? I know that Lady Bird Johnson was instrumental in the project, but I can't remember when it finally happened. I do know that in my childhood (long long ago) that the highways and byways only had dirt, weeds, and trash. Lots of trash.

Then one day suddenly everyone was talking about the glorious spring flowers, particularly bluebonnets. We began to act like driving past carpets of them was the norm for as far back as we can remember. Not true. I just can't remember when it became true. I do remember when bluebonnets were so rare that it seemed illegal to even own them. Now, I have packages of seeds myself although so far I haven't succeeded in getting them to grow.

Picking bluebonnets along the roadside was a definite no no in the past. Now we have miles and miles of them, however, according to the Texas Almanac, "picking of posies on highway right of way might [still] be interpreted as being the destruction of state property." Perhaps as a throwback to that earlier scarcity, instead of picking bluebonnets, we take pictures of them every spring for Texas Highways magazine. Acting as if we have always had an abundance of these lovely lupines (wolf flowers), bluebonnets are now featured on every state calendar, map, and memento.

Last weekend I drove to Kemp near Dallas, which is not exactly the hill country where most folks go to look for spring beauty. I passed yards and yards and acres and acres of these magical blue rugs. The flowers were past their prime according to the locals. I didn't care. It was still too lovely to even imagine. Only a photograph could do it justice. Mine looked just like those you'll find in Texas Highways which didn't require much in the way of photographic expertise. I just parked along the roadside and started snapping pictures. A no brainer, for sure. I couldn't take a bad shot. The hard part was to know when to quit. When my passenger in the car started looking like she was going to walk back home, I knew I'd exceeded my limits. (Since this paper only prints black and white,

you can see one of my efforts at [www.susanlake.net/photos](http://www.susanlake.net/photos).)

But that doesn't answer my question about when all this came about. I wonder how many other wonderful things in life just appear quietly without us noticing. The uglies are easy to remember. War. Disease. Death. The pretties seem to sneak up on us.

All I can say is that if one wanted to be remembered for something important and worthwhile, I think Lady Bird has found the answer. I know that when she first proposed a plan to sprinkle the roadside with wild seed that lots of folks made fun of her. It seemed such a silly thing to be concerned with. There were far more important issues of the day such as inflation and violence. Little flowers surely weren't significant enough for a former first lady to propose as her personal project. As time has passed, however, it has become clear that she knew something the rest of us didn't. I'm going to try to remember what that was the next time I worry about what I'm leaving behind as my mark on the world. Bluebonnets will always be remembered as Lady Bird's contribution to the state of Texas. I can think of no better legacy to leave behind.

## Stages – Issue 21

May 16, 2003

I saw *Stage Fright* on Friday night at the Lubbock Community Theatre and realized from looking at the program that once again Chris Caddel was working his magic. No, he wasn't one of the actors (although he does act). He wasn't directing it either (although he does that also). What he does for all the plays I've seen in which he was a part is create a miracle.

He takes a small area in the midst of the not yet remodeled fire station floor and makes me believe. He creates sets that are time and place transporting. Chris is able to conjure up images in my mind using the tiniest details such as a draped cloth, an open door through which I can see just a little, or a pipe running down the wall. With these touches and so many more, he forces my mind to accept that which I know is not true. After all, I can see all around me. I know the floor is just concrete painted black. I can see colored lights hanging down to illuminate the actors. I can even look around the "stage" to see someone going to the wall to turn the house lights on or off.

So how does he succeed in turning a stage into a real place? I don't know. I do know that I've come to wait expectantly for each play looking forward to his set designs. They fascinate me. It's as if he has taken a special course in interior design. This course isn't the one we all want that will create homes that outdo Martha (although does anyone still yearn for that now that Ms. Stewart has fallen on such hard times?). This course, instead, has taught him to turn the tiniest area into an entire world whether it is a home in Jerusalem, a homesteader's cabin in the wilderness, or the basement of an old theatre. I always believe.

I just don't know how he does it. I've created a world, sort of, in my own home. In it I've tried to convey a certain feeling or an image. I have to admit that the image is supposed to tell visitors that we don't live in absolute chaos. To achieve this end, I have carefully placed details such as a fountain that I turn on only when company is coming. I light candles in the fireplace to send the message that we live such an uncluttered existence where tapers are the norm. I even

have music playing gently in the background to convince guests that we live a tranquil existence.

I laugh to myself as I move through the house in a whirlwind fashion only moments before someone arrives. This is so bogus. A vision of our real world would show instead the peanut butter that remains on the counter to make it quicker to grab lunch. It would see the bed that gets made only when guilt becomes too much (usually when even the cat protests the unkempt state of our sleeping area). And then there's the room with the closed door – the room that no one is allowed to see. I won't even try to explain what is in there. Just suffice it to say that you aren't brave enough to go there.

And what does this have to do with theatre sets? It's that we all live in theatre scenes. We all try to make others believe that they are seeing things they aren't. Chris Caddel does it on a stage and he does it well. The next time that you see a play, whether it is live or not, take a minute to look at the setting. Stand back and see the little details that send a bigger message than you might expect. You'll be surprised at what you observe. Look for the tiny detail that makes you believe. If it's one of Chris' settings, it will delight you.

## Everglade Images Inspire Museum Visitors – Issue 21

May 16, 2003

If writers are supposed to write about what they know, then the same could be said for photographers. Clyde Butcher, who is known as the Ansel Adams of the Florida Everglades, follows that philosophy and succeeds at it. His huge mural-size black and white photographs of a part of the world that he clearly knows and loves are astonishing.

We are used to viewing six and nine foot oil paintings. They are imposing and often beautiful. A six by nine foot photograph is impossible to imagine. Photography seems limited to more manageable sizes measured in inches – not feet. Adams has overcome these limitations in his studio filled with equipment designed to produce massive prints using seventy year old equipment.

The mural-size photographs alone would be worth viewing even if the images were merely ordinary. But Adams also brings to the task an eye for the absolute beauty of his environment. The Everglades come to you in his shots. The majesty and awe that these pictures bring to the observer cannot be described.

Lubbock is privileged to have an exhibit of Adams works on display at the Texas Tech Museum. The body of his work is titled "VISIONS FOR THE NEXT MILLENNIUM." Adams uses his art to encourage preservation of wilderness areas to ensure that these lovely places in nature will be cherished and kept for future generations. Missing this exhibit is not a choice. Every child and adult should be allowed to see these magnificent images. They are truly wonderful. Once again the Tech museum has scored a *coup* by bringing to the city works of this caliber.

## Local Artist's Work Reveals What You Might've Missed – Issue 22

May 23, 2003

J. Marcus Weekley is an artist in the making whose goal is to give others the chance to enjoy life by revealing in his poetry, paintings, and photography that which his audience might have missed. Lubbock will get a chance during the month of June (3-30) to view the products of his vision at the Lubbock Regional Arts Center (511 Ave. K).

This young artist is self taught, but he admits the influence of the giants in his fields including names such as T.S. Eliot, Georgia O'Keefe, and Piet Mondrian. "I've seen a lot of good art in galleries all over the world. It does make an impression on my work."

Marcus' work has been published in literary magazines such as Modern Haiku, Fourth River, and Tundra. His work has also been displayed at the National Photography and Television Museum in Bath, U.K., at The A Gallery in Hattiesburg, MS, and at the juried 2003 Lubbock Arts Festival.

He tackles many subjects in his writing, but his poems are often short - less than 30 lines. He writes through other personas, and confesses, "My art is not always directly a reflection of myself, but I'm in there." He wants to have an impact today as well as 100 years from now, and hopes to be able to develop his art sufficiently so that he can make a living from his abilities. Meanwhile, he is working toward a degree that will allow him to teach. Currently, he is a doctoral student at Texas Tech majoring in Creative Writing (poetry).

There will be a reception honoring Marcus June 6 at the LRAC from 4-5 pm. If you miss the display in June, you can also see his work at J&B Coffee House during July.

### Painting the Beaches at Normandy

(previously published in Snow Monkey)

All Sunday I scumble pthalo blue into waves with titanium white crests

and no blood. Ladies clutch bonnets and their gentlemen hold flying ties

and the sun has no beef with anybody.

I highlight tan sand with ochre

and stripe a vermilion changing tent,

and none of my friends' hands

collect hunter green helmets with holes.

No shiny machine guns hide in that dune,

there is no mission objective labeled in a red X on some map,

no seven-year-old boys giggle

at girlie magazines behind the ammunition dump.

In my picture, red fiddler crabs play their clackety clack,

two girls nibble a mustard pretzel,

and the men grow old and hum like carburetors.

### Chef's Ditty

(previously published in Conspire)

I am a burning fool for you

but you never try my lady fingers.

How many mornings did you leave

the smell of ginger snaps

on your shirt?

I will continue to knead

and roll and pre-heat

until all my cookie sheets rust.

## It's a Labyrinth Not a Maze – Issue 22

May 23, 2003

So what if it's a labyrinth and not a maze?

Mazes are designed to confuse – to force the analytical part of the brain to function. A labyrinth is built as a tool for meditation and a means of letting the creative side come forward. My first experience with a labyrinth was at Ghost Ranch in New Mexico. I kept hearing folks say, "I'm going to go walk the labyrinth." Sounded pretty strange to me. We were there for a writing workshop, so spending one's morning walking in a confusing circle didn't seem like a productive use of the time.

I decided to find out what this was all about. To begin with, there is no wrong or right way to walk a labyrinth. You just walk, or run, or skip, or whatever suits you at whatever pace works for you. What everyone said was that the first time nothing might happen. It might take a couple of times to understand the power of the path. I figured it would take me far more than a couple of times. I like to walk, but I've never found it particularly enlightening except as a means of avoiding doing something I didn't want to do.

The first time nothing did seem to happen. It was nice to know I was normal (at least in that respect). But I did find myself drawn back there the next day. Amazing things did happen as I walked the second time and other times that followed. Of course, the beautiful scenery didn't hurt, but it was more than that. A peacefulness, a coming of knowledge, an acceptance of all that was going on came over me each time I walked as I found myself wrapped in the quiet of the labyrinth. I came to understand the Latin phrase "It is solved by walking," and I missed it when I left.

But I don't need to miss it anymore. Lubbock has its own labyrinth. Actually, it has two at Covenant Presbyterian Church (4600 48<sup>th</sup> St). The garden one outside is very similar to the pattern I had walked before. It is based on a design of one constructed at the Chartres Cathedral. The path is surrounded by delightful native plants and herbs (and labeled for which I thank the gardeners). The other one at the church is a smaller personal labyrinth only 12 feet in diameter constructed of pavestone and modeled after the "Heart of Amiens."

Labyrinths are not new age; they are actually old age having been used since the medieval times. They were originally built to allow those who could not go on pilgrimages to substitute the labyrinth for the journey. Today they are used in churches to provide a "walking prayer" opportunity, in hospitals as a form of physical therapy or comfort in time of pain, and in schools. Even airports are considering installing them to provide release for harried travelers.

The congregation at Covenant Presbyterian has created this lovely place for all of us. The community is welcome and encouraged to come walk the labyrinth anytime they want. Group walks as a means of building community are encouraged and can be arranged by calling the church at 792.6124. If you want to learn more about the history and uses of this spiritual tool for meditation and prayer, contact Sarah Lee Morris at the church office. Even if this isn't "your thing," consider going by just to admire the labyrinth. It's worth your time.

## Time Gets it Right – Issue 23

May 30, 2003

Have you ever noticed how a product, a song, or a clothing style just suddenly appears as if it has been there forever? When you start paying attention, you realize that everyone but you already knows about it and can't believe you didn't. I'm sure it's mostly a sign of old age (as are so many things), but the most recent such event happened to me last weekend.

This time it wasn't a song I suddenly realized was on every radio station, and no, it wasn't even a clothing fad that was already passé before I caught on. It was a product that was awarded Time magazine's Best Invention for 2002. What's amazing to me is that this award winning product won't cure cancer or even a hang nail. It doesn't do anything that will make the world a safer, better place. It doesn't even last very long – a mere seconds before it dissolves on the tongue.

Okay. By now you've figured it out and are saying, "Hello! You are just now noticing breath strips." Yep. Actually, I'd seen the ones made by Listerine a few months ago and thought they were an interesting novelty. However, I didn't give them more than a couple of seconds notice. It wasn't until I saw cinnamon Altoid ones at the checkout counter that I knew I'd missed another phenomenon.

Turns out I was right. I did a little Yahoo search to find out what was going on, which is when I discovered that even Time magazine had noticed what I had overlooked. To begin with, these melt away postage stamps have become a major teen fad. Kids love them as a means of ensuring a constant supply of fresh breath and are giving up mints and chewing gum. Schools love them because unlike gum they don't get stuck anywhere. And I'm sure Pfizer (who manufactures them) is thrilled. Even Levi-Straus must like them because people have now found a use for the "fifth" pocket on their jeans.

I have to admit that even I like them. You just put this tiny transparent "paper" on your tongue and wait for saliva to melt it away. Here's a clue, though. Don't push your tongue up against the roof of your mouth. The breath strip tends to stick there. Instead, just wait for the action to

occur which won't take long. As soon as the moisture hits the strip, an absolute burst of mint or cinnamon floods the mouth and stays there. It's a wonderful sensation which is all the better because no calories are involved.

Ignoring the mouth response, one of the most appealing aspects of these strips is the packaging. They are tiny – no more than a rectangular inch. That makes them cute and portable. The Altoid ones are even in little metal "boxes" that look like the original. I was in love as soon as I saw it meaning that I forked over my \$1.85 without even a thought. I'm a fool for cute. I have a hunch I'm not alone.

Now that I've noticed these tiny packages, I've begun to wonder what comes next. I'm sure manufacturers are already holding focus groups to see what else they can put on these strips that we would want to buy. Mint and cinnamon are already covered so sweet and sour can't be far behind. But what about more complex flavors? Will the day come when we pop Thanksgiving dinner strips in our mouth? I don't know, but I'll be watching. You won't catch me twice not paying attention.

## Transformations – Issue 24

June 6, 2003

What is it about transformations that appeals to us? I remember when my children were small that toys called transformers were popular. These were objects that could be manipulated in such a way that they changed from a truck or some “normal” plaything into something unusual such as a robot or monster. It wasn't that a monster-like creature was really unusual. It was instead that the usual changed to the unusual and you could surprise others as you altered the toy.

As adults we haven't lost that interest in changes. I realized that recently as I surfed the television looking for something to fill an evening in a hotel room. At home there's seldom opportunity to surf or even a need to. I have my own television favorites and the rest of my life doesn't leave much time. However, when I'm traveling it's a different situation, and that's when I have a chance to see what I've only heard others talk about. Perhaps that's as good a reason to travel as any. We transform our ordinary lives into something else.

So what program did I land on in my surfing expedition? It was one that it seems everyone talks about. I discovered HGTV. For the uninitiated, that's Home and Garden Television. I would have expected a channel with this name to be focused on topics such as the best paint to use or how often to mow the lawn. Nope. This channel focuses on transformations. Hour after hour, we can watch an old house or a merely old looking house be changed to something the owners want. We can see small houses be increased in size. We can see rooms be modified instantly. Or so it seems. In thirty minutes, dark ugly spaces become open lovely kitchens, bedrooms, or living rooms.

The same changes occur in gardens and yards. Bare ground becomes a rain forest. Depressing concrete drives become interesting patterns of brick or tile. Water features (what we once called a fountain or pond) add focus points to an ordinary backyard that once looked like the yard I grew up in. You know the terrain. There would have been a fence supposedly to keep the kids or dog safe but probably worked just as well to

keep others from seeing that your backyard was hardly a paradise. This non-paradise consisted of a tree or two, a few flowers that struggled to survive, and a swing set and sand box. There might have been a barbeque positioned somewhere near the requisite concrete patio.

One of the most fascinating HGTV programs is one in which neighbors exchange houses and do their own transformations. They take a room and redesign it. Scary. What idiot would hand over their house to strangers or even neighbors to repaint, repaper, reupholster? Evidently there are enough such people to populate a show once a week. It's like watching a train wreck -- which is not my kind of recreation. It appears that I'm alone in my response because “Trading Spaces” is the HGTV that I hear mentioned most frequently. I suppose that means we like to see transformations coupled with the potential for disaster.

I have to admit, though, that the other HGTV programs do appeal to me. I love watching six months of work crammed into minutes. I love imagining that I could take the ordinary and turn it into amazing. I also love seeing professionals do the work that we often attempt ourselves. These people don't have to go buy new sheetrock because they cut short instead of long. Any “problems” these experts face are resolved during the commercial break. Even going over budget is passed off as a minor glitch unlike my world where an overrun of \$1,000 would threaten bankruptcy.

If you think about it, these transformations aren't that different from those childhood toys. Each one is a fantasy that has nothing to do with the real world. Trucks don't change into monsters and ugly houses don't become beautiful in thirty minutes. But it's a nice way to spend a boring evening in a hotel room.

## Pots and Wine – Issue 25

June 13, 2003

The sixth annual Llano Wine and Clay Festival was held this past weekend. As usual, it was a wonderful place to spend an hour or two. The Llano Estacado Clay Guild Potters hold this display of art each year at the Llano Estacado Winery (3.2 miles east of US Hwy 87 on FM Rd 1585). One of the nice features is that the admission is free. I think last year was the only one I've missed and sorely regretted not being able to go.

If you've never been to the event, put it on next year's calendar. The festival is very low keyed. Tucked in between the winery's huge vats and equipment are tables with pottery and other artwork created by artists from the region. Outside is a place for the kids to practice their own clay work and the adults can sip wine as they stroll through the displays. It's a relaxing event that has a special flavor because of the type of art.

Clay work feels so real. It requires the audience to touch and feel. I love it. Some bowls are rough; some are slick and smooth. Others are muted in colors while some are splashy raku fired. Each piece has a personality that makes it special. While I love artwork such as paintings and photographs, I feel a special kinship for pottery.

Having a chance to talk to the artists and to know that these works were created here adds to the appreciation. Each artist is anxious to explain the process, clays, and firing techniques used to create the special effect. I've bought cups, bowls, tables, figures, and pitchers. Each piece has added a special quality to my home and I never tire of them. Prices are reasonable for work that has such longevity. The experience is much like going to the Lubbock Arts Festival except I like it better. See if you agree next year.

## More Transformations – Issue 26

Jun 20, 2003

A couple of weeks ago I talked about transformations of homes and gardens into things of beauty (at least in the eye of the beholder). Saturday morning, I saw another one. This time I saw interesting, but hardly artistic, dried gourds changed into works of art. It was truly amazing. This magic was demonstrated by Connie Bertrand who came in from Floydada to share her knowledge with us. It was sponsored by the Arboretum (the little red brick house at 41<sup>st</sup> and University) which provides a different gardening related program the second Saturday of every month at no cost.

The experience was a treat. I'm no artist and have no hope of creating similar pieces, but it turned me into a better audience. The next time I see a decorated gourd at an art show or crafts fair, I will now know what went into the process and appreciate it far more.

I learned so much. As you could expect, there's an American Gourd Society ([www.americangourdsociety.org](http://www.americangourdsociety.org)) that sponsors contests and provides help and information. Although related to melons, squash, pumpkins, and cucumbers, gourds are not edible. I discovered that there are different kinds of gourds. Ornamental gourds are pretty but cannot be kept indefinitely. These are the ones you see in fall arrangements in interesting colors. The kind that we saw demonstrated at the Arboretum falls into the dried gourd category and consists of those called birdhouse, bottle, and dipper gourds. These gourds have thick, hard shells when dried. They begin as a green fruit and then change into a tan or brown color often mottled with mold. Not an attractive site for the uninitiated.

To begin the process of turning mottled inedible fruit into artwork, the gourds are grown with tender care. If they grow undisturbed in one place, one side will be misshapen just as a watermelon or cantaloupe often is. In the grocery store, I don't much care if my watermelon has a flat bottom. If you are trying to create a lovely bowl or vase, uniformity is much more desired. Once grown, the gourds must be dried for an extended period of time. If they are left to dry outside, they develop more interesting

characteristics. If they are dried inside where they can be turned every few days, they are more uniform.

Once fully dried, the gourds must be washed and the waxy coating removed. According to Connie, that is the hardest part of the job requiring elbow grease and determination. Some people soak their gourds in bleach water; others use high speed sprays to clean them. Inside the gourd are dried seeds and pulp that must also be removed in a tedious process.

Once the gourd is clean and ready, the art takes over. Gourds can be cut into bowls with lids, birdhouses with access doors to clean them out, vases, serving pieces, or anything your imagination can conjure up. Paraffin or oils can be used to make them waterproof. Wax placed inside the gourd and allowed to "puddle" at the bottom can provide weight and stability.

The inside can be sanded and painted to make it more attractive, but the outside is where most people put their energies. Wood burning tips can engrave the shell. Inks, paint, leather dye, permanent markers, and stains can be used to create geometric shapes or actual paintings. Knobs can be glued on, feet can be attached, and broken pieces of shell can be added to create a multidimensional effect. The artist has a canvass on which to work which is just like wood except the grain is missing.

To tempt us, Connie brought a supply of dried gourds for us to take home to experiment with. I'm trying to get up enough nerve to just cut into mine. Drawing on it may take more guts than I have. But the unadorned ones, are lovely just sitting there. Maybe it's best to leave them untouched. I do know, though, that the next time I find one at a show that I will touch it lovingly knowing what it takes to bring it to that moment.

Next month the Second Saturday will be a program on "bent wood trellis making" given by Liz Skoog and Betty Marricle. Show up at 9:30 for coffee and then sit down for a fascinating presentation at 10. It's a great way to spend a morning. For more information about the Arboretum, go to [www.lubbockarboretum.org](http://www.lubbockarboretum.org).

## Family Resemblance – Issue 27

June 27, 2003

Summers bring family reunions like red sports cars bring speeding tickets. A strange comparison you may say. Not really. In both cases, what started out looking like a good idea turns out to have unexpected consequences.

Recently, I've attended not one but two family gatherings which is surprising since for many years I haven't attended any such gatherings other than a funeral here and there. That makes me something of an anomaly perhaps, but we aren't exactly known for our close family ties. I have an uncle (long since dead) who I never met and a set of cousins (my only ones) who I have no knowledge of other than their existence.

I've always found it fascinating that my friends actually spoke of cousins as if they were nearly siblings. Often they actually seemed closer to these family members than I was to my only brother. Since there were times in my life when I didn't even know where my brother was, this cousin closeness probably isn't unlikely.

As a result, spending a weekend at a family reunion wasn't something I looked forward to. However, unlikely consequences did occur. I found that being in a room filled with people with my family's DNA was fascinating. I've always enjoyed people watching at airports and malls, but a reunion turned out to be the best place in the world to people watch. This reunion was a little unusual in today's world because there were no second spouses to distort the genetic message I observed. Every single person in the room was directly related to one or more members of the group. I found myself beginning to catalog similarities.

The unexpected consequence was a discovery that I made in my observation mode. We expect faces to be similar – ears, mouths, and hair color. What I didn't expect was that other characteristics are also passed down the family tree. Rear ends turn out to be more distinctive than I expected. I could have traced the genetic code with little more than a back view of the group. It was as if one should take family photos of both the front and rear in order to clearly record family resemblances. However, I doubt

that this will be a popular addition to most family albums.

From a more traditional angle, it was fascinating to see a child shrug or even laugh in a way that mimicked the previous generation of even the one before that. Two male members – one the uncle to the other – are so alike that they appear to be clones separated by nine years. I've known about the similarity for a long time, but what I realized this time was that genetics extends to smiling patterns or the lack of. For these two men don't smile. They grimace instead as if afraid to show teeth to strangers. I always thought the uncle was unusual in this, but then I heard the echo of my own words as the wife of the nephew made the request I've heard myself use so often. "Smile. Don't grimace." My head came up in surprise. What! The realization came with a shock. It's a family trait. Who would have known?

A second observation was that these clones separated by a generation had married quite similar women. The wife and I found that we had far more in common than we would have expected. We both grew up as transients and swore to protect our children from the gypsy life – only to see our children leave the nest to wander afield unaware of our gift to them. We both cherish our adopted "home towns" enjoying the knowledge that we remember when that street corner was the site of a store others don't even remember. As we continued our get acquainted experience, it felt like a kindred soul was on the other side of the face. I began to wonder if spousal choice might be more genetic than I would have ever considered. All these years I thought it was just my scintillating personality and great toenails that attracted him to me. Turns out it was that and more.

All in all, the reunion was a good way to spend a weekend. I know far more about the "family" than I did before and the next time I won't avoid such events. Such experiences are clearly valuable in ways I would never have expected. And the sports car and the speeding ticket just might turn the testosterone possessed owner into a safer driver, or not. It's in the genes.

## Sports Bars for the Hungry – Issue 28

July 4, 2003

Sports bars are not my usual hangout. To begin with, I don't like most athletic events which is generally the draw for a sports bar. So it was surprising to me how much I enjoyed my visit this week to Cujo's (West 4th near Walmart). It was a rainy night, so the establishment was perhaps a little quieter than usual. That helped, but what made it even better was the food. I have a hunch that most sports bars don't worry too much about providing interesting cuisine. Folks who come usually want something to drink and, oh yes, to eat something too.

Well, someone forgot to tell the management at Cujo's because I encountered a meal that showed some originality. Sure, there were nachos and hamburgers and pizzas on the menu, but I ordered the Cajun Chicken Salad which the waitperson recommended. Great choice. The chicken was truly Cajun spicy (enough to make my sinuses know they'd been had). The hard boiled egg added a nice contrast and then the sweet pickles (who would have thought that would be a good addition to a salad?) added a third flavor sensation. On top of that, Cujo's even has hazel dressing which I seldom find. My taste buds woke up and stayed awake the whole time. I eat lots of restaurant salads. I really didn't expect this one to be more than average. Was I wrong!

On a side note, I have it on good repute that the chicken fried steak, a more traditional meal at a sports bar, was also excellent. The breading was the right amount and the gravy wasn't thick and gummy. This from a CFS aficionado who has eaten more than a few of these Texas favorites.

When my dinner partner ordered a dessert, I was not in the least interested in participating having more than filled up on the salad. I seldom order restaurant desserts and if I'm invited to "share," a small taste is more than enough to satisfy me. I expected this to be my response this time. Wrong again. Out came a pizza size platter of dessert nachos that were nearly too beautiful to eat. For those like me who have never heard of such a creation, a dessert nacho is a fried cinnamon flavored tortilla enhanced

with small ice cream scoops and decorated with white chocolate, strawberry, caramel drizzles and whipped cream. The flavor was memorable. I couldn't resist. There was no way that only a sample would be enough. I'll regret it later, but this was a real treat.

I fear that I may have to develop a fondness for sports if the Cujo's menu remains as enticing. If you already like sports bars, then Cujo's is surely the place for your next meal. Their staff was friendly and attentive which combined with the food made for a good dining experience

## Harry Potter Magic – Issue 28

July 4, 2003

What is it about Harry Potter? Here's a book that is clearly written for children and that is read by children. Librarians everywhere rave about the fact that young non-readers turn into avid ones when they discover Hogwarts School of Witchcraft. But when was the last time a children's book received a half page review in the *Wall Street Journal*? Of course, it's hard for the business world to ignore a book that makes the writer wealthier than the Queen of England.

I have to brag that I was an HP fan before it was cool. I even have a sweatshirt that I proudly wear that has the school logo on it that I received with delight four or five years ago. I used to wear it waiting to see who would know its significance since it looks like it came from some upscale Ivy League college. Those who "got it" always grinned as if they were part of a secret club. This was before the movies came out, so you had to have read the books to be in the know. Now you just have to have watched the trailers or been to the website. Dadgum. Ruined the fun for sure.

I knew, though, that with the latest book that something mysterious was happening when my two children (who are no longer children but professionals with advanced degrees) both had copies of the newest book the weekend it arrived in the stores. One was at Barnes and Noble at midnight to pick up hers. The other had pre-ordered his by email for delivery the next morning. Actually, he had bought not one but two copies so there would be no fighting with his wife over who got to read it first! My children were raised on hobbits, so it might not be surprising that even as adults they liked these sorts of books. But their friends weren't. And all week, I've heard reports that "Traci is on page 356, but Brett had to be in court all day (he's a lawyer) so he's behind." A book that runs 870 pages takes even professional readers a while to finish.

So what is it about Harry Potter? I wish I knew. I'd love to do it myself. How did this book change the rules of publishing? Books for children are supposed to be short because it's common knowledge that our visually demanding

youth have short attention spans that won't tolerate long books. Books for children are just for children; their subject matter doesn't appeal to adults. Grown-ups only read children's book to children – not to themselves.

I've been thinking about that since my esteemed editor (who has yet to fall under the spell) asked me why I liked the books. She seemed to feel that they wouldn't appeal to her. I tried to explain that there is wonderful suspense that is never predictable in its outcome. I talked about the fact that the violence is there but not the ugly, brutal kind designed to drag our minds through slime that I find in too many "adult" books. But I finally realized it comes down to the characters. They are wonderful. Harry Potter has his faults just like the rest of us and works hard to manage in spite of them. He gets angry. He gets his feelings hurt and hurts other's feelings too. He gets scared. But he also does amazing things. He lives in a fascinating world that lets me escape from this one for a while.

The other characters are just as interesting as Harry. Hagrid with his unusual and generally dangerous creatures makes me chuckle as he assures everyone that Fluffy or in the newest case Grawp is really good hearted and just needs to be "understood." Ron's folks and even the Dursley's give adults a chance to identify with the problems of having bright adolescent wizards in the house. Hermione is a delight – a Nancy Drew for the next generation of girls. Starting out the series as far too serious and even pompous, she is growing up to be far more reasonable and balanced in her ambition. I could go on and on. There's a whole world of inhabitants in the Harry Potter books, and these characters are part of my world.

What I found most astonishing about the newest book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, is the growth in the young characters. I used to teach teenagers an experience I loved (I never said sanity was my strong point). When you teach teenagers or more accurately try to put them in an environment in which they can learn (for as any parent of a 15-year old will agree, "You can't teach them anything."), hormones have a significant impact on what is going on. But those same chemicals turn ordinary kids into

bright, challenging, and fascinating people. J. K. Rowling has figured that out. I could feel the hormones surging around Harry and his friends. I could feel the change occurring page after page. At one point, I thought for sure that the next chapter would reveal that some magic spell was causing the problem. Nope. The only magic necessary was the one that we see happening everyday in an adolescent world.

So maybe that's what it is about Harry Potter. J. K. Rowling has done what writers are supposed to do no matter what age is the intended audience. She has written a good book – or rather five of them – that has an interesting plot and well developed characters. No magic there. Oh yeah! Then you try to do it.

## City Slicker – Issue 29

July 11, 2003

I moved back into the city last week. It wasn't by choice. The strange part of this is that I resisted at all because I'm hardly a country girl. I was raised in cities and towns. I never even had any friends who lived "out in the country." As far as I know, I have no relatives (knew I should have gone to some of those family reunions) who ever lived in the country. As far back as the mind will go, our family members have been city folk.

Twenty years ago when we moved out of town, it was a brave act. I left behind city services that I had taken for granted such as water, sewer, dumpsters and paid fire fighters. I was used to living in the commune of a neighborhood with homes in back of me, beside me, and in front of me. This seemed a perfectly normal existence. Any other environment seemed hostile.

The thought of having to regulate my own water pressure with a tank rather than rely on the city's water pressure determined by my closeness to the nearest pumping station was actually rather frightening. I grew up on novels by Erma Bombeck and others describing the horrors of septic tanks, so I was not thrilled to think that I suddenly had one.

There were other issues that were merely surprising rather than terrifying. It took me weeks (or probably months because I'm a slow observer) to figure out what was wrong with our streets, which were actually paved – sort of. They didn't look like the city streets I grew up with, but I couldn't quite make out the difference. Then one day I looked at the grass growing out to meet the asphalt and realized that we had no curbs. And for the record no gutters there either. Weird.

Street signs were a whole 'nother issue. We didn't have any. Instructions to our friends required them to count "streets" at each turn. We did have an address, though. When we first moved in, the residents of our development (obviously this wasn't truly the country if I can use a word like that) were still fussing about having a street address. Only recently had the county assigned numbers rather than a rural route address and they didn't like that one bit. They liked being hard to find. I didn't quite get it, but I was new to the mindset of those who didn't

live in the city. I would come to appreciate their point of view.

Those who choose to abandon the comfort of city living are of an independent mind. Their ancestors were those pioneers you read about who said, "Ma, I saw a new family building a home not five miles away. It's time to move on. This place is getting too crowded." Evidence of such independence was clear when we first moved in. We had a mailbox on our property that we planted ourselves, but there was a communal one across the street and down a bit. We asked about it and were informed that the post office didn't want to have to drive from one sparsely spaced house to another. They wanted us to use that one. This was said with so much disdain that I quickly understood that it would be the *faux faux* of the century to even touch the offending object. In time the post office gave in and took away the pariah.

It was clear to me a number of years ago that I had lost the desire to live in a city when I went to visit friends who still did. We'd sit in their backyard and I'd get this claustrophobic feeling. I wanted to say, "Do you realize that there are people living just on the other side of your fence? As a matter of fact, you don't even have a fence of your own. You are sharing that one." On the other side of my fence (and yes it is mine) is land. My land. While I have a neighbor who shares an alley with me, there are wide backyards bounded by our fences. There were dumpsters out there too. Our dumpsters. We purchased the dumpster that fit our need and determined a delivery service that was right for us.

But the moment I knew I didn't like living in a city came clearest when I moved back. Actually, I guess I didn't move, my home did -- when the city annexed us. It happened some months ago, but we treated it much like we treated that unwelcome mailbox. We ignored it hoping that the governmental agency would come to its sense and reconsider. Didn't happen. We knew it wouldn't when we were informed last week that we were being handed over to the city power company. The uproar could be heard in town. Oops, guess we can't say that anymore.

We had been served by the local coop (as in electric cooperative). That might not seem

important to those who live in the city. One pole is pretty much like another. Electricity is electricity. Except that the coop is different. It's run by people like us. People who understand those who don't want to be governed by a city and are prepared to make the sacrifices necessary to have that happen. If that means worrying about a septic tank or having to draw maps so friends can find you or even watch water run over your yard instead of down a street gutter, so be it. It's worth it.

Last night I read my last copy of the coop magazine that came each month and was sad. I'll miss the fine articles about things like how to grow wildflowers in your pastures. I'll miss the pictures of high school graduates from our area who receive scholarships funded by the coop. I'll miss the ads for bunnies and livestock. It was as if this magazine was all that was left of the world I had come to love and have no more. I put it down and grieved over our lost independence.

I've moved into the city and I don't like it.

## Morning Addiction – Issue 30

July 18, 2003

Starbucks has come to Lubbock. Of course, there's been access to the coffee addict's favorite brew by going to Barnes and Noble, but this is a real Starbucks with a building of its own. They recently converted the structure at 82<sup>nd</sup> and Quaker that once housed a gas station, car wash, and convenience store. It's proof to me that Lubbock has turned the corner to becoming a full service city. Of course, if Krispy Kreme ever does finally build a shop so people don't have to bootleg donuts in from Amarillo and other points that will be the final stamp on the guarantee

Coffee has become an essential part of modern American life. Hotels have figured this out and even budget priced motels put coffee pots in the rooms just as they do towels and televisions. Of course, I'm old enough to remember when such places advertised with pride that they had the televisions that we now take for granted.

Recently I've been paying more attention to what's been happening with coffee. Automobiles brag about the number of cup holders they have. These slots could be used for some other beverage, but it's clear that their first use of the day is coffee. I have to admit that I am part of this fashion. We have color coded metal mugs with lids that fit exactly into the holders and wouldn't consider traveling without them.

This weekend I was wandering through a camping store and saw further proof. There were two small enamel mugs that are supposed to be used as espresso cups. No longer is plain boiled coffee or even instant granules considered good enough to camp with. I have to admit that I bought two of them, but not for the intended use. I think they will make great baby gifts for my two young grandchildren whose parents love to camp. No use putting off coffee training any longer than necessary.

At the same time that I discovered the enamel cups, I stood in awe looking at the most beautiful stainless steel espresso cup that was part of a tiny camping set. Its design was something that could only come as the result of the development of the coffee cult. Its shape was a delight to the eye and its feel created bliss in my

soul as I caressed it. I didn't buy it, but even if I had, I wouldn't have used it for its intended use but instead would have displayed it as a work of art.

What we did buy, though, was more amazing and even more ridiculous, but the real coffee addict in my family coveted it in a way I haven't seen for many years. I knew that he was hooked when I came upon him standing in the aisle at Walmart cooing to it.

We have camped for years always using boiling water and Tasters Choice to satisfy the morning craving. As we prepared to spend a week in wilderness solitude, we discovered a Coleman drip coffee maker designed to be used on a camp stove. "Absolutely ridiculous," I said. "Absolutely not," I added. "We will not succumb to this marketing ploy," I declared emphatically. So we bought it and I have to admit that it made great coffee. It actually seemed like a reasonable purchase which is always scary to me. One more means of feeding the morning addiction has been added to our world. Starbucks is surely quaking in its boots or cups at least until we return home.

## Hope from the Prairie – Issue 31

July 25, 2003

Last week I had the opportunity to drive across Kansas – something I've never felt the need to do before. It was interesting to drive past miles and miles of crops that would in time feed us all. It's fascinating to think of corn being grown in the middle of the nation, canned on one coast, and then shipped to the other coast to be eaten by a family there. The vastness of the process is beyond my imagination.

Nestled among the fields were some unusual farms. At least currently they are unusual, but I think in time areas such as Kansas and West Texas will see more and more of these "crops." We already have one farm near Sweetwater, and I've always been curious about what I could see "growing" as I sped along. However, the Sweetwater crops are not near the highway and I've never taken the time to venture off the beaten path to get a closer look.

But in Kansas one of the fields ran along both sides of the road, so I could see the crops up close. Mesmerized is the only word to use. These crops, from which I could not tear my eyes away, were growing energy. These were turbines generating electricity from wind. They consisted of huge poles topped by three blades turning in the wind converting one of our more renewable resources into power. The eye began at the bottom of the white pole and was then pulled up to the sky to be captured by the sight of the paddles as they turned slowly in the breeze. The poles covered an extraordinary number of miles of the Kansas plains, but rather than looking like unnatural attachments to the terrain, they looked like a forest that had grown naturally.

It took a while for our speeding car to drive past the energy farm, and the whole time I was glad I wasn't doing the driving or we would have been in danger of veering off the road. The sight of the expanse of wind turbines was so lovely and calming. I know people who feel that way about traditional windmills, stopping to look at every unusual one they see. It was ironic to me that once again wind turning a blade was appearing in our country. Earlier generations learned to appreciate nature's means of providing energy to pump water. Life seems to be repeating itself.

As we left the vicinity, I turned back for a last look. Sometimes modern problems with our concerns about resources such as water and oil seem insurmountable. I don't know how much electricity these modern windmills produce, but they made me believe we can find answers to all of our problems. They gave me hope. The next time I drive the road to Sweetwater, I'm going to stray from my path to photograph these modern wonders. They are worthy of our attention surely as much as other visual delights. I'll print the photograph as a reminder that the windmills from our past are not the only way to use nature's gifts.

## The Hard Work of Having Fun – Issue 33

August 8, 2003

Having fun, which is generally seen as some kind of recreation, is a strange state of being. I've just spent the last few days practicing the art of fun which for me meant watching others to see what they consider fun. It's one of the problems with being a writer – we tend to be voyeuristic by nature.

I've heard for years people tell me, "Don't work so hard. Have some fun." The problem is that what looks like fun to me seems to look like work to others which also means the reverse is true. Going to football games is work as far as I'm concerned since it requires me to give up hours of my day to do something I don't enjoy which is watch men or boys run around a field trying to hurt each other. But there are those around me who find perverse pleasure in going and they want me to come "enjoy" it with them, so I treat the experience like work meaning I go, I smile, I participate, and I'm a good "team player" (which I know is an ironic description).

This week I've been "sentenced" to a week of fun called a vacation. Now, for all of you who have been toiling in the West Texas heat and who would in a heartbeat trade your situation for mine please understand that I hardly think this is a hardship assignment. It's just that my idea of fun and others don't seem to coincide, so I've spent part of my enforced idleness (remember when being idle was the devil's workshop – hah – today we don't even know the word) watching people have fun trying to decide what appeals to them.

Spending money seems to be the deciding factor in most cases. For some that means dropping coins into slot machines with almost no hope of leaving with more than one came with. I used to think slot machines were fun, but somewhere along the way I decided I'd rather leave with a product after I gave someone my money.

For others there are horse races. That is a slightly more interesting way to spend one's money. You are outside rather than trapped in a noisy smoke filled room. The horses are beautiful creatures who are demonstrating their strength and speed. It's a pleasure to see them, but I can get just as much delight from watching them race around the pasture on a cool fall

morning. And it doesn't require me to spend money. Of course, I can't bet on which one will get to the opposite side of the field, but I don't really care.

For the athletic types of which I'm hardly one, there is snow skiing. I admire those who ski with a passion. Their fun gets them outside and physical. For the less athletic there is golfing. They are walking some and are also outside. These all seem like good ways to have fun, but they are incredibly expensive. Given a choice, I'd rather use my muscles to weed my garden, push a lawnmower, or clean out the garage and none of these things cost me anything but sweat. When I'm through I have something more than when I started: a weed free garden, a lovely lawn, and a garage that is habitable.

Then there's the ultimate spending money recreation: shopping. I have to admit to the vice. It too requires some physical energy as one strolls from art gallery to curio shop to sweatshirt emporium to classic tourist trap. But mostly it just requires patience and money. The last thing I need is more stuff, but I can't resist seeing what someone wants me to buy. It's fascinating to explore stores whose sole purpose is to make tourists spend money. The items they offer for sale defy my imagination.

Long ago such shops offered post cards, silver spoons with the name of the location, and perhaps thimbles. Today such items are passé maybe because no one mails cards anymore and we want more variety in our souvenirs. That may be too bad. Antique shops of the future will have fewer things to sell to collectors. Speaking of antique shops, these have become the ultimate tourist trap. Anyone with a storehouse of junk regardless of its age can put out a sign and tourists will flock to the door. Kind of ironic if you think about it. We have moved from going on vacation to buy something new to haunting the stores that offer us old.

Speaking of old, though, one thing that I do find "fun" about vacations is to visit sites that take us back to the past. These can be museums or archeological sites or even re-creations of moments in history. Some of the best ones are administered by the national park services and seem to be our tax dollars used wisely. These places have small entry fees which would seem

to mean they can't be much fun, but it's not true. For those interested in the physical, often there are long walking paths to follow. For the shoppers in us, there are always gift shops. But what is there that isn't found elsewhere is recreation for the mind. In these places one can learn about the past as it happened not as it appears from an antique shop. One can see where we've been and maybe imagine where we are going. Each one has something different to teach us making it worthwhile to leave home to see them. On my vacation, I visited the petroglyphs near Three Rivers, NM and found them fascinating. To walk among rocks carved by those who lived hundreds of years ago trying to imagine what the images represented and their purpose was truly fun. My mind got to take a vacation as well as my body. Perhaps that's the best kind of vacation.

If you can't take a vacation to places far a field, remember that in Lubbock and the surrounding towns we have our own vacations for the mind such as the Lubbock Landmark and the Ranching Heritage Center. When was the last time you visited? Have you taken others there who visited you? Consider it.

## More Fun – Issue 34

August 15, 2003

Last week I talked about vacations and having fun. Last night I got to see “fun” in another light when I got to go hear “Willie” sing in concert at the Canyon Amphitheatre. I have passed by this facility frequently and always wondered about the concerts I saw advertised on the small sign outside. I have to admit that it looked a little seedy to me and not a place I thought I wanted to go. A concert in my world is a bunch of people who sit in seats in rows in real buildings. The audience is quiet and politely claps as each song ends. It’s a good way to enjoy music. Last night I enjoyed a concert in another way. I’m not sure which one is better.

Long ago I taught high school English which included a unit on Shakespeare. Part of the standard curriculum is to demonstrate the Globe Theatre and to explain about groundlings and the culture of the time. Last night I felt like I was at an Elizabethan production. It was wonderful. There was great entertainment coming from the stage. Willie Nelson at 70 sings better than ever and gave a show that truly entertained. The music alone would have been enough to make the evening satisfying.

But there was more. We were sitting on the grass on a blanket which was so much better than benches or chairs. It was comfortable and relaxed. And the weather cooperated by covering the sun with its own blanket of clouds. But it was the people and events around me that added to the evening. There were babies held in arms or small children wandering not too far from watchful parents. There were old folks like us just sitting there. And there were younger and more energetic ones dancing in joy to the sounds of the music.

And there were things to buy. Food like nachos and true potato chips (not the kind one gets in a can). There was lemonade to drink and beer. Lots of beer as you can imagine. Colored bands on the wrists of many attested to the number of “adult” beverages being sold. The most fascinating vendor of liquid refreshment, however, was one I’ve never seen anything like before (I don’t get out much). Young ladies were walking among the crowd with a set of holsters that Matt Dillon never even considered. Instead of a two gun set, these holsters had upward of

five leather pouches with a different kind of liquor in each one. The attractive vendor would pour the drink of choice into a glass tube for those who wanted to make a purchase. No bartender was more professional. It was fascinating to watch the process.

Besides food and drink, one could buy things such as Willie t-shirts and memorabilia of the night. Others were selling little blinky lights. I had noticed a couple of folks walk by early in the evening who had small lights emitting from their clothes much like the one in my car that warns someone that my alarm system is functioning. I did wonder if perhaps these young girls had a similar system installed – perhaps by careful parents. As darkness settled in, the lights became more obvious and sales increased rapidly. Sellers began to wander among the folk with placards of these lights hanging from their necks. What is it about lights that have such allure? I don’t know, but I can tell you that from the number of hats and shirts and belts and shoes and ears that I saw with lights flashing that it’s a powerful attraction.

The Elizabethan theatre had nothing on last night’s concert except there was no bear baiting. Or at least I didn’t notice any. What I did see was lots of people having a very good time listening to equally good music. It was a great way to spend an evening having fun.

## Saturday Opportunities – Issue 34

August 15, 2003

You missed another one and this time it was a double whammy. Saturday morning in Lubbock offered the chance to learn how to make a garden waterfall or fountain as well as to see prize winning wood carvers. Both of these opportunities were available within walking distance of each other. The waterfall instruction was held at the Arboretum (41st and University) and the annual South Plains Woodcarver's Association was at the Garden and Arts Center right next door.

As part of the series of Second Saturday programs provided free of charge by the Arboretum, Roberta Davis of the Garden Patch demonstrated the step-by-step instructions for completing a disappearing fountain. By disappearing, she doesn't mean you won't be able to see the fountain. What she means is that the magic which allows water to flow continuously without ever overflowing is invisible. It was one of those demonstrations that people left saying, "I had no idea it would be so easy. I could do that in thirty minutes." Expect to see lots more backyard fountains appearing in your neighborhood if the response was any indication.

If you'd like to see what's possible in fountains and water features, there's the 2003 Water Garden Tour to be held on Saturday August 16 from 9-3. The tour consists of visits to six homes and only costs \$6. You can pick up a ticket and a brochure listing the locations and maps of each home at the Arboretum. Or you can choose one of the homes listed below and pay at the door. That ticket will give you entry to the other five homes. This is a great way to gather ideas for your own yard.

1906 29th

6821 CR 7230

4822 105th

3717 156th

#9 Whisperwood Circle

5230 85th

For those less interested in gardens and more into another kind of art, the woodcarvers are a great bunch of men and women. They meet the

second Saturday of the month at the Garden and Arts Center (4215 University) and dues are only \$15 per year. They meet from 9-4 because unlike your usual organizational meetings, this is a working meeting. During the time, carvers help each other learn and demonstrate new techniques to each others. Beginners are encouraged to come to learn and look around.

A carving piece can be completed in as short a time as ten minutes (for something very simple) or require 30 or more hours. Carving was once the domain of men, but now about 30% of women are involved in the craft. Carvers come with all kinds of interests. At Saturday's show there were birds and Santa Claus and replicas of houses. Some were painted; others were smooth natural wood. Those who were sitting at each table were constantly busy with a piece of wood and whittling tools of all kinds. It was fascinating to see what another person could create out of an ordinary piece of wood. And no, I didn't see any missing fingers. I didn't even see any signs at all of earlier mishaps.

## Gifts from the Past – Issue 35

August 22, 2003

I don't have caller ID. Don't want it. I feel like it's the equivalent of opening a gift before the occasion. As a child I remember racing my brother to answer the phone each time it rang. My mother used to ask if we thought it was going to be Mr. Anthony. For those of us too old to remember, he was a character in a television show who each week gave away a million dollars to an unsuspecting person. This was when being a millionaire was an extraordinary event. The show then tracked the recipient's use and abuse of the money. It was a favorite that no one now remembers.

Unfortunately, I've become jaded. When the phone rings now, I'm perfectly willing to let someone else answer it. I know that Mr. Anthony won't be using the phone. He'll be sending an email. When I hear the bing on my computer warning me that I have a message, I race to it just as I did the phone in an earlier age. Of course, most of the time it's the equivalent of a telemarketer, but still the adrenalin surges with hope that this time it will be something special.

Well, last week it was. I got an email from someone who actually had read one of my Stuff and Nonsense columns. That in itself makes it special since I'm not sure that anyone except my cat looking over my shoulder as I type reads the words I write. While this email didn't come from Mr. Anthony, it did come from Mr. Cowart and it was a priceless gift.

Fred Cowart is a 17-year veteran teacher for Lubbock ISD, but when he's not teaching he's learning and exploring the petroglyphs of the southwest. Petroglyphs, which fall into the category called rock art, are carvings into stone. Pictographs, which may seem similar, are paintings onto rock. He was writing in response to the description of my visit to Three Rivers, New Mexico. He has written about and more importantly sketched many of the figures from that area. Ironically, as soon as I realized how fascinating these drawings from the past were, I began to look for a book to provide me with more information. I searched museum shops and bookstores in the area but without success. Little did I know that the book I wanted was waiting for me in Lubbock.

As a result of the email, I got to spend a fascinating Sunday afternoon talking with Fred and Carol (who faithfully follows him down unbeaten paths looking for these astonishing figures). It's always a delight to listen to someone talk who has both knowledge of a subject and a passion for it. Fred is truly one of these people. He has spent years reading, studying, photographing, and drawing these works of art. Since he has an art history background, it's not surprising that he brings a special understanding to this venture. He describes the Three River petroglyphs as being "the largest collection of sacred writings in the hemisphere." His personal goal is to record and interpret the Jornada Mogollon picture-language-writing represented by these figures carved into rocks. To preserve these figures he has published a book entitled *The Best of Three Rivers Sketchbook*. It is a lovely collection of 34 of the glyphs with more to come in later editions.

The pen and ink sketches alone are works of art that take perhaps as many as 70 hours to complete. The brief interpretation of each one whets the appetite to know more. The 8.5X11 inch book has a glossy cover featuring the *Spirit Sheep Petroglyph*. At \$14.95 (plus \$3.85 shipping and handling), the book is a great buy. It can be purchased by writing Fred Cowart at PO Box 93931, Lubbock, TX 79493-3931. It's not your usual coffee table book full of gloss and color. It's actually more – a record of an archeological treasure in our back yard. I will cherish it for many years to come. It will also entice me to return to Three Rivers to learn more. One can ask for no greater gift.

## Intelligent Life Gathers in Lubbock – Issue 36

August 29, 2003

Way back in my dark past I was once a student of English at Texas Tech. Part of the curriculum required us to discuss intelligently various novels that we read. It was always for a grade and had certain requirements that made it necessary for me to make intelligent and insightful statements about the characters or the plot or the author's intentions. I wasn't very good at it.

Since then I've stayed away from such endeavors except for a brief foray into a group that was using the Oprah books. We only met once and it was more social than intellectual. I enjoyed it and would have gone back for another if we had continued the program.

So when a friend of mine told me that the English department at Texas Tech was starting a book discussion, I was open to the idea but leery. Was this going to be like the classes I once attended or like the Oprah group? Since the book being discussed was *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (which I wrote about in an earlier column), it seemed less intimidating than a more "intellectual" book might have been.

The group meets once a month in Room 200 of the new English building (a really beautiful place unlike the structure I was educated in that was in danger of collapsing even when it was new). Last Sunday was the appointed time for the August meeting and I screwed up enough courage to go figuring I couldn't make too much of an idiot of myself if I said nothing.

Wow. What a surprise! The group was not what I expected. I figured on seeing mostly English faculty and maybe a few "mature" women like me who would sit around and talk book. Not the case. There were some children who seemed to be about 11 or 12 years old, but I don't guess well. (If I have insulted some 13 year-old, I apologize.) There were college students. There were faculty members. There were some like me.

The discussion was vigorous and astonishing. The moderator Professor Jen Shelton opened with a single question and then stood back. It was a good thing. She might have been knocked down by the ideas that began to pop out and circulate. First one idea and then another and

then another until it reminded me of those science experiments with ping pong balls all bouncing around a room. References to characters, events, quotes from the book (all made without benefit of the text but instead stored in the speaker's brain), and statements made by the author in interview provided concrete evidence to support the ideas presented. References to web discussions added additional details. Questions were immediately met with responses of every kind and from every perspective.

And yes, the kids (who seemed really bright) added their share of insight into the roundtable. What was unexpected, though, was the lack of condescension. No one responded to these children in a way that could be considered patronizing. They stood on equal ground with everyone else. Perhaps it's part of the magic of J. K. Rowling that she writes "children's" books that adults read and discuss but that provide a platform for her younger audience as well.

Speaking of Rowling, I found myself thinking that any author would be thrilled to sit in a room like this and hear her readers respond to her writing with such passion. This was a group of people who knew the characters intimately and cared about them strongly. The Hogwarts world was their own. Life and death and frailties of the characters were important to them. It was an enchanting experience that ran far over its allotted hour. For many in the room it was clear that they could have stayed much longer.

What I came away with was an awareness that this book has become the Lord of the Rings or the Narnia Tales of our time. If there was any question in my mind about the enduring quality of these books, it ended when I left the English building. It was time well spent.

Next month's book won't engender quite the interest that this one did, but it might be worth reading and discussing. The forum is open to the public. You don't have to make reservations – just show up.

The Books of the Month are as follows:

September -- *Trials of the Monkey: An Accidental Memoir* by Matthew Chapman (discussion scheduled for September 30 at 7

p.m.) – see last week's HubStuff for a review by Sam Dragga

October -- *Why Education is Useless* by Daniel Cottom

November -- *Early Occult Memory Systems of the Lower Midwest* by B.H. Fairchild

December -- *The Afterword* by Mike Bryan

The best day and time to hold these meetings are still being considered. The forum I attended was on Sunday; the next one is on Tuesday. Go to [www.english.ttu.edu](http://www.english.ttu.edu) to get current information and a description of the book of the month. If you are interested in books and want a place to talk about them, this is the opportunity for you.

## Wake Up Mouth – It's Pepper Time – Issue 37

September 5, 2003

I don't know when I started wanting my food spicy. I didn't grow up liking jalapeños or anything even slightly hot. I blame that on my mother's northern roots. We even ate Yankee chili which had all the bite of ketchup. I avoided Mexican food during my childhood never understanding other's love of the Tex-Mex dishes that were so prevalent in the Rio Grande Valley where I grew up. At some point this changed and now I keep a bottle of Marie Sharp's habanero sauce (straight from Belize) on my table ready to enhance my food at a moment's notice.

I know other folks who buy roasted chili peppers and store them in the freezer for use throughout the year, but I've never done that. I'm going to have this opportunity, however, on Saturday (Sept 6) when the South Plains Plant Society will be sponsoring a booth at Fiesta! which will be held at the Garden and Arts Center (see Events).

These are special peppers since they were grown in our neighborhood and picked just for us. I actually got to visit the fields where they are growing just waiting to be picked at the perfect moment of ripeness for Fiesta!. My farming experience has been limited to growing a few miserable tomatoes and prolific squash in my yard. Getting to see fields of vegetables growing in such abundance was more interesting than I had expected. Along the way, I also learned much about these peppers that make our food hot, spicy, and mouth watering.

Glen and Sherri Brosch have been growing peppers in our region for about ten years. For the last 3-4 they have been supplying the peppers and expertise for the SP Plant Society to sell at Fiesta!. Along the way the Brosch's had to build a special roasting contraption using plans from the Internet supplied by Dana Porter. I look forward to seeing this special rotating cylinder that can roast two onion sacks full of peppers at one time using gas jets.

I had always heard that the seeds in the pepper pods were the culprits that made the peppers hot. Not true. It's actually a small yellow vein filled with an oil that makes the mouth wake up. If one carefully removes the vein without

touching it, the spiciness is lost. But this vein is very delicate and just the slightest touch releases the oil onto the seeds and the pod. Roasting helps spread this oil throughout the pepper as well as facilitating the removal of the tough outer skin. According to Rollie Roberts, a member of the Plant Society, the compound which causes the "hot" sensation in the mouth is capsaicin which is dissolved in the oil contained in the vein. That is why when you want to cool off your mouth, putting some whole milk — not skim milk — in your mouth relieves the burning sensation. The capsaicin in your mouth dissolves into the butterfat of the milk, and you feel relief.

Both long green chilies (Anaheims) and anchos (Pablanos) will be sold by the sack or partial sack. Each sack weighs about 28 pounds before roasting and will cost \$20 for the long greens and \$25 for the anchos. This includes the roasting and the packaging. Freezing the roasted peppers will then allow the buyer to remove and use only the amount needed. The peppers will slip right out of their skins making them a cinch for use in cooking.

In the past, the Plant Society has had as many as 100 sacks to sell, but this year's crop is much smaller both here and in New Mexico so lovers of these spicy additions to any meal need to come early to make sure they don't miss out.

## Community Theatre Brings Mirth to the Lubbock Stage -- Issue 37

September 5, 2003

Noises Off is funny. Enough said. There are few enough examples of live theatre in any given year in Lubbock about which that can be said. This Tony Award-winning play is this year's opening presentation for the Lubbock Community Theatre. Directed by Jay C. Brown, the play written by Michael Frayn is a farce in every way imaginable. However, it's a play that knows it is meant to entertain and not enlighten. It serves its purpose well.

The nine member cast works well together handling each exchange as if they had practiced for a lifetime. The casting seems perfect with characters filling their rolls as if made for them. Kathy Davis as Poppy Norton-Taylor tugs at our sympathy strings. Misty Bathgate as Brooke Ashton is just too bored for words and oblivious in ways we have all seen making us want to throttle her. Pam Brown handles the role of Dotty Otley with such sureness that we have no trouble believing that a character young enough to be her son is her lover instead. Wayne Jennings has us believing in Selsdon Mowbroy even as he plays "keep away" with the liquor bottle.

This is a strenuous play that makes us all tired for the actors when the play ends. Act I lays the groundwork of the play as it is meant to be performed, but it also allows us to learn much about each character. Elysse Lenore West as Belinda Blair makes sure we know all the "dirt" that we might have missed in a casual watching. As the act develops, we find each character beginning to move faster and faster as the scene builds to no climax – merely a readying for the next act.

Act II takes us behind the scenes requiring the dismantling of the stage at intermission. Watching the workmen uncouple and reattach pieces in a matter of minutes to produce a whole new stage is fascinating. If you have to leave your seat, at least wait until most of the work is done. It's as much a part of the entertainment as the play itself. Once the act begins, we see Act I from a whole new perspective. The first act is being replayed on a nearly invisible stage, but we get to see what goes on behind the scenes

and it's not pretty. Jealousy, anger, and mean tricks keep the actors scurrying trying to not miss their stage cues. The farcical slapstick might appear ridiculous in another play, but not here. Somehow it seems appropriate that one character is taking an ax after another.

Act III returns us to the original stage. This also requires a major stage revision, so if you missed it the first time, stick around for the second reconstruction. From this point on everything falls apart for the characters, but not the actors. They manage to carry off the missed cues and added lines as if this happens every day. Maybe it does. All I know is that by the end, the audience is laughing and emotionally cheering for the hardy band of actors who make sure the show goes on.

The play itself is long which would be the only issue I think playgoers might find a problem. We are used to succinct two act plays and the third act makes the play run longer than usual. However, the time flies by and it's a night of enjoyment. There's no inappropriate language to prevent parents from bringing adolescents (younger children might not follow the ins and outs well enough to enjoy the experience). If you want an evening of fun and laughter, try *Noises Off*.

## Arranging for the Fair – Issue 38

September 12, 2003

Okay. I know that I've been living under a rock for the last millennium, but I've never been to the South Plains Fair. Consider it a flaw in my character that I'm trying to correct. All I ever knew about the fair was that it had rides and food and hoards of people. None of this appealed to me. Seems I was wrong. There are also things like flower arrangements and exhibits that I might have actually enjoyed.

So, when the Arboretum announced that there was to be a free half-day workshop on flower arranging, I knew I wanted to go. It was supposed to prepare one to enter arrangement at the Fair. I have to admit that I figured we'd learn how to place daffodils gracefully into a vase which I surely needed to know about.

Wrong again. This is getting to be a habit. Margaret Coil and Linda Brown could probably teach me about daffodils, but that wasn't what they helped us learn. Instead we learned how to use both dried and fresh flowers and other plant materials to create works of art.

The Lubbock Council of Garden Clubs works with the South Plains Fair to present a flower show at the same time as all the other events are happening. One of the judged events is called "The Joy of Nature" which has six categories. The categories consist of Sunrises and Sunsets, The Flight of Birds, The Changing Seasons, Forests and Deserts, Tranquil Waters, and Southwestern Bird Life.

We chose from one of the categories and attempted to create a vision using various plants. We learned how to use the elements of design such as light, space, line, form, color, texture, pattern, and size to build our "image" using those things growing around us. Materials such as vases, florists tape, pins, and Styrofoam were used to help us mold our materials into the desired figure.

It was a wonderful experience. Helpers went from group to group giving advice and showing us how to clip this and place that to get the effect we wanted. What began as a twig or branch became the foundation for a design one could be proud of. I found myself thinking that I'd love to gather some of the wild flowers and attractive weeds that are dormant or dead after

the long hot summer and create a design of my own just for my home. It wasn't anything I'd ever thought about before. I found myself looking at everything growing around me and imagining how it could be incorporated into something to be displayed on a table or shelf.

Even if I don't enter anything in the Fair, when I go I'll know so much more about an art form with which I was totally unfamiliar. Once again the Lubbock Memorial Arboretum has provided a gift of beauty and knowledge to our town. Even if you missed the class, you can still enter your own work. Contact Linda Brown at 799-0611 for help and information.

## Poetry from the Heart Takes Us Back – Issue 38

September 12, 2003

Poetry is one of those love/hate things. Those who like it – like it a lot. You can guess how others feel. I'm not sure where I fit into that dichotomy. But I do know where I fit into cowboy poetry. I love it. The words. The sense of immediacy. The cadence of the language. All these parts of it and more make me glad every time I get to hear it.

Cowboy poetry is a throwback to our earliest history when stories were told as poetry to the listeners clustered around a campfire. Just as there were no books then to read from – only memory to guide the teller – cowboy poets recite from memory their works. There is no fire, but you can feel the warmth.

The subject of cowboy poetry is life – real life. Life that is both happy and sad, dangerous and funny. Events are recounted with feeling but without the “navel searching” that many modern poets feel compelled to share with us. It's sometimes called doggerel and often seen as “low brow.” Too bad. It's fun, interesting, entertaining, and insightful. Cowboy poetry makes it possible for those of us who have never ridden a range or roped a doggie to know a little more about another life than we did before.

The Cowboy Symposium held this week gave one lots of opportunity to hear cowboy poetry. I listened to the likes of Bud Strom tell about a blizzard white out that could have turned out disastrously, but didn't. I could feel his love for family and his fear. I lived through the moment with him. It was what cowboy poetry is all about.

I listened to another poet's tales of turkalope and laughed with the folks who thought they had found the way to riches only to realize that an animal that you can't shoot or sheer is pretty useless.

There were poetry sessions both morning, afternoon, and evening. I wish I had been able to go to everyone. There wasn't a session that didn't offer the delight of words and rhythm. Poets from all over came to share their works in ways that we who live by the printed word don't often experience.

The poetry was mixed in with sessions where folks presented papers sharing their knowledge and others sang their lovely soft songs from the heart. Outside the rooms, there were booths selling everything from silver jewelry to an opportunity to adopt a longhorn. Chuck wagon food and covered wagon rides added to the event.

It was a great weekend and I look forward to next year when I can hear more cowboy poetry and once more return to the roots of our literature as well as our culture.

## A Studio Is In the Eye of the Beholder – Issue 39

September 19, 2003

For those of us for whom a working space is called an office, the term “studio” seems rather exotic. I always imagined that an artist’s studio should be located in an interesting loft in Greenwich Village. There should be huge open spaces, great light, and a view to die for. After my visit with Beth Bartley, I’ll never think of a studio in the same way.

Beth is one of the artists who will be demonstrating her work at the upcoming Local Color Studio Tour November 8 and 9. She stopped by to give me a brochure and to give me a chance to ask questions. I had no idea what a studio tour would include (there comes that word again). The tour is kind of a “progressive dinner” with art instead of food. There will be about ten studios open for the public to visit. Each studio will have several artists displaying and selling their work. And just in case you think that it really is a dinner, there will be refreshments and beverages available to renew your energy. It sounds like great fun and I look forward to the tour.

Meanwhile, as Beth and I chatted, we began to talk about the concept of a studio since Lubbock doesn’t have many New York lofts. She told me that most folks convert a spare bedroom into their working area although a few can manage a dedicated building. Beth takes it a step farther. Her kitchen is as much a studio as the spare bedroom she uses. She warns friends that if they expect food to come out of her kitchen, they are going to be disappointed. Every utensil gets used in a way that your usual gourmet would be horrified at.

Beth’s current work is in gourds that she paints and uses in a variety of artistic forms. She came from a weaving background, so sometimes the two media are melded into one. Gourds require cleaning and washing and drying before the real art begins. Wooden kitchen spoons become the perfect tool to scoop out the seeds and “innards”. Cookie sheets make great drying surfaces. Muffin tins are the perfect size for mixing small amounts of paint. Even her mixer is used to twist fibers to make a decorative rope. I feared to ask what might be in the refrigerator.

Since the tour includes only those who have passed the judgment of a selection committee, these artists will represent some of the best Lubbock has to offer. Brochures and information will be available in late October, but go ahead and put it on your calendar. Other cities such as Santa Fe and Albuquerque have their own tours. Ours has a reputation as being even better. If you want to find out more, you can contact Ginger Bundock at 792-8269. Meanwhile, I look forward to visiting Lubbock’s answers to Greenwich Village.

## Waiting and the Art of Kindness – Issue 40

September 26, 2003

Eating out has become a way of life for most of us.

That wasn't the case when I was growing up. In my family we only ate out on very special occasions such as a birthday which traditionally meant that we got to choose the place to dine. The only other time that we ate out was when we were traveling although we ate breakfast in our motel room. This meal consisted of cereal in individual cardboard boxes with milk from the ever present cooler. The boxes had tear lines that never tore evenly and waxed paper liners to keep the milk from soaking through. Lunch was a picnic along the roadside with my mother serving us meals of bologna on very white bread. There would be an apple or orange and cookies to give the meal a sense of completeness. Dinner, however, was at a restaurant – not a fast food one which hardly existed at the time (I'm really really old).

Today that scenario seems rather foreign. I recently heard that one out of seven Americans eat breakfast at McDonald's. Amazing. These are not people who are traveling – other than to work. If that many eat the first meal of the day in a restaurant or at least pick it up there, then I can't imagine how many must eat the last meal someplace other than home. No longer is mother (or to be politically correct a parent) the person serving a meal.

Today our meals are more often served by students working their way through school or less frequently by an older person who has spent years in this profession. I've never worked as a waitress (although I know that today the generic term is waitstaff). My high school and college jobs were always secretarial in nature. I regret this omission in my life experience list. It seems like everyone should perform the task of taking an order for a meal, handing the request to a cook, and then serving it just to understand what that side of life feels like.

But while I've never been on the serving side of the table, I've spent lots of time on the ordering side having made up for the time I lost in my early years. I'm an easy "serve" since I rarely ask for any special adjustment to my meal or protest about the quality of a meal even if it's not

quite up to par. Even if what I ordered isn't exactly what I receive, I generally take these mistakes as an opportunity to try something I might not have known I wanted. Some might call me a "woos" and understandably, but I'm just not that hard to please. I didn't have to cook it, serve it, or clean up afterwards. To me that means I'm willing to be pretty accepting of whatever.

However, over time I've come to appreciate what a difference the waitress can make in a person's world. I have used the feminine version because the experiences I want to talk about have all come from women. Sorry men. I imagine there are those out there who could be candidates for my "angel at my table" award. It's just that I've not met any yet.

I want to tell you about the first time I realized that I'd met an "angel at my table." We were traveling far from home and arrived late at the hotel hungry, tired, and pretty grumpy after having faced the usual challenges of travel. After checking in, we looked for a place to consume enough calories to get us to morning. The hotel dining room was still open, but just barely. We snuck in hoping that perhaps we could wheedle a quick something from the staff who were surely trying to close up after their own long day.

The waitress who came to our table took one look at us and asked kindly, "Just came in on the train?" We hardly nodded. We stared at the menu trying to find anything that would appeal finally ordering what seemed like the simplest thing which was some soup. This thoughtful woman said, "We have some lovely special bread that's still fresh. It would make a great roast beef sandwich to go with that. How about it too?" Suddenly, it was mother standing there trying to make the long day all better.

I found myself looking at her with more gratitude than I can express as I asked more plaintively than I liked, "And could I have a glass of red wine with that?"

"Sure, that's a good idea. We've got both a Merlot and a Cabernet. Which would you rather have?"

Before we knew it, we had a lovely supper filling our tummies and souls. Along the way, we learned that the previous month she had used her day off to make the same trip we had come on. She did this just so she'd know what her customers felt like when they arrived in the same state we had appeared in (as did some every day). This woman was truly a professional waitress. She brought caring and sensitivity to a task that many of us see as unimportant. Believe me, that night she was the most important person in our world.

Since then I've started paying closer attention to those who bring this special skill to my table. Only last week I encountered another one. Once again we were traveling (which can bring out the best and worst in eating out) spending hours fighting our way through torrential rains. Even with an umbrella, my clothes were damp when we arrived in the restaurant. After our initial drink orders, I realized how chilled I had become and asked the waitress for a second drink – this time for some hot tea explaining that I was cold from the rain. Without a second thought, this angel at my table said, "Then let me turn off these fans. I'll bet you're not the only one." This was a waitress who understood that her job was more than getting the right food to our table.

It goes without saying that we tipped all these women well, but as with any other important job, money doesn't say it all. So I'm taking this moment to thank each waitperson who reads this for every time you are an angel at my table or someone else's. Even if we don't say it, we do appreciate all you do.

## All-American Parade – Issue 41

October 3, 2003

Parades are interesting if you think about it. Their purpose seems a little vague although no one ever seems to worry about that. People line up along a city street to watch others go by who wave to them. The vehicles on which the waving parader sits may be a car or more likely a flat platform pulled by a truck of some sort. The platform may have a sign proclaiming the responsible parties as well as some tableau. A stranger to our world would wonder, I'm sure, what ritual this is.

I've watched lots of live parades and I've actually participated in a few parades of my own. As a college student I was part of a group that stayed up for days stuffing little multicolored paper squares into a contrived chicken wire frame designed to represent some image related to a prescribed theme. It was lots of fun and gave us an excuse for missing class.

I've also watched my children troop by in 4<sup>th</sup> of July parades while they marched proudly on representing their scout troop. I was one of the smiling mommas waving frantically back at them.

And if my memory serves, I think I even once rode in a car waving and smiling until my teeth hurt as part of the Corpus Christi Buccaneer Days celebration.

Of course, I've seen television parades also. The granddaddy of them all is the one held in Pasadena, California to celebrate the Rose Bowl football game. I've always thought I would like to see it live with the millions of flower petals used to create temporary works of art. The money and time that goes into these fantastical visions defies imagination. I know that I probably see lots more than I'd see if I were actually there, but somehow I think a parade should be experienced – not just seen. However, the sheer size of the crowds and the logistics of getting a good viewing place make me wonder if it would really be worth it.

This week, though, I got to see a parade that puts the one in Pasadena to shame. It wasn't the longest parade in the world. There weren't any floral Disney characters supported by a ton of mechanical gear to make them appear alive.

The crowds didn't line the streets for miles requiring one to camp out from before dawn to get a good view. As a matter of fact, the signs advertising the organization being represented were often crudely hand painted. There weren't any chicken wire stuffed frames although there was at least one tableau. The band didn't even march – it sat on a flat bed trailer in chairs as it played to the audience.

What I watched was classic Americana and probably what parades were meant to be before we brought our natural competitiveness into the picture. This parade of note was held last week in Geneva, Nebraska (pop 2300) to celebrate the beginning of homecoming festivities. It lasted about 15 minutes and was fun. I don't think anyone cut class or missed work to make it happen. I don't think there were any ribbons awarded by judges for most creative use of chicken wire. Instead what happened was the entire community turned out to wave and be waved out. Candy was thrown and gathered gleefully by children (and a few adults – I'm not naming names). Folks stuck around after the last fire truck went by and talked. It was community.

And that's what a parade is all about. Lubbock has its own community parades and you don't want to miss them. The next one will be for the Texas Tech homecoming game. Our bands will march instead of ride. We will have some elaborate floats (created by some freshmen who will have cut classes to complete the project on time). And there will be folks from our town waving at you. Wave back.

## Where There's a Will . . . – Issue 42

October 10, 2003

Small town America is dying or so they say. Maybe “they” is right, but its demise may be longer in coming than “they” expect. One of the frustrations we hear about regarding small town living is the lack of things to do. No McDonald's for the little kids. No clubs for the big ones. No movies unless they are so old that you could see them on television already. What is one to do on Saturday night?

I know at least one small town that has found a solution that sounds too good to be true, but isn't. I know because I've just witnessed it firsthand. I realize that what I'm about to tell you is going to sound like sugar coated fantasy made up by some reporter desperate for words. Trust me. This is real.

One town in Nebraska (considering the population size of 2300 perhaps it's not even big enough to be called a town – perhaps it's a village) has found an ingenious solution. Off the square is a lovely old movie theatre that has been given a national historic designation. Inside is your classic old movie house with tall ceilings and decorative moldings. The seats are not plush and they don't have cup holders or recline, but they are clean and comfortable. There's a concession stand to your left as you pass the single payment window.

This remnant of a by-gone era is used once every Saturday and Sunday night to show a movie. First run movies. Good movies that the entire family can see. Oh yeah, I know. Ho Hum. Boring – six weeks of the same movie. Nope. The movie changes every week. And while I would have thought that it wasn't possible to find four movies a month that met the criteria of family entertainment unless they were rather awful, it turns out that's not true. The entertainment industry actually makes more “good” movies than one expects from all the anti-violence, anti-sex hype we read about.

So, okay, this little town shows a movie. Big deal. Here's the cruncher. They do it by charging \$3 admission for adults and \$2 for kids. First run movies in a real theatre for a price lower than the cost to rent it later. Oh and a big drink costs \$1. No way, you say. After all, we've read how theatres must charge huge prices to cover their

costs and make a profit. That's why we pay \$3 for a sip of a drink after paying \$7.50 just to get in. How on earth do they do it?

To begin with, no one is making a profit. The admission charge covers just the cost of renting the movie. Organizational volunteers man (or woman) the concession stand as a fundraiser and do all the work needed to run the theatre that night. Some smart dude along the way figured out that half the work was cleaning up the trash after everyone had left, so they started putting numbers on every drink cup and candy wrapper. They post at the exit a winning number in each category. That means everyone leaves their seat with their trash in hand dropping it into the trash can as soon as they check to see if they have won. And enterprising youngsters scour the theatre just in case someone was dumb enough to leave the winning cup behind.

The theatre was full last week when I went to see Freaky Friday (which was as good as Cranky Critic had promised). It was filled with kids and parents and old folks. We laughed and had a great time. It was what movies used to be like in an earlier age. I kept wondering if I'd fallen into a time warp. I know that what I've described isn't necessary in Lubbock which has an abundance of great movie theatres, but if you live in a town where “there's nothing to do” and are interested in talking to someone from a town that has found one answer, email me at [s\\_lake@hubstuff.com](mailto:s_lake@hubstuff.com). I'll put you in touch with folks in Geneva, Nebraska who can tell you what they've done.

## The Night is Scary – Issue 45

October 31, 2003

I'm not a scary movie person. Or rather I'm too much of one. I'm the person they show the ads about who is sitting in the theatre chair scrunched up with her hands over her eyes peaking through just enough to see what is happening but not too much. I'm the type who screeches at the unexpected such as when the ghoul jumps out when all is quiet. It's rather embarrassing. Even when I know how a movie or play ends, I bring a well honed suspension of disbelief to anything I watch. I'd read the book (so I knew the outcome), but watching *Jurassic Park* was nearly more than my heart could stand. I nearly ripped out the theatre seat in front of me at one point convinced that the dinosaur was going to get that little girl.

As a reader, if the suspense gets too great, I stop to read the end before resuming the story. I still read the whole book. It's just that I need to know how it ends to enjoy the process. I know that for most folks that sounds pretty silly since knowing the ending is the drive to finish.

Keeping this information in mind, you can understand my response to the Lubbock Theatre Project's *Night of the Living Dead* which I had the pleasure to attend last weekend. *The Night of the Living Dead* was adapted for the stage by Lori Allen Ohm from the George Romero/John Russo classic film of the same name. It has taken on a cult status as one of the "must watch" scary movies. Filmed in 1969, it set the stage for all the Freddie's and Jason's to come. According to the website devoted to the series of "Dead" movies, "Although shot in 35mm grainy black and white on a small budget (\$114,000), *Night of the Living Dead* shattered horror conventions and is now probably considered one of the most ground breaking horror films."

(<http://www.homepageofthedead.com/>)

Somehow I had never seen the original, so I came to Saturday's production as a "newby." I've been told that I must now rent the original which I will do, but I can tell you that this one was good enough.

It's one thing to produce a scary movie on film which allows for makeup and special effects and it's another to produce it live. Patricia Lynn McCaleb and her cast of thousands (okay so I

exaggerate – there were about 35) are to be commended for doing the difficult and doing it well. It's unusual for non-speaking cast members of any play to have as much impact as the speaking parts, but the mute zombies stole the show. While the campiness of the story line was obvious, it still succeeded in causing hearts other than mine to flutter. We laughed at the ridiculous parts but only to cover the sense of terror that was just under the surface.

Watching a scary play in the intimate setting of the Lubbock Regional Arts Center Theatre is about as good as it gets. You are there. You are listening to ghouls breathe not through amplification but because they are close enough to hear. The sounds of the rustling of the undead as they circle around the house makes you know exactly how it would feel if you were trapped in the same predicament. This is theatre as it should be – engaging the audience in the emotions and experiences rather than having them be merely bystanders.

It was good theatre even if not traditional. The Lubbock Theatre Project has succeeded in its goal to provide Lubbock with uniquely different live theatre using volunteer talent from the South Plains. It was surely worth at least the price of admission.

## I See A Tall Dark Stranger in your Future .... – Issue 46

November 7, 2003

Crystal balls have never been particularly reliable. I remember a time when every year the prognosticators (otherwise known as crystal ball gazers) used to forecast the world ten years hence. They used to assure us that the work week would drop to 25-30 hours with no reduction in income. They assured us that the biggest issue would be how to use all our free time. Tell that to the 60 hour a week workers who can't figure out how to find time to pick up milk at the store.

These same knowledgeable folks said that in the future we'd all have video phones instead of the voice only ones in use at the time. Strangely enough, in these same predictions, they didn't mention the day when we'd all have cell phones – even little kids. And that schools would have to figure out what to do with students whose phones ring during class.

Video phones can be found in some homes, I'm told, although I've never visited anyone who had one. They have even quit advertising them on television probably figuring out that we aren't interested.

But I can hardly throw rocks at these crystal ball viewers because I once spent an entire morning explaining to my less technologically inclined friend that books as we know it are going to disappear. I assured her that electronic books would be the wave of the future. We'd all have our little electronic reader into which we'd download all the books we wanted to read. I predicted that students would have all their textbooks available to them on CD or something even smaller. At the time it seemed logical. Why kill all those trees and waste all those shipping and storage costs when the same information could be placed on a tiny piece of plastic for a fraction of the price?

I've actually had an electronic book reader that I liked a lot. I could keep 10-20 books on it that I downloaded from the Web. It was easy to read in bed; I didn't even have to turn pages (disturbing the cat in the process). I just clicked the page turn button under my thumb. The backlight meant that my sleeping partner didn't have to put up with a bright light disturbing him. When the reader died, though, I didn't replace it.

I've also downloaded books to my PDA for those times that I am stuck in an airport or elsewhere and have nothing to do to wile away the time. It's not as easy to view as a true e-reader, but it's better than nothing. However, given a real choice, I'll go buy a copy of a print novel at one of the airport shops.

The Web offers opportunity to read online as well. I subscribe to the Wall Street Journal in print, but I also have an online subscription for when I'm out of town. And, of course, HubStuff is available to read online ([www.hubstuff.com](http://www.hubstuff.com)), but the bottom line is that I'd rather read paper copies of both if I have a choice.

So it's no surprise that electronic books seem to have taken the same path as video phones. However, keeping my track record as a seer in mind, I want to make a prediction.

Standard video phones may never be important, but computer video phones will take their place. For some time now, webcam viewing has been possible, but the quality wasn't particularly satisfying. However, Apple computer now offers IChat a technology which combines an excellent webcam (Isight) along with a high quality interface in the newest operating system just released (Panther). With it, you can sit in front of a computer and "chat" with someone else without having to guess if the person on the screen is male or female. All this without worrying about how many minutes are left in your phone plan.

You may ask, "Why on earth would someone want to do that?" just as most of us asked about video phones. After all, who wants to have to worry about what you are wearing or not wearing or if your hair is having one of its days while talking to perfect strangers on the phone. There's the point! With IChat you aren't talking to perfect strangers as you would with a phone. You are talking to the few who matter to you and whom you want to see. You are watching the granddaughter hundreds of miles away as she shows off her Halloween costume. You are admiring the house renovations that your friends have just completed. You are showing your mother how the coat she sent to you for your birthday looks on you.

There are lots of advantages to using a computer to video “visit.” For one, you aren’t encumbered with a headset or receiver. In addition, more than a single person can be in on the conversation. And you are sitting still. Let’s face it, we no longer sit still when we use phones. We walk around. We cook dinner. We drive. We chat in the car careening down the freeways as if that’s the phone booth of choice. This isn’t conducive to viewing.

Computer video conversations are just that – conversations. Real time. Real talk. Our family makes appointments to do it which means that we set aside time to just chat. Being able to see each other makes it better. Much better. Baby boomers and the generations coming up have learned to use technology to communicate anywhere anytime. Distance has become no obstacle. This is the next step.

At the moment Apple has the “monopoly” on this tool, but there’s no reason to think that the PC won’t catch up and begin to offer the same quality video. My prediction that one’s computer will be the real video phones of the future doesn’t take too much imagination. We’ll see. Tune in a year or two to see how close I got this time.

## More Angels – Issue 47

November 14, 2003

A number of weeks ago, I wrote about Angels at my Table. These are waitstaff at restaurants who do more than bring a menu, take an order, and deliver it. These are people who are true professionals. They bring caring and sensitivity to a task that many of us see as unimportant. My article was a way to thank these people who do more than others.

Recently, the HubStuff staff was eating out together when we encountered our own Angel at our Table. This was a person who epitomized just what I had described in my column. She responded to us in a way that said, "You are important to me." She did it cheerfully, enthusiastically, and with style. It was clear she cared about us and our needs. We had never met this person before and probably wouldn't again although we could wish that her clone would wait on us the next time we were at a restaurant.

And just for the record, our experience didn't happen in an upscale restaurant, but instead one that saw people from all walks of life. The restaurant wasn't empty; the waitperson was scurrying as fast as she could to get to everyone. And we weren't big spenders. Two of us just ordered coffee because we only came along for the conversation. It would be easy to expect only the most basic service. That's not what happened.

Instead of minimal service, we got the best one could ask for -- someone who strived to make sure we got exactly what we wanted. It takes us longer than most for the obvious to occur to us, but even we quickly recognized that this was someone special. This was someone who deserved recognition. As a result, we are proud to announce HubStuff's first Angel at my Table award.

Drum roll, please!

**Maria who was serving on Sunday November 2 at the International House of Pancakes on University you were an Angel at our Table.**  
Thank you.

We will continue to search for candidates who deserve more than a generous tip. They deserve to have their name published for all to see. If you

would like to submit a story about a likely candidate, we'd like to extend our search to our readers. This recognition is not given lightly. It must come as the result of service that goes beyond the ordinary or expected. We would love to give one each week, but we don't expect that to happen. But whenever we encounter someone like Maria, we will let you know.

## Christmas Stuff – Issue 48

November 21, 2003

This is the time of year that we all start trying to figure out what kind of “stuff” to give to others. It’s a real challenge – particularly for the geriatric set of which I’m fast becoming a member. This is the group that doesn’t need anything. They already have more stuff than they can store or figure out what to do with.

I’m particularly aware of this problem as I have spent the morning cleaning out drawers in my kitchen (as a way of avoiding the writing task that faced me). I found stuff that I can’t throw away because it still has life. For example I came across two perfectly good calculators that I don’t need because I already have one in each car, one in every purse, and at least two on my desk. I still remember my first calculator. It cost \$100 and was considered a bargain at that price. While I realize that each of these calculators in my cabinet were “freebies” given as advertising gimmicks, I can’t quite forget what they once would have cost.

And then there’s hand lotions. I have bottles and tubes of it everywhere. Some of it I bought. Some were given to me. And most are sample or hotel size ones. If I slathered myself with lotion every hour on the hour from now to Christmas, I might be able to use it all up. It’s all perfectly lovely stuff and still completely useful. What do I do with it?

Every closet and drawer in my house seems to have something just like these calculators and lotions. Things that are too good to discard but for which I have no use. What am I to do with it all? I’ll probably send the calculators on to some charity such as the American Council for the Blind although I can’t imagine what use they will find for them. The lotions are probably not something they want, so I’m going to start a daily ritual to use them up.

But I’m also trying to attack the root cause. I’ve already vowed not to buy anything that isn’t of critical need. I mostly succeed at that, but I did succumb just this week to the purchase of some colored wine glasses that were too pretty to ignore. Stupid me. In a couple of years, I’m

going to be looking at them saying “Why on earth did I buy those?”

The other plan I’ve made is to tell my loved ones that I want only consumable presents. I actually started this a couple of years ago and am thrilled at the result. The definition of consumable extends a little beyond what you might think since I include books, music, and movies in the list. These items fall into the consumable category because they can be sent on to others when I’m finished with them or merely tired of them.

Last year we got a lovely collection of Chilean wines and a Wine Bible to explain the background of each. I was delighted. The wine is gone, but I still consult the bible occasionally when I come across an unfamiliar wine. It was the perfect Christmas present.

For my part, I also send consumables to my friends. There is a wonderful family-owned company in Maine that sells the loveliest handmade balsam wreaths. They arrive as fresh as if they had just come from the trees. They last through Christmas and beyond since once they are too dried out to use as wreaths I create potpourri out of the needles. Sometime in the summer, I finally give up and send the remains to the compost pile. By the time Christmastime arrives, I’m ready for my new wreath. I know from comments I get from those I give them to that they have the same response.

This is the perfect give for the family “who has everything.” Its arrival instantly signals the joy of the season. If you get more than one, you can use them as table decorations. And they go away when their time passes.

So when you are considering your Christmas purchases, think about gifts that go away. You might be surprised how much more pleasure they can give than those permanent “keepsakes” that are lovely to behold and to behold and to behold.

## It's Sure Not West Texas – Sidebar

For most of us in West Texas, Christmas wreaths are often made of fabric or artificial pine. Occasionally, Christmas tree lots have wreaths for sale, but these are often already so dried out that they are nearly a fire hazard. A real wreath isn't something we see much of.

For those who live in places such as Maine, wreaths are the real thing. More rain than we see in a year falls in a week which means that lovely Balsam Fir trees grow in abundance. As a result one of the seasonal industries of the area is the construction and sales of Christmas wreaths.

Blackberry Lane Farm in Harrington, Maine is one such place. Run by Gail and Tim Moorhouse, this twenty year old business is a classic example of American entrepreneurship. Gail started the business when her first child was born as a way to provide income for the family while still staying home. She began by using her personal and family contacts and then growing from there. She doesn't advertise but instead allows word of mouth to keep her business going.

And go it does. Gail sold fewer than 50 wreaths the first year and now consistently sells 500-550. She has no interest, though, in expanding into a wider market as that would mean she would lose the personal side of the business. She hand delivers many of her wreaths to customers that began ordering years ago and sees it as a way of staying in touch.

Gail's 22-24 inch wreaths are decorated with natural cones, red berries and a handmade red bow. In addition, each wreath comes with a small pouch of balsam needles to leave behind the scent of Christmas all year long. A special gift package is also available that includes a hand stenciled wooden tree ornament and a jar of homemade wild blueberry jam.

Tim Moorhouse creates the block ornaments entirely by hand choosing a different stencil each year. Gail gathers the blueberries and makes the 180 jars of jam herself each August. September is devoted to creating the bows and balsam pillows. The branches for the wreaths are not cut until mid-November when the temperature drops below 20 degrees. That is the moment when the "brush sets" which ensures that the needles will not fall out.

From now till the middle of December, there will be daily UPS deliveries from her barn where the wreaths share space with her horse and sheep. If you are interested, there's still time to order a wreath. You can call Gail at 207.483.4712 or visit their web site at [www.blackberrylane.com](http://www.blackberrylane.com). It's a great way to bring the smell and sight of Christmas into your home.

## Do You Really Want to Throw Away Your Cookbooks? – Issue 49

November 28, 2003

I have quite a few cookbooks gathering dust on my shelf. Some that I've kept from my childhood long ago are probably even collector's items by now. I like to look at cookbooks. They often have pictures of meals that I surely have never served since I don't believe I've ever placed a sprig of parsley on a plate. Generally, I figure if it tastes good and is perhaps nutritionally valuable that's good enough. The folks who believe in the art of food presentation have my admiration, but it's not my calling.

However, once upon a time I did decide to establish order to my recipes. Up until that point I had stuffed away in a box the following: slips of recipes on torn scraps of paper, note cards with recipes dutifully recorded by me or some kind friend, photocopies of recipes that someone made and everyone wanted a copy, and even quite a few that were ripped from the newspaper. My favorite cookbook recipes could be identified by the food stains and the pages that fell open automatically. Unfortunately, because of this disorder I had been known to lose a precious recipe or at least be unable to locate it. I'd find myself asking, "Was it in the green cookbook or did Mary Louise give it to me?"

To bring order to this mess, I carefully typed all my recipes into a computer database that I created using the Apple HyperCard program. It was cool. There were little tabs for every category and even a search feature. I envisioned having a computer in my kitchen that I could use as a perpetual cookbook entering the recipes I encountered and liked. With the search feature I could look for all the recipes I had that used pumpkins or pecans making it easy to decide what to prepare that day.

Once my database was complete, I printed out my recipes and put them in vinyl sleeves punched for a binder, but I figured that would be just a backup. I actually did move a computer to my kitchen and used it as I intended for a short while, but I have to admit that it wasn't long before I fell back to my old ways. Fortunately, my old ways did include the backup binder which I have used ever since. The vinyl sleeve means that I can wipe off the inevitable food

splatters and the fact that they are my favorite recipes means it's where I go to look first.

In the past, if I were looking for a recipe, I'd look first in my binder and then in the "real" cookbooks. But now I have found something even better: the Internet. I use either the Yahoo or Google search engine to look for recipes. If I have lots of pecans and want a recipe to use them with the chicken I just bought, I key in "pecan," "chicken," and most importantly the word "recipe." Up pops Baked Pecan Chicken, Coconut Pecan Chicken, and Honey Pecan Chicken Salad as well as 46,300 others.

You may ask why I would want to face such an overload of choices. I don't. But I also don't worry about it. I scan through the short descriptions looking for something that seems to match my interest. The other night I wanted to try to make blackened salmon. I have never "blackened" anything in my life other than a few pans that were left on the stove too long, so I felt a little inadequate. I spent a few minutes skimming the choices looking for one that wasn't too complicated and could be prepared with the spices I had on hand. Voila! Number 16 on the list was Past Cheap Thrills Recipe: Blackened Salmon. It even had pictures. I printed it out to go in my binder if it turned out to be worth keeping and took it to the kitchen to try. Yep, it went into the binder.

Last Christmas, I was at my daughter's for the holidays and had wanted to make for the meal a new recipe for cranberry sauce that I had just discovered. I had carefully brought all the ingredients as well as a copy of the recipe that I had copied onto the perennial note card. When it came time to make this lovely concoction, I realized the recipe didn't look quite right. I promptly went to the computer and keyed in the most distinctive part of the recipe and pulled it up quickly to discover that I had left out something. I avoided getting 36,789 choices by listing the most unusual ingredients as well as the obvious ones.

Not long ago, a friend was enjoying a meal with us and commented on a squash recipe he had used long ago. This recipe used similar ingredients to a dish I was serving but had a special twist. He promised he'd send it to me

when he got back to California, but instead I went to the computer, keyed in the atypical ingredients he had mentioned as well as the words "squash" and "recipe." Bingo! There it was. I printed it out and he added a couple of notes from his own experience and I now have a new great recipe.

And added bonus to using Web recipes is that if someone likes a recipe that I have, rather than copying it onto a card, I just go the Web, key in the ingredients that I think will pull up the recipe, and print it for them. Fast. Easy. Accurate.

Does this mean I'll be discarding my cherished cookbooks? No. But will I be using them as I once did? Again, No. I think they may be left on my shelf to develop collector status. My binder, however, will stay in use. It's nice to use as a trigger for things I might not think about as well as printed instructions to use as I prepare the dish. But I'm hooked. It's an Internet Cookbook for me from now on.

With the holidays coming on, try the Web for recipes. Remember that one your mother made that used almonds, pineapple, and water chestnuts to create a spectacular stuffing. It's the one she lost years ago. You can find it at [www.oldfashionedliving.com/tstuffing.html](http://www.oldfashionedliving.com/tstuffing.html). The odds are that if you can list a few ingredients, you can find any recipe you've ever used.

Happy Thanksgiving.

## Dancing Boots Kick Up Heels at Holiday Happening – Issue 49

November 28, 2003

Have you ever noticed that dancing of the kind where two people glide across the floor with one person facing backwards shouldn't be possible? Think about it. The person (usually a woman) can't see where she is going. Neither person knows in advance what steps the other one is going to take. And all this must happen while they are surrounded by a group of people also facing the same dilemma. To compound the problem, some couples are moving slowly and others quite fast. At best one could expect major collisions if not an outbreak of violence as couples invade each other's space. Instead, as improbable as it seems, it works just fine.

Thanks to HubStuff, I had the pleasure of attending this year's Holiday Happening Friday Evening Sparkles & Spurs. It was styled as a western event consisting of a dinner, auction, and dance with Patty Loveless providing the music. It was quickly apparent that these folks may have come to eat and buy but mostly they came to dance. There was no hesitation or shyness on the part of the crowd who took advantage of the dance floor and music as soon as the auction was over. These were people who clearly liked to dance, had done it a lot, and were good at it. I observed no collisions and surely no dance floor rage.

Instead I saw the impossible. Dance partners moved in wonderful synchronicity as if they were reading each other's minds. I have to admit that my sole participation in this was to act as a delighted audience. I don't dance. Wish I did, but I think it's a trust thing. I like to know where I'm going. And I don't read minds. I have no idea what step my partner is going to make and by the time I figure it out, I've stepped on his toes. It's a terrible flaw in my character, but I've learned to live with it. What I do love, though, is to watch people dance. I've become sort of a dance connoisseur or perhaps voyeur.

It seems like the folks who dance the best are those who wear cowboy boots. I don't know why this is. All I know is that as a dance observer I'd rather watch cowboys at a dance than watch chiropractors. The funny thing, though, is that last night at the Holiday Happening event I had no idea how many real cowboys there were on

the dance floor. Maybe all of them were chiropractors or dentists or news broadcasters which leads me to wonder if it's the cowboy boots. Maybe these are truly dancing slippers while the more traditional shoe is not. Maybe boots convey a sense of rhythm that other shoes don't. Whatever it is, I may have to go out and buy myself some cowboy boots just to see if the magic could work for me. Not likely. Some of us are immune even to the magic of dancing boots. I'm just glad they work for others. It was a great dance and Patty Lovelace had a great audience.

## The Challenges of Modern Plumbing – Issue 50

December 5, 2003

This is the time of year that many of us “go visiting.” Sitcoms love to use these moments to create episodes that consist of a difficult mother-in-law and a put-upon son-in-law. There are also the “pinch the cheeks of the kids” scenes and the disastrous turkey ritual. What I’ve never seen them include, however, is one that all too often I find myself in the middle of. I like to call it the technology of modern plumbing predicament.

Perhaps you can relate.

At home, I have old plumbing fixtures. You turn on the faucet and water comes out. If you want to take a shower, you pull up on the little gadget on top of the spout. No big deal. However, to be honest, I have to confess that even in my bathroom there are challenges for the novice. For some reason the hot and cold are reversed. I try to remember to tell my guests, but at least one visitor took cold showers for an entire weekend unaware of the novelty of my faucet arrangement.

But that’s nothing compared to what you find in newer homes and hotels. These places have the strangest plumbing setup. No technophobe ever felt more fear of a computer than I face when entering an unfamiliar bathroom. Give me a new computer program any day over new faucets. I don’t know who comes up with these ideas, but it’s as if they want to make the features as challenging as possible.

And the worst part is that you only discover your problem while standing in a bathroom stark naked as you prepare to bathe. This means that in order to seek help, you have to re-dress and go in search of someone who understands the system. That is, if you are in someone’s home rather than a hotel. I have sheepishly had to ask my niece, my daughter, and good friends to please come help me turn on the shower. They do look at me as if I have developed an early case of dementia.

If you are in a hotel, good luck. I’ve never felt brave enough to call the front desk to ask for faucet help. I’ve always wished instead there would be instructions on the wall such as “To activate the shower, stand on your left foot,

whistle the Niagara Falls Symphony, and touch the button located under the shower curtain.” As a result, I’ve been known to do without a shower if after an hour I cannot figure it out.

Over Thanksgiving I once again encountered this problem. I was staying with a lovely family who have a new home. Mrs. Nice Lady carefully showed me where the towels were, offered shampoo, and encouraged me to feel right at home. Like an idiot, however, I didn’t inquire about the shower. You’d think I’d learn.

Thursday I began my early morning make myself beautiful preparations and pulled back the shower curtain. Faucets – two. Good. Spout – one. No knob. Not good. Okay, I’ve learned some techniques from my previous encounters. I’d try to pull up the faucet while the water is running. When it became apparent that more pressure was only going to rip the handle from the tile, I gave up. I stood there. I looked. I wondered. I inspected the shower nozzle. Nothing.

So I did what I’ve learned how to do so well. I got dressed. I went in search of someone with more knowledge of shower technology than I have. The solution – there’s a tiny ring inside the spout that must be turned to activate the shower. Ah ha!!! Of course, I should have guessed.

Now the purpose of recounting my plumbing tales is to suggest that if you have guests over the holidays, give them a break. Install old faucets or at least provide instructions. Some of us are more fixture challenged than others. Your guests will be happy to return again unlike the poor soul taking the ice cold showers who never did come back to my house.

## Trains Aren't Just for Christmas – Issue 51

December 12, 2003

It's the time of year when toy trains are seen everywhere. Most Christmas ads seem to feature an engine and a few cars circling a Christmas tree as the whistle blows. These ads are all shot with a slightly diffused filter to create the image of nostalgia rather than harsh reality.

I always imagined that most trains were sold to satisfy the need to satisfy an adult's past wish than because a child actually wanted one. At our house we have a Christmas train that was bought for the old child in our family long after children left the house. It does a lot more than whistle as it is programmed to call out instructions as it passes certain points. It's set up on the standard circular track that goes nowhere. It's great fun and we love it. But it's nothing compared to what I've just recently learned.

There are folks out there who love trains in ways that most of us could never imagine. Some of them join organizations such as the Lubbock Model Railroad Association which meets monthly to provide model train enthusiasts with a chance to discuss their trains and to learn ways to enhance their hobby through clinics. There are state and national conventions where these people gather to demonstrate their skills and learn from others.

Model railroading has a long history in Lubbock beginning in 1962 when the LMRA was established. Members include a wide range of people coming from every background. Men, women, children, and families all participate in this hobby. As you could expect, some model train lovers actually worked on or with real trains, but that's not always the case. Others just became fascinated with trains as a child or perhaps as an adult.

Trains come in a variety of sizes identified by letters such as HO, O, N, Z, and G. The letters identify the scale of the train as in comparison to the real thing. Some trains are large enough to actually ride on and some are so small that it's hard to imagine how one could work with them. I saw one car with wheels no larger in diameter than a dress sequin. Most train enthusiasts pick a scale and concentrate on building their setup

using that size. And these setups aren't just a single track with an engine and a couple of cars. Nope. They are complicated affairs that may include many trains and convoluted track arrangements.

Until I talked to Randel Bittick, president of the association, I didn't realize the attention to detail and accuracy that model railroaders seek to achieve. Many hobbyists build modules based upon an actual historical event in which a train played a part and recreate the details after extensive research. These modules are often displayed in traveling exhibits at places such as the Lubbock Public Library, the Cowboy Symposium, and the Arts Festival. These modules are not merely a set of circular tracks such as the one under my Christmas tree, but instead include people, equipment, landscaping, and buildings created exactly to scale. And of course, the appropriate train is also included.

Perhaps one of the most astonishing such modules is called the Club Pike which was created in the early years of the LMRA. It is a recreation of the area near Post, Texas where the caprock rises to form our high plains area. It is only on display about once a year since the time and difficulty it takes to assemble it is quite demanding. There are plans to display it at the Harvey House dedication for those who are curious as I am to see it.

If I were still a history teacher, I think it would be a wonderful class project to create an historical module such as the ones created by the members of the LMRA. It would be hard for kids to resist the allure of history told in such a way. If you aren't a history teacher, but think trains are cool, consider visiting a Lubbock Model Railroad Association meeting. It's held the first Monday of every month at 7:30 p.m. in the Activity Center at Highland Baptist Church (34th and Quaker). Dues are just \$12 a year. The cost of your train, however, is up to you.

## The Next Step in the Digital Camera Saga – Issue 52

December 19, 2003

I've written in the past about my infatuation with digital cameras and that hasn't changed one bit. My digital camera is a magical piece of technology that has dramatically changed my use of a camera. I take many more pictures (and I mean many) and some of them are surprisingly good. I suppose if you take a 1000 shots, the odds are in your favor that one or two will turn out to be keepers.

The problem with those keepers is that after I've sent them by email to all my adoring fans – otherwise known as my long suffering family – what do I do with the pictures I want to preserve on paper? I have a very nice Epson Stylus Photo printer that is fun to print experiments with. It does a good job of printing on photo glossy paper as well as a matte finish. And it's reasonably fast considering the megapixels it is working with (which means that it's slow).

With digital photography, though, we've come to expect speed. It's possible to determine instantly if the shot you intended is the one you got. If it is, you can print it immediately. However, what about those other pictures that you don't print immediately but want to have on paper? Printing them at home isn't much fun. And it's actually pretty expensive when one factors in paper and ink. There are places in town that will print your digital photos for you, but for me that doesn't work very well. I find myself in the same situation that I was in when I did film. Just as rolls of film canisters stacked up waiting for me to take them to the store and then pick up, I procrastinate just the same with digital pictures.

Over Thanksgiving, though, I found a better way – one that does work for me. I had a good recommendation that a couple of Internet sites did a fine job of printing digital photos (and film ones too) at a very reasonable price. I decided to give Snapfish a try ([www.snapfish.com](http://www.snapfish.com)). I figured I didn't have much to lose since they offer the first ten free requiring only a small shipping charge. I registered quickly and downloaded 25 images (in glossy or matte finish) out of the gazillions I need to get printed. This isn't going to be a good choice if you don't have a high speed connection such as DSL or cable modem, but that isn't the case for me. The

process took only a few minutes, and the hardest part was deciding which photos I wanted to try.

It took about a week for my photos to arrive which might not satisfy the instant gratification folks among us, but in my case I've had these photos sitting on my hard drive for months. A week didn't matter and I loved having them just appear in my mailbox. For 25 - 4X6 photos the cost was \$.25 each with less than \$2 for shipping for a total bill of \$5.47. This was cheaper than it would normally be because of the offer giving me the first ten free. Otherwise, I would have paid a total of \$7.72. Not bad for some great looking prints. I couldn't tell the difference between these and the ones I used to get from film developing.

However, there's an option that I'm seriously thinking about. If you pre-buy in lots of 100 – 400 (sort of like setting up a draw account), you can reduce the price considerably – down to as little as \$.19 each. For \$76 I can get 400 of my photos printed whenever I want. This may be a good choice for me to use to clear out my backlog of photographs. I know of one person who is giving this as a Christmas gift to the housebound mother of a newborn premature baby.

Getting your prints in this way may not be the best solution in every instance, but it sure is a great way to solve my problem. With Christmas upon us and all the photographs that folks are going to be taking, go visit Snapfish to see if it will work for you.