

Stuff and Nonsense Articles

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Volume 2

HubStuff

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A Gift of Memories – Issue 2

January 2, 2004

The gift getting season is mostly over. We've torn the paper, pulled off the ribbons to reuse, and stacked our presents that we now must find a place to store. For some of us the gifts will be welcome additions to our world. For others we will have to figure out what to do with what we got.

I remember early married years when I had a kitchen with exactly four cabinets and about three square feet of counter space. Fortunately, this was the pre-microwave era so I didn't have to give up my precious space for it. But my mother-in-law in all her generosity decided that my life wasn't complete without an electric frying pan (a precursor to the microwave) and a free-standing electric mixer (which she bought used from a neighbor). I actually did want these appliances, but when I arrived home from our Christmas celebration with them I realized the obvious. There was no place to put them.

I juggled and moved things around thinking that the laws of physics could be manipulated. It didn't work. I finally decided to store these new possessions in the bedroom because my closet was considerably larger than my kitchen if that gives you a clue to my predicament.

In time I did what people will be doing all over America next week. I decided to purchase a storage cabinet to place on the open wall in my kitchen. I pored over the Sears catalog trying to find something that would serve the necessary purpose (no Amazon in those days). I finally found one I could afford. It had a sturdy metal top with heavy duty cardboard sides and sliding doors. It would be perfect because it effectively doubled my storage as well as counter space.

I called in my order and waited for notification of its delivery some days later. Instant gratification wasn't the order of the day. Even living in a big city (which I did) meant that items ordered from the catalog took ten days to two weeks to be shipped to the store. A phone call or post card would notify you of its arrival and then you had to go pick it up. The store closed at five, so even though I learned on Thursday that my cabinet was waiting for me, I had to wait till Saturday to get it.

Unfortunately, though, a huge snowfall descended upon the city Friday night. I was new to winter driving and faced a major predicament. The catalog store was only a few blocks away and I desperately wanted to pick up my package, but I had never driven on snow in my life. And this was lots of snow. I agonized over the wisest decision but need for gratification took over caution. I left early to reduce the traffic I would face and managed the trip uneventfully. The parking lot was empty since only I was desperate enough to venture out in the early hours.

I retrieved my purchase and decided that the parking lot offered an opportunity too good to resist. I spent the next hour driving in snow. Pristine, unplowed snow. I drove from one end of the lot to the other braking suddenly, braking slowly, not braking at all learning the feel of my tiny yellow Opel Cadette as it maneuvered this unfamiliar white stuff. When I felt I knew enough to be marginally less of a hazard on the road, I went back to my apartment to give my Christmas gifts their new home.

I no longer have that cabinet or even the electric skillet although they both served me for years. I do still have the mixer although it has moved to the attic. I can't quite bring myself to discard it and I think it has reached the age to be a collectible. Whenever I come across it while looking for something else, I remember that Christmas and the gifts that wouldn't fit. I remember problem solving to find a place to put them. I remember learning to drive on snow. I remember hauling in the huge box that was the unassembled cabinet and sitting on the floor assembling the pieces. I remember removing my new (and used) appliances from my bedroom closet to give them a rightful place in the kitchen.

It's funny, but at the time if you had told me that what I was getting that Christmas were memories I would have thought you slightly "tetched in the head" as they once said. Gifts are supposed to be objects – physical things that serve some purpose – not of the mind. But I would have been wrong, for what has lasted has been the experiences and the memories left behind. The next time I buy presents for Christmas I want to remember that. I also need

to remember that I may never know how important a gift may be, for my mother-in-law never knew that long years after she wrapped my gifts that they are still giving.

Good Resolutions – Issue 3

January 9, 2004

We have safely passed the time of year when New Year's resolutions are no longer required of us. For most folks that's a relief. It's not entirely true for me. For years I made the required resolutions to eat right, exercise, and buckle my seatbelt. Pretty boring. More importantly it never happened. It was like the eternal "to do" list that never gets checked off so you just keep recycling the intended actions.

A number of years ago I stumbled upon a really good use for the annual resolution. Instead of picking things that were good for me, I began to pick things that I wanted to do – really wanted. I didn't pick those things one is supposed to want. I picked things I wished at the end of the year I had done. I actually felt very brave at abandoning the expected.

Let me give you an example. One fall I was invited to a soup dinner where each of us were asked to bring our favorite homemade soup. I was stymied. I could open a can of tomato soup with a Campbell's label on it, but that was about it. I dug open a cookbook and made something, but it was hardly best of show I can tell you. The other soups that night were wonderful. Envy took over my soul and I pined to have my own repertoire of incredible soup recipes to make from scratch. Come the end of the year, that was my resolution – to experiment with soup recipes until I had a half dozen real keepers. And I did. Not long ago I took a soup (creamy mushroom made with no milk products) with me to a group event and shared it. "Where did you find this recipe?" someone wanted to know. I explained quite innocently that I had come upon it as I fulfilled a New Year's resolution several years ago.

The look on the person's face (which wasn't because of the soup) made me realize that for once I had stumbled upon something worthwhile and I began to think about each year's resolution since then. Last year's was to learn to tat. I have a friend who does exquisite tatting and I vowed that I wanted her to teach me. It took a nearly the full year to make that happen, but in December I began my adventure in the ancient art. It will take many more years before I'm even approaching skilled, but I have the start.

One year when my children still lived at home and had reached the point where I wasn't getting to spend many hours with them, I resolved to spend time watching television with them. A strange resolution, I know, but if the mountain won't come to Mohammed. It was a good year. I learned to enjoy some of the shows they liked to watch and it gave us many avenues for conversation other than the one that always began, "You need to ..." It might have been better to resolve to go jogging with them, but remember this was my resolution – not theirs. They had no desire to jog with mom which is understandable.

Another year I decided that I wanted a yard that didn't look like images sent back from the Mars rover. I had no landscaping skills or even the time, but I began to think about options. I realized that I had a friend who was a landscaper and in February I approached him to find out what it would take to have a truly landscaped yard. It took the whole year and lots of this and that, but at the end I had a yard to love.

So now you are asking what is this year's resolution. It's to use my china. I have lovely Wedgwood bone china (Belle Fleur for anyone who cares) that I received as wedding presents many eons ago. During that time I have used these dishes perhaps a total of 30 times. So why aren't I using it more? Who knows. Laziness probably. I do know that I don't need to protect this china to hand down to my daughter or daughter-in-law. They each have their own that they love. Hence, I have resolved to use my china at least once a month this year. I want to eat from it as often as I can in the years to come not reserving it just for holidays. I may just use it for the two of us or I may invite others or I may use the dishes to feed the cat. Doesn't matter. What does matter is that by the end of the year I hope to have a new pattern to my existence.

Now what I'm wondering is how many others out there make resolutions that are sort of "off the wall." How about sharing them? I need some ideas for next year.

Wonders in the World of Weeds – Issue 4

January 16, 2004

Who would have thought that weeds could be so interesting. When I walked into the Arboretum for the monthly Second Saturday program on Weed Control, I expected a sparse turnout. Wrong. The place was packed with folks wanting to learn how to manage the pesky plants that according to the standard definition are merely plants that grow where they are not wanted. From the looks of the crowd, it is clear that we have lots of plants in our yards that as one person said, “Just don’t have a good press agent.”

Nathan Gilmore of Lubbock Lawn and Tree Service was there to explain weed control and to answer the audience’s many questions. He brought along a copy of the book *Weeds of the West* which contained full color photographs of weeds in every stage of development. Arthur Elliott of the Arboretum brought samples of various weeds to use as examples. It was a good use of an hour on a Saturday morning.

I have to admit that I’ve not spent a lot of time thinking about weeds. I have my share of them and try to keep them out of my flower beds and yard. Without them, I wouldn’t spend nearly as much time in my garden as I do. In a way, they are a blessing because they force me to pay attention to the lovely things growing there. I always thought weeds were somehow different from other plants and that’s what made them undesirable. Not true. All plants fall into three categories: annuals that only last a year, biennials that grow one year and bloom the next, and perennials that stay with us as long as they can. Within these three, plants fall into two groups: grasses and broadleaves.

If you want to get rid of something that is growing, you have to know how long it will last and whether it’s a broadleaf or a grass. You can then use a mechanical means of removing it like pulling it up or a chemical means. Herbicides are chemicals that kill on contact with the leaves or systemically by invading the whole plant. Some chemicals attack everything just like an indiscriminate child who can’t tell the difference between your prize lily and a strange grass. Other chemicals are picky choosing just grasses or just broadleaf plants. You can use a pre-

emergent to nip the seeds before they sprout or a post emergent for use when the plant is already in place.

All this information provided by Mr. Gilmore made me think about weeds in ways I never had before. Some plants we encourage; others we try to get rid of. Why? Not because there is something intrinsically wrong with them. It’s because they mess up the image we are trying to project of order and design. Unfortunately, “weeds” are usually the hardiest, most determined plants we have. While we coddle and protect our “flowers,” weeds grow in spite of all our best efforts. Can you imagine a daffodil or lilac continuing to grow even after we have dug it out or sprayed it with chemicals?

I began to wonder if some of us shouldn’t think this through more carefully. As water becomes more precious, we are going to have to begin to cultivate the plants that can survive under less than ideal conditions. Maybe a grass or broadleaf that can’t be killed easily is a better choice than some we think should be encouraged. I’m hardly the first person to think about this, it’s just that I’m beginning to understand better why others have been saying this for years. I believe that I’ll start looking at my “weeds” to decide if they are really all that bad. I think I’ll remember that Emerson once said, “A weed is a plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered.”

Sidebar: Definitions

A weed is . . .

a plant that you wish would die and it won’t.
Even with Round-up!

anything that will eventually produce obnoxious seeds that attach themselves to every passing cat, child, or other creature.

a plant that won’t come out of the ground easily.

a plant we haven’t found a use for yet.

a flower unloved.

--taken from <http://forums.gardenweb.com>

Passing at Breakfast – Issue 5

January 23, 2004

The last few months, I've spent more than my share of time in motels or "inns" or "suites" as they are more likely to be called today. I am not sure the word motel is still in the vernacular – probably because of the slightly tacky image of sleaze that attaches itself to the word. No matter what they are called, they are home for today's traveler.

Most of the places I stay provide a self-serve breakfast of some sort ranging from at worst stale donuts and some orange juice to the best which is made-to-order waffles that are wonderful. These breakfast nooks are interesting places to observe the world in microcosm. This last weekend was a good example.

Each of us entered the room not looking at one another. Each of us passed by the other without speaking. If we had to wait our turn to pour juice, we did it in silence. Once seated, though, we pretended that we were in our own kitchen eating in private.

There were families with young children who were trying to corral their offspring in unfamiliar terrain. The words directed to the children say a lot about the kind of parenting that is going on at home as one child is encouraged to eat and another is instructed to sit still. The cell phone conversations conducted where we can all hear are fascinating to factor into the equation.

There were old folks (like us) who were obviously not in much of a hurry. The components of the marriage or relationship are interesting to observe. Who clears the table, who brings coffee refills, how much conversation actually occurs over breakfast are all signs of the world in which these people live. When the map is brought out and the day's trek is plotted, everyone nearby knows how many miles are ahead of the couple and who will do the driving.

There was the rookie salesman being trained by the veteran. Eavesdropping on the conversation was difficult not to do. Actually, if one wanted a mini-course on sales, this was a great place to get one. I always wonder if these people realize that the visitors to the room can hear all that is

said. I've heard conversations that in a world of business espionage would make for juicy tidbits.

Most interesting, however, was the gentleman who clearly had spent far too many nights away from home. He came to breakfast at 9 a.m. looking like he truly thought he was in his own kitchen. He had classic "bed hair" that had not been near a comb, he was barefooted, and his sweats appeared to have functioned as pajamas. He padded about getting his juice and coffee and then wandered off to get a copy of the paper. He ate his cinnamon roll slowly and then departed as casually as he appeared. No one seemed to notice or care that this apparition had come or gone.

It was just another day. Strangers came together to eat and share their lives – even if they didn't intend to. They will all go on their way having left a piece of their life with the others in the room. No one spoke. Each of us acted as if the others did not exist. But we did know they existed. I know about each of these people in that room who have passed by my life. What do I do with the information? Nothing. What should I do? I don't know, but it seems like a waste of humanity. How much better it would be if instead of a wall of silence we could have joined our lives for a few moments. Next time perhaps I'll speak to the young family although I'm not sure I want to talk to the gentleman with the bed hair. He was just a bit too comfortable even for me.

Real Reality TV – Issue 6

January 29, 2004

I'm been grieving for days. I've tried to go on with my ordinary life, but it's been hard when my mind kept returning to anxious thoughts. First Spirit wasn't returning any signals and then it was sending "I'm sick – very very sick" messages. For a few hours there had been hope when the first set of messages arrived, but that was crushed when the content was revealed to us in one of those hospital type press conferences.

"Get a grip", you say. Easy enough for you. I was there when the first Mars rover landed. I watched unable to breathe as we waited those awful seven minutes for it to announce its successful impact. I went to sleep that night telling myself over and over "We are on Mars. We are on Mars." It was the moment of a lifetime.

I have downloaded megabytes of images from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory Web site (<http://marsrovers.jpl.nasa.gov/home/index.html>) and then gone into my image editing software to get as close as possible. I felt like I could pick up grains of sand and rub them between my fingers. The 3D images mesmerized me as I adjusted my vision to see through paper glasses that I didn't even know I had until the moment I needed them for this.

Every day I went to the site to see what was new. And then the horrid moment when the news was bad.

It made watching NASA television last night even harder as they tracked the landing of Opportunity, a second Mars rover. Once again I didn't breathe as each stage passed first from entry into the atmosphere and then to deployment of the parachute and finally the bouncing rolling arrival. Regardless of my anxiety over Spirit, I cheered with the JPL staff and waited anxiously for each new beep indicating another success stage.

And now today the news is good. Spirit is improving with cautious hopes that its problems can be fixed. I'm so full of admiration for those who are trying to repair the ailing rover. I've done my share of computer troubleshooting over the phone. I can't imagine trying to do it under

these conditions. Additional good news is that Opportunity is nestled in a crater allowing it to send back information more amazing than any of us could have hoped. The pictures once again send chills down my spine.

Never before have we been able to watch such extraordinary events on television or see such images on our computers. The television cameras recording the conversations, frowns, and delight of the JPL staff are not providing contrived events for us to watch. This is the real stuff. Nervous peanut munchers are real people responding to stress just as I do. When news comes across the speaker that Opportunity landed at the rate of 2-3 Gs, these people are truly amazed and they show it. I'm sure that these folks know that a camera is recording their every action and beaming it to millions of people. That might temper their language a bit. I'm sure they work hard to look busy even when there's nothing to do for the moment. But it's still real. Very real.

I have to say that I'm astonished when I talk to people who are hardly aware that within a three week period we have successfully landed not one but two vehicles to use to explore our nearest planet neighbor. Even those who are aware of the news haven't bothered to go look at the photographs. Amazing. These same people watch Survivor Somewhere and call it entertainment. They are missing the real thing. They are welcome to their recreation. Meanwhile I'll watch the rovers explore Mars taking me over ground I never expected to see in my lifetime even if I do suffer mightily at each mishap.

People Naming – Issue 7

February 6, 2004

I've spent the last week reading people's names. Lots of names. No. I haven't been desperate enough to replace a good novel with the phone book. Instead, I finally decided to unearth the genealogy records that I had stored away waiting for the perfect day.

The "just right" moment came last week. It was an eye opening experience. The Internet has made an extraordinary difference in how one does family research. It's almost more than I can handle. Years ago when I did my first searching, I was limited to microfiche and forms on which to record census data that might just be information about my family members. Trying to find that obscure relative was truly the needle and haystack experience.

Today, these same census records are online and quickly searchable. A copy and paste action means that the tedium of carefully recording each bit of data is no longer necessary. I have to say that I'm in heaven. I haven't gotten much sleep because I keep thinking of new ways and places I can uncover one more piece of lost information.

The whole experience has been interesting in ways that I had not expected. It used to be that I moved so slowly through material that I never looked at the big picture. This time is different. I've spent my time looking at a name such as Caroline wondering why she was called Lena until the obvious occurred to me (if you are as slow as I am, pronounce the "i" as an ee and don't let the final "e" remain silent). I've looked at Sincler and discovered that it could be called St. Clair. And Ciety Ann finally showed up. For a while I thought my aunt had made up that name although there must have only been two people on this earth with that unusual moniker and both of them are my relatives.

I've been able to notice the panorama of family names covering generations. It's amazing to see the same names ripple through a family line disappearing for a generation or two only to reappear in the most unexpected places. The genetics of names would be a worthy study.

The naming of people has always fascinated me. I actually once wrote a juvenile novel about

a young girl whose parents named her Brandye Whyne. The worst part was that her last name (surname to genealogists) was Drinker. You could laugh and tell me that no one would be so heartless, but I've been a school teacher too long to believe that. I could tell you stories about the names I've encountered.

In the midst of all this name studying, I attended a play about names. The Lubbock Community Theatre produced an excellent version of The Importance of Being Earnest which is all about how one name effects a person positively and another sends negative vibrations. It seemed I was beginning to see a pattern to my existence.

The thing about doing genealogy is that you quickly realize that when we are gone, for many of us, all that is left is the name that someone else gave us. A family tree has names, dates, and places and that's about it. We have precious little control over any of the information that is assigned to our history. I know that our friends and immediate family remember us and our contributions, but once those people are gone, you are merely a name. That's why I'm doing genealogy – so that I can attach even a tiny piece of information to these names – information that the name had some control over for good or not. It's a worthy task and maybe when I'm gone someone will remember my contribution.

It's Almost Here – Issue 8

February 13, 2004

I could fill my entire column this week with the refrain, "It's coming. It's coming." I feel like a kid waiting for Christmas. When I heard the news, I went around for days grinning from ear to ear. So what's got me in such a dither, you ask. The Anthony Kearns concert. And who is Anthony Kearns, you reply, trying not to sound too stupid.

Now that's a good question. Trying to explain Anthony Kearns is kind of like trying to explain Katherine Hepburn by saying she was an actress or Georgia O'Keefe by describing her as a painter. It somehow just doesn't say enough. The same is true for Anthony Kearns. I could tell you that he's a singer who is part of a group called The Irish Tenors. I could tell you that he is good. But none of this would give you a true sense of who he is.

I have to admit sheepishly that until last year I had never heard of the Irish Tenors much less Anthony Kearns. That's not too surprising because my musical interest is eclectic but not particularly broad which sounds contradictory. What I mean is that I like lots of different stuff, but it's the same stuff everyone has heard of.

Part of the joy of working for HubStuff is that I get to meet new people, so last May I was scheduled to interview and photograph a "singer" who was coming to town. I got there early and waited in the wings feeling rather foolish, I must admit. I had no idea what I was going to ask or even how much time this man Kearns would have. I have to tell you that the thirty minutes I sat listening to him rehearse were extraordinary. Even his "mistakes" sounded wonderful.

When he finished, I commented that I didn't feel like I even had to come that evening because what I had already heard was so enchanting. He laughed and assured me that I did want to come to hear the real thing. He was right. An evening listening to Anthony Kearns sing is the closest I'll ever get to heaven on earth. His Irish ballads and even an aria (and I'm no opera fan) enthralled me. I became an adoring fan.

I promptly bought every Irish Tenor CD that I could afford. Lunch money disappeared to buy music and I didn't care. I'm sure I have worn

several layers off my CDs listening to this music. I have even bought the DVD of their concerts.

Okay. I know. I know. That doesn't tell you a thing about whether or not you'd be as smitten as I am. Fortunately, there's a way for you to get a taste to decide for yourself. You can go to www.amazon.com and look for the CDs by the Irish Tenors. There are six (unless I've missed one). Each CD has a page that lists the contents of the recording and also provides a sampling of four songs. The titles listed below are the sample songs performed by Anthony Kearns. Fair warning. Listening to these will only give you the tiniest flavor, but maybe it will be enough to give you an idea of what you will hear in a full concert.

The Irish Tenors

Mountains of Mourne

The Irish Tenors: Ellis Island

Love Thee Dearest

Live in Belfast

Bantry Bay

The Very Best of The Irish Tenors

Pick any of the four to hear the group

Home for Christmas

The Wexford Carol

We Three Kings

It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

Last year, the concert was in the Auditorium at Texas Tech. This year it will be at the Civic Center. I'm thrilled that the better acoustics and seating of the Civic Center will be available this time. February 28 is also the date of a Texas Tech basketball game. That's too bad for the team, because an evening of Anthony Kearns may mean that the coliseum will be empty.

On a final thought before I turn my CD player back on, if I had children at home, I'd take them to this concert. It may be the only time in their lives that they will have the opportunity to hear what exquisite sounds the human voice can produce. It will give them a chance to compare their music of choice to music that is totally

unlike any they have heard before. Don't worry that they will be bored by it. Anthony Kearns couldn't produce a boring concert if he tried. He is funny, engaging, and a consummate performer who knows how to relate to any audience.

Meanwhile, I keep reminding myself. He's coming. He's coming. Anthony Kearns is coming. I'm not sure February 28 will get here soon enough.

Sidebar

Just in case you think I'm a fan of one, here are a few comments taken from Amazon reviews.

Words cannot effectively capture the emotions I am feeling as I listen to this beautiful CD.

Anthony's rendition of "Sweet Little Jesus Boy" brings tears to my eyes. It's the most beautiful sound that ever came from the mouth of any singer I have ever heard.

Anthony Kearns' voice is incredible and he has, amazingly, improved over the near perfection of the earlier CDs.

Anthony Kearns' voice in particular has a smooth clarity that soothes and caresses, like warm silk.

From the clarion opening of Isle of Hope, Isle of Tears, Anthony sings with a purity and richness of tone that is sensational.

As I have said, I am not someone who is typically interested in this type of music. I tend to be bored easily, but I have yet to grow weary of the Irish Tenors.

In the Dublin concert, Anthony Kearns sings some of the most beautiful songs recorded by the "ITs". He is truly outstanding on this recording. To watch him sing is captivating. He holds your attention because you can't believe anyone can sing so beautifully.

The incredible voice of Anthony Kearns is beyond any adequate written description. One must hear his voice to experience the true depth of emotion and the breathtaking purity of this unequalled voice.

Life as Literature – a story retold – Issue 9

February 20, 2004

The fatal flaw in my life as an English teacher was that I never really believed that literature truly reflected life. And it doesn't. But this morning I encountered a Romeo and Juliet story that could have come right out of Shakespeare.

Perhaps I should start at the beginning (if there is one). For days now I have been absorbed with genealogy work. Absorbed probably isn't the best word because it doesn't begin to describe the all-consuming nature of this passion. I think of words like enthralled, in the grip of, and possessed. There is no sleep, no food, no daily need that isn't forgotten in this quest to find the missing piece. What drives me may be the need to know a birth date, a middle name, or in this morning's case an answer to a family puzzle. It is so bad that when I'm in conversation with my husband he must keep reminding me to "focus, Susan, focus" because I tend to fade out in the middle of a sentence as my mind thinks about a new way to spell Gahn or Kourt.

The puzzle piece that came to me in my sleep last night (remember, I said I was possessed) is a fascinating one to recount (at least it is to me). It is making me reconsider my belief in the value of literature. My father's early life was a tragic one with his father dying violently when he was only a small child. This left his mother to deal with the world as a single parent with no means of support. Today we take this issue for granted as we read the statistics on the homeless, but we don't expect to find it in our past.

In my search for family I wondered why it was left to the parents of his mother to provide support while his father's more affluent family ignored them. Growing up I had no idea that this other family even existed. Today I know why. What I don't know is why no one ever told me. No matter. It's been a fascinating journey in the quest for an answer.

The solution to the puzzle goes back to a time that still haunts us even though we think that events 150 years ago have no impact on our lives today. Many of my roots are Southern with family found in Alabama and Georgia. The assumption would be that family members who were alive during the period of the Civil War or

the War Between the States (depending upon your side) would have fought on the side of the Confederacy. Sometimes such assumptions can be wrong.

It is true that one side did wear the grey. At the age of 16, James R. Lancaster from Georgia joined Company A of the 19th Arkansas Infantry fighting for the Confederacy. He and his older brother were captured during the battle at Island No. 10 and then sent to a prisoner of war camp.

The other side of our family did not support the cause. As you can imagine this was not a popular point of view in their hometown. In defiance of his neighbors, John C. Tompkins joined the 1st Alabama Cavalry, a small but important group of union soldiers. According to one general, "I am largely indebted to the activity and gallantry of the 1st Ala Cav in procuring information for me about General John B. Hood's movements in NE Georgia and NW Alabama."

After the war the Tompkins and the Lancasters moved to Texas leaving behind their old lives. But did they? Emma Tompkins received a pension from the United States of America for John C.'s service to his country. The Lancasters did not. Instead, James R. carried the memory of watching his brother die in a union POW camp.

This should have been the end of the tale. But it isn't. In a classic twist, the children from these two disparate families fell in love and married. Romeo and Juliet are revisited once again. However, this story doesn't end when the stage curtain falls. For a child came of this marriage and from him came other children who suffered the consequences of "Two households, both alike in dignity . . . from ancient grudge break to new mutiny."

I can only imagine the animosity that bubbled under the surface. There were no family accounts of the quarrel. But children always know when there's bad blood even if no one talks about it. To finally understand what caused this division of families is the morning's research gift.

Discovering the war records of these two men means that I now understand what I did not

know before. It's what has driven me to spend countless hours in the search for my family's history. It almost makes it worth giving up meals and life. With this mystery solved, maybe now I can remember how to stay focused in my ordinary conversations. I doubt it. There's always those Gahns, and their mysteries are even more intriguing.

On the Home Front – Issue 10

February 27, 2004

Home Depot and Lowe's once looked to me like places to buy tools and nails and maybe a few plants. Today they remind me more of an army supply depot. The change began when my daughter and son-in-law bought a 50 year-old house that needed considerable updating to bring it into the 21st century. The first Christmas they moved in, we gathered in their new home prepared to celebrate the season in the traditional ways. Little did the women of the family know but this was to be known as the first major engagement of the power tool army.

The day we all arrived, the testosterone began to flow as each male member of the family began their induction into the Spellman Street Division. Skills were assessed and assignments were handed out. The kitchen was established as the staging area, and the dedicated band of soldiers only lacked a white board on which to mark the battles ahead. These consisted of

- Remove doors (13)
- Transport new doors (truck needed)
- Trim new doors to fit old facings (circular saws required)
- Wire house for network connection (CAT 5 already acquired)
- Replace outdated and duplicate phone lines (ladder required)
- Replace exterior door with French door (muscles needed)

Fathers, fathers-in-law, brothers, and male friends discussed with a scary intensity the plan of attack. It wasn't long before each member of the unit strapped on their newly acquired tool belt which identified them as a true member of the hardy brigade. The battle cry "bonding through power tools" could be heard throughout the house.

The women folk were left to their ordinary lives in which they prayed nightly for the safe return of their warriors hoping that no battle injuries would be require a trip to the emergency room. Fortunately, I can report that the only damage was to the older male egos which required

frequent doses of pain killers such as ibuprofen to restore them to physical fitness each day. As in all wars, there were inconveniences that had to be endured by the non-combatants such as inoperative phone lines for two days.

The sound of power equipment ran far into the night. Frequent trips to the supply depot were needed which included new blades for the circular saw (who would have thought you could use so many), another door to replace the one that was a casualty of one battle, and reinforcement tools to replace those lost or damaged. In most wars, the industries that support the battles see a noticeable increase in profits, so it is in this one. I recommend purchasing stock in home improvement stores because our family has done more than its share to improve their bottom line.

I can report that the Christmas Battle was successful. Doors are in place that are lovely to behold. Every room has a network connection and all the phones work.

Yesterday, though another engagement was begun. This time it was a wall that needed a door – not that there wasn't already a door there – it was just in the wrong place. Friends of mine will quake at the very words, because they know that no wall is safe in our house. My husband has a tendency to awake from the fall football season with a gleam in his eye and a saw in hand ready to go where no builder intended. This time it was my daughter's wall and not mine that received the assault. Once again the power tool belts came out and noises too hideous to describe could be heard coming from above. The women cowered in a safe place trying to reassure the small furry things that life would eventually return to normal.

At one moment, though, during a temporary cessation of firing, we heard the words "Soldier, I don't care what you play. Just play loud!" The desperate sawing continued.

What will the outcome be of this campaign? Successful, I believe. Will there be another one? Absolutely. This is not a war that will be won until every wall, door, roof, floor, sink, toilet, and crown molding has been conquered. Our men are not quitters!! And when this front has been

taken, there's the cabin in New Mexico that has been the object of many late night planning sessions. Rest assured, Baby Ben already has his own tool belt ready to join as soon as puberty comes upon him in about 13 years.

More Than Just a Pretty Voice – Issue 11

March 5 2004

Listening to an Anthony Kearns concert is a night of delight. His magical voice transforms an ordinary evening into a special moment to be cherished always. It's easy to believe that the flawless performance happens because Kearns has been blessed with an astonishing musical gift. And it's true that he has a vocal ability that one rarely if ever hears, but as with any gift, it's what you do with it that counts.

Watching him on stage, his life appears to be the stuff fantasies are made of. After all, his solo performances are considered "suitcase acts" requiring nothing more than for Kearns to show up and sing. The only other person on the stage is the charming Patrick Healy who provides musical and program support. There are no huge buses filled with equipment and personnel. There are no complex lighting requirements. All he needs is a piano and a stage.

The hour before the audience arrives, he dons immaculate black tails over a crisp white shirt finished off with gold cuff links. An announcer walks out on stage and prepares the audience for the performer's arrival, and then Kearns takes center stage and proceeds to sing. When it's over, he goes back to the hotel after spending a few minutes personally greeting his adoring fans.

This is the life, you say. For this he is paid the big bucks and don't we all wish we could be so lucky. "Ah," he might say in his delightful brogue "if that were only the case." The real story is hardly a tale of hardship and denial, but it is also one of hard work and professionalism. It's a world that puts him on the stage 150 days of the year. There are 90-100 concerts with the Irish Tenors and about 50 solo performances. This is about once every two days if my math is correct. Not that performances come that regularly. As Kearns says, "It's either feast or famine." He will perform daily for weeks and then it's a return to Dublin to do nothing – a forced respite that is almost worse than constant performances because he isn't comfortable doing nothing. But, of course, even nothing isn't nothing. What looks like down time is filled with the business of his profession. There are meetings with the other two tenors, music to choose, decisions about

future concerts to be made, music to be learned, arrangements to be considered for the next tour, and even bills to pay (like the rest of us).

There are "hired guns" such as Vincent Mitchell, who acts as his agent in the United States, to deal with many of the details, but in the end it is up to the performer to make the final decisions. And these decisions impact not only Kearns but his entire staff. For the product, the sales, the income comes from one person – the performer. On his shoulders rests it all and until the others are paid, he gets nothing.

Kearns is not complaining. He will tell you that he is "obsessed with singing." He admits that he lives a life that many would give their right arm for. But just because it's an enviable life doesn't make it an easy one. There is the constant travel, strange hotels, and unfamiliar concert halls. There are the interviews and publicity events that fuel ticket sales but require him to be articulate and friendly when he might rather be reclusive. And then there are the miscues such as the unexpected PBS interview for which he had brought no suit. With only an hour to spare, he must make a quick trip to the local department store although he jokingly considers doing the interview in his performance tuxedo.

Moving from one city to the next on a daily basis is wearing on the body and the voice. To keep his voice – the instrument that is supporting himself as well as others – requires constant attention. Voice lessons allow him to continue to train and to grow as an artist and performer. The learning never stops. He says, "It drives you mad sometimes. Always trying to make the singing better." There are no laurels to rest upon.

Kearns brings more to this profession, though, than just a dedication to performing. He brings an intelligence that shines through as he talks about the world in which he lives. No MBA could talk more knowledgeably about how one grows a musical career. As a matter of fact, if he tires of the constant demands of live concerts, there are schools of the performing arts that would find him an enviable addition to their faculty. He knows his craft. It radiates as he talks about following in the footsteps of other musicians learning from their experiences. He accepts bad

turns in the road not looking back but instead learning from any misstep. He does say, though, that working as part of The Irish Tenors is an advantage because “Three heads are better than one” when it comes to making decisions.

This isn't a performer who is convinced that he somehow has earned the adulation that he receives from fans who fly from great distances just to hear him sing another time. This is a performer instead who appreciates it when nice things are written about him but who also reads the few negative print articles that appear – taking none too seriously. He will admit, “It's nice to get compliments, but I don't wallow in the glory.”

It's not surprising, though, that his fan base continues to grow each year. He brings to the stage something special, something unexpected. He has worked hard, he has studied diligently, he has prepared as thoroughly as possible. But then he walks out to his audience and has fun. Sure and this is a strange thing to say about a performer who sings operatic pieces to an untutored West Texas audience who would normally not walk across the street to hear such a sound. But when Anthony Kearns sings, we listen and relish every note. He says in his very demeanor “This is fun and you will love it.” And he is right. We do. We expected to love his Irish folk songs such as the “Darling Girl from County Clare.” We didn't expect to love “Dein ist mein hanzes Herz,” but we did.

While we are having fun, he appears relaxed as he prepares to take us to places we didn't expect to go. There's a sense of ease as one watches the tips of his fingers rest gracefully on the piano or the hands come together to add emphasis for a moment in a song. As he finishes one stanza and waits for the music to take him to the next, Kearns looks out on his audience as if to see who he is reaching. He takes time to offer a charming wink to a long time fan sitting on the front row. He laughs comfortably and clicks his heels when the moment is right. This is not the contrivance of a choreographed event. This is a performer who loves to sing and loves to have others hear him. He is not trying too hard but always achieves more than anyone could expect. Notes are reached and held that don't seem possible. This didn't come by accident. This was once a musician who did not even read music but learned. This was a person who said, “Sure, I could sing whatever I heard,

but if you are doing Handel's Messiah, you can't rely on that.”

That's what separates Anthony Kearns from the average or even the very good. He has talent – yes. So do lots of singers. He has energy. So do most 32 year olds. But he has something more. Something that is hard to define unless you see him. He's not just a pretty voice – there's a man behind the voice who is smart, who is funny, who is charming, who is in love with his profession. And when you bring all this to the stage, miracles happen. Those who attended last Saturday's concert at the Civic Center got to witness it.

A Look Behind the Stage – Issue 11

March 5, 2004

Anthony Kearns talks about “hired guns” that he uses to make his business work. These are the people behind the scenes that we don’t think about. These folks don’t autograph the copies of CDs or even usually have to submit graciously to interviews. However, people such as Vincent Mitchell are as much a part of show business as the performers themselves. Without them to make wide the path and the way smooth, we would not see shows of the caliber of the Anthony Kearns concert.

Vincent “Vinnie” Mitchell is a New York agent who specializes in Irish performers although he’s considering expanding into other types of acts for future bookings. His job is complex and challenging with constant phone calls and never ending demands. He must make the contacts with those people who schedule acts into performing arts venues such as the Bass Performing Arts Center in Ft. Worth. He negotiates for fees and even hotel arrangements (having to find accommodations that are no more than \$70 a night). He worries if a performer can manage to perform in two different cities on two consecutive nights that might be hundreds of miles apart. He tells performers when and where they will perform allowing them to concentrate on the show side of the business while he handles the business side.

While some agents may only set up the dates, he’s a hands-on agent who often goes with his performers to help in myriad ways. His work for an evening might include making sure the correct music is on Patrick Healy’s piano or having on hand for sale the CDs and videos that fans want to purchase after the show. Mitchell provides materials for promoters to use and sets up media interviews. He provides video footage for television. He worries about the details that will keep a performer from focusing on the audience and the performance.

This isn’t a career that Mitchell came to intentionally. He was in record sales initially until Frank Patterson, a famed Irish singer asked if he could to find him some work. Some work turned into more until Mitchell decided to leave one music business and enter another in 1996 when

he started his own company. His concentration on Irish music means that he must know not only his artists but the music as well. His job is to match musicians with audiences and to make the decision makers aware of the performers who might meet their needs. It’s one that he is clearly good at and one that he works hard at.

He has 12 performers on his roster, but concentrates on 5-6 accounts. He attends the regional and national conferences held by the performing arts exchanges where agents gather and performers showcase their talents for representatives from universities, performing arts centers, and community centers such as the United Spirit Arena. It is a place where contacts are made and relationships are formed. In is here and through personal contacts that acts are booked for the coming year. Sometimes Mitchell has bookings arranged more than a year in advance. He is always searching for new contacts and new possibilities for the performers he represents.

For an agent specializing in Irish artists, it’s March Madness because of St. Patrick’s Day. At this time, he has five tours going on including a group consisting of 25 members currently performing in Dubuque, Iowa. He arranges itineraries that include performances in places as far flung as New York, Arizona, and Louisiana. For his part in this process, Mitchell receives a percentage of the fee paid to the performer.

While the hardest part of his job is getting promoters and performing arts centers to return his calls, for him the most important element of his job is building trust and keeping it. The agent for Victor Borge once told him, “It takes years to build credibility. It can be torn down in five minutes.” He continually keeps this in mind and knows that once the trust is gone, it will take years to rebuild it. He has no intention of losing the trust of those he works for. He does that through hard work and a knowledge that show business is two words: show and business. He believes that people in the show should not be doing the business. He steps in to do the business for them.

Vincent Mitchell’s website is www.irelandonstage.net.

Cat Time May Be the Right Time – Issue 12

March 12, 2004

I've been thinking about time lately. Perhaps this was a waste of a valuable resource, but it seemed important. That's because time feels like it is slipping away from me. I hurry and hurry trying to fill each minute to the brim with worthwhile activities, but when the day is over, not enough is done. During my contemplative state, I realized that my Siamese cat (a lovely creature rescued long ago) seems to understand something about time that I don't. He never hurries and yet always gets to where he is going. Have you noticed that cats even stretch in slow motion?

Up until now, I've thought that perhaps if I hurried faster, it might change the outcome. However, even that didn't help. If anything, the more I hurried, the farther behind I fell. I think this problem is not confined to my world. Why else would we carry cell phones, pagers, palm organizers, and other utensils of modern hurry?

This same methodical cat (who has no palm to keep organized) does his best to remind me of the inappropriateness of hurry. He tends to nip at my heels whenever I am in major scurry mode as if to tell me "slow down." He clearly does not approve of my frantic movements. If I'm too long engaged in a project at my computer, he moves onto the keyboard demanding that I pet him instead. It's hard to be too intense while petting a purring cat.

Sitting at the symphony last night made me all the more aware of the "hurry mode" we live in. Sitting still just to listen to classical music seems a waste of time. I can hear the same music on my car radio as I am being transported from one location to another. I can hear it on my CD player as I cook dinner. I can even hear it in elevators as I move from one floor to the next. Why on earth should I give up an evening to sit in an auditorium just to hear music? Such a waste of time. Notice, though, the multi-tasking nature of my "listening." In each instance, I am not listening. I am, instead, doing while the music plays.

And this is what is wrong with too much of our musical listening. We don't want to give the mind

a rest and allow the notes to bathe our minds with soothing tones. We want to double time everything. At a symphony, that is far more difficult to do. We are even asked to turn off our cell phone (which mercifully most folks do). All we can do is sit and hear and listen. That's important. It's good for the brain. It's good for the body. When the hour or two has passed, we have given ourselves a respite that can't be found anywhere else. It's probably the closest we will come to a meditative environment found in a cloister.

If my cat were able to talk, he'd suggest I do more such listening. I'm sure that's what he is doing as he sprawls out each afternoon in the sun. I believe he's listening to the birds sing their songs and the wind rustling its melody around him. I think I'll work on taking lessons from this bright species that understand what we humans don't. The body, the mind, and the soul aren't supposed to run on overdrive. We are supposed to rest. We are supposed to meditate. We are supposed to listen to that which refreshes our soul. Attending a Lubbock symphony is a good way to do it.

Roses Made Easy – Issue 13

March 19, 2004

Once again the Second Saturday Arboretum program offered more than one could expect. The program was supposed to be provided by TreeGrace Farms, but a family emergency prevented that. Instead, Keith Moffett, a member of the Arboretum board, stepped in with a program that could have been entitled “Everything You Wanted to Know about Roses.”

In a little over an hour, he succeeded in making everyone in the room understand the intricacies of selection, planting, pruning, and maintenance. When I left, I went home ready to conquer my garden.

As I've written before, I love roses and joined the Rose Society to learn more about them. This has been a wonderful experience, and I've got to meet many folks who have a deeper understanding than I of what it takes to grow these lovely gifts from nature. However, just because I now know that there is a difference between own root and grafted roses doesn't mean I feel any more secure. Moffett's program took me the next step.

I can't possibly duplicate in these few words all that I learned Saturday, but here are some things that you might want to know as a starting place.

Roses fall into several categories. It's important to know the difference when making a purchase if you want to have roses perform the way you expect. I have to admit that the first time I bought some I looked at the categories and made the wrong assumption meaning I kept wondering why I didn't have long stem roses to cut and place on my table. I thought “tea roses” were those little ones growing in a cluster and that “floribunda” meant great big pretty ones. Wrong!

Here's what you need to know:

Hybrid Tea roses are the kind you think of when looking for long stem single roses to use in arrangements.

Floribunda roses have lots of beautiful clusters that make a show in your yard, but aren't the kind you'd usually use in a bouquet.

Grandifloras are meant to produce blooms like a hybrid but in clusters.

Antique roses have a long history. They are very hardy and quite fragrant.

English roses are a new strain that is meant to produce blooms like a hybrid tea but with the fragrance and disease resistance of an antique.

Climbers do what their name implies.

Shrubs are low bushy roses with lots of clusters.

Miniatures are smaller versions of roses. Come to the May Second Saturday at the Arboretum to learn about the wonder of these tiny marvels.

March 15 -30 is the time to prune roses. They are just now beginning to wake up from their winter nap. I have to admit that I'm not a big pruning advocate. My philosophy of growing things in this part of the world has always been that if it is has leaves, let it be. But in this case, I think I'm about to become a believer. Pruning roses (even in West Texas) is important because it gets rid of canes (that's rose talk for stalks) that get in the way of good growth. Roses like sunshine and air. Too many canes mean that air can't circulate, and the bush doesn't have enough water and fertilizer to produce beautiful flowers. Four canes is the optimum for great looking roses, but a few more can be left if you want more blooms but smaller ones.

Deciding how much and what to cut is the really scary part for me. Keith Moffett's easy answer was to cut off half if you have hybrid teas or floribundas. If you have the new English ones, just cut a third. If you have climbers, DON'T cut at all until after the first blooms or you won't have any blooms at all. Who would have known! Shrubs and climbers are cut in a way that fits your needs.

Cutting should be done with sharp clean pruning shears. Find a forward facing bud (that's the small red eye where growth is about to pop out) and cut about ¼ of an inch above it. If you have more than one rose bush, always dip your pruning tools in a bleach solution before moving on. It's easy to share disease between plants if you fail to do this.

Once you've cut the bush down to size, then it's time to remove canes that cross (remember you want air to circulate). You also cut out canes that don't look good because of age or disease. Pick the 4-6 canes that look the best and remove everything else. I know it sounds harsh, but that's what the gardeners do who have great flowers all year long.

Oh, except they do one other thing. They fertilize. West Texas soil is low in nitrogen which roses need. The soil is high in phosphorous and potassium. These are the three usual components of fertilizer. That's the numbers on the fertilizer bag such as 30-30-30. That would indicate that each of the three chemicals is in equal proportion. You don't want that. You want one that has more nitrogen (the first number). So a proportion such as 3-1-1 would be better.

Here's the problem. If you pour a fertilizer with lots of nitrogen on your roses, it will burn them. The way around this is to water a day or two before you are planning on feeding your roses. Then fertilize by sprinkling or pouring the fertilizer in a circle around the base of the plant at a distance that represents the outside of the growth pattern. Then water again very thoroughly. All this water will help dilute the nitrogen so it won't hurt your plant.

Hybrid Teas

Artistry
 Century Two
 Chicago Peace
 Crystalline
 Dainty Bess
 Double Delight
 Elizabeth Taylor
 First Prize
 Fragrant Cloud
 Gemini
 Granada
 Kardial
 Louise Estes (hard to find)
 Mister Lincoln
 New Zealand
 Olympiad
 Peace
 Pristine
 St. Patrick
 Stephen's Big Purple (hard to find)
 Touch of Class
 Tropicana
 Veteran's Honor
 Yves Piaget (hard to find)

Grandifloras

Gold Medal
 Octoberfet
 Queen Elizabeth
 Tournament of Roses
 Floribundas
 Betty Prior
 Brass Band
 Brilliant Pink
 Else Poulsen
 Europeana
 French Lace
 Iceberg
 Lavaglut
 Margaret Merrill
 Nicole
 Playboy
 Sentimental
 Sexy Rexy
 Showbiz
 Singin' in the Rain
 Sunsprite
 Victorian Spice

Old Garden/Antique

Barone Prevost
 Hansa
 Harison's Yellow
 Mme. Pierre Oger
 Mme. Plantier
 Paul Neyron
 Reine Victoria
 Rose de Rescht
 Souvenir de la Malmaison
 Zephirine Drouhin (very good choice)

English

Abraham Darby
 Belle Story
 Brother Cadfael
 Evelyn
 Fair Bianca
 Golden Celebration
 Graham Thomas
 Happy Child
 Heritage
 Prospero
 Sharifa Asma
 The Squire

Good gardeners feed their roses in the spring and then once a month until the end of September. Their payment is roses that bloom at intervals all summer long.

On a side note, I've just come in from the garden where I took my own advice. I have the spear marks where the roses took offense at my good intentions. I wasn't brave enough to cut as far back as Moffett suggested, but I did cut away many canes blocking the interior. I started paying attention to the direction that the new growth was putting out shoots and cut accordingly. It was a challenging task. I'll keep you posted on the progress of my efforts.

Sidebar

West Texas Rose Favorites

Below is a list compiled by the Rose Society of roses that have a reputation for doing well in our climate. If you are looking for roses to plant, you might find this to be a good guide for your selection. From now to early May is the best time to plant. Water frequently after you plant. Don't fertilize until the first blooms begin to appear. Avoid roses that have "waxed" canes. And join the Rose Society or attend Arboretum programs to learn more about your new roses.

How Many Points Is “Stuff” Worth? – Issue 14

March 26, 2004

I played games as a kid – a lot. It was too hot in the middle of the day to go outside to play (deep South Texas can be pretty miserable at high noon in July). In desperation my mother taught us to play canasta and other card games such as two handed solitaire. We also played board games such as Monopoly and Clue, but we didn't play many games involving words. That's too bad. I am now seriously regretting my limited training in the logic of Scrabble.

“Why?” Because Lubbock actually has a Scrabble Club that meets each Saturday at Jason's Deli on Loop 289 and Quaker. The members gather once a week and play the game from 2 - 6 p.m. They have a trained director, Dr. Cheryl Tyler, who received her instruction in Santa Fe, New Mexico and passed the required test. As director, she provides lessons to club members and tracks their progress.

“Progress?” Yes, this is not kid's play. It is serious adults who love words and think challenging themselves with letters is a great way to spend four hours on Saturday. After spending an afternoon with them, I understand the passion. It was fun. It was engaging. I now understand player Wendy Thomson's comment to me, “This is really fun. I love doing this.”

These people put real energy into this pastime, but they are not alone. There is a National Scrabble Association (www.scrabble-assoc.com) that provides rules, materials, and tournament listings. As you can probably imagine, these people aren't satisfied challenging each other. They want to engage other players who have their same interest. There are tournaments held all over the country. As a matter of fact, Lubbock will be hosting a three day one Memorial Day weekend (May 27-29) at the Ashmore Inn. It's expected that 40-60 contestants will participate with people coming from Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Colorado, and Louisiana. Occasionally, some folks from as far away as New York or California show up.

Tournament contestants are ranked as a result of the number of games they win and the level of playing difficulty -- much like golf handicaps or chess masters. Rankings fall usually in the range of 500-2000 with those in the 1800 range

considered top players. Lubbock director Tyler is in the “expert” class with a ranking of nearly 1600. It's not just glory that these players seek. The winner at the national tournament, which is held on alternate years, went away with a \$25,000 prize. Not bad for someone who can use seven tiles to create words across and down.

The game on the local level is hardly intimidating, though. The members are open to newcomers and are willing to help beginners learn the intricacies of two letter words that use the letter “X.” If you didn't have an exposure as a child to the rules, they will happily explain the point count and provide you with helpful hints. While the group meets for four hours, a game only lasts about 25 minutes since a timer is used to keep the play moving along.

The bible for adult Scrabble players is a book only available to members of the National Association called The Official Tournament and Word List (better known as OWL). However, bookstores carry The Official SCRABBLE Players Dictionary that provides spelling as well as definitions. When club members are not playing, they spend time reading up on words and discovering tricks such as how many ways the letter “Q” can be used.

The Lubbock organization has a long history, beginning in 1980. Its size has varied over the years, but it currently is small and anxious for new members. Membership dues are only \$2 a month and the club provides all that you need to play. If you are interested, you can email the director at lubbockscrabble@aol.com or call her business office at 795-1800. Or better yet, just come by Jason's Deli some Saturday to watch a bit. You'll be hooked. Now how many points did you say I could get for the word “hooked”?

Fantasyland in the Desert – Issue 15

April 2, 2004

There are 846.2 million ways to lose money. Transmissions cease to function in automobiles. Hot water heaters flood kitchens or other rooms by spewing water from a small hole in the bottom. Bones break when their owners fall off quite small ladders requiring visits to emergency rooms. Jobs are lost when the economy swoons. Life always seemed to have enough elements of chance that I didn't need to go looking for other opportunities to introduce risk into mine. As a result, Las Vegas and other gambling spots have never been high on my list of recreational sites.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not philosophically or even morally opposed to gambling. It's just not my thing. It may have something to do with the fact that the few times I've put money into a slot machine, I have gotten nothing back. It always seemed more logical to drop money into one of those donation cans. I get the same amount back except I know that something good came of my action.

However, I was recently invited to spend time with friends in Las Vegas. The last time I was there, Circus Circus was the biggest thing on the strip. And it was still a strip. You could walk from one end to the other without too much difficulty. I decided that I'd go see what everyone has been talking about. All I've heard for years is that you can't imagine how much things have changed.

Yes, things have changed. The traffic is unbelievable. Taxi drivers are fully employed since one can no longer walk from one end of the row of casinos to the other unless you are training for a marathon and even then you'll get killed trying to cross the streets.

Huge magnificent buildings which defy imagination have sprung up in the desert. There are casinos that recreate the outdoors by building smaller structures within them and then painting the ceilings to mimic the sky. It's amazing to see fake blue skies turn to shades of evening and then night. One doesn't even care that there are no windows in this fantasyland.

What I found most fascinating, though, was the change in slot machines. The last time I fed these machines my money, my choice was

limited to three lines with a cherry as a wild card. It was pretty simple to lose money. One machine was much like another. There were the same cups in every casino, and the sound of nickels and quarters dropping into trays was the music one heard. At least others heard it. My machines were always quiet, as I've said.

Today, the first noticeable difference is that money is not the same. Now every casino wants you to register for a card to record the money you've spent (translate that to lost for me). Lanyards tether gamblers to the cards inserted into a slot in the machine. If one didn't know better, it would look like some kind of life support system. Now that's a thought. Perhaps in time rather than having minimally clad hostesses circulate asking for drink orders, "refreshment" could just be pumped into the slot fanatic using the tether cord. But not yet.

Money still can fall out of winning machines producing a gambler's symphony. But many casinos now print out slips of paper with your winnings recorded in print rather than in quarters. It's a strange thing to see silver money replaced with a voucher. I have to believe that the next step will bypass that process, and your winnings will be recorded on the card. But not yet.

The most interesting change, though, has been the variety introduced into slots. I have no idea how many options one can choose from. I do know that finding a simple three line machine with a cherry wild card is pretty hard to do. There are machines that let you play Wheel of Fortune. Others let you choose your winnings from behind a choice of doors. Some whiz and whirl in a random way surprising you with a win.

If you want to pretend that you have some control over your winning or losing, you can play poker. If you want to play craps without having to stand at a table with others, you can do that too. And if you want to play against others, there are even slot tournaments where a group of people compete on their machine for the highest score in a limited time.

No longer are quarters and nickels the only coin of choice. One can gamble a penny on a pull (or more likely a button punch) or even a \$1000. Machines aren't even the same size.

Some are so large that this gambling becomes more like a spectator event as the dollar is inserted and the monstrous handle is pulled. Groups gather about to watch the results just as one would with a sports event.

Surveying the options, it's clear that some of the nation's most creative minds have spent their time trying to device slot machines that appeal to a wide variety of people.

It's a fascinating world that I enjoyed visiting for a few days. I do wonder what changes the next fifteen years will bring considering what has occurred in the last fifteen. One thing, though that probably won't change. I still won't win, but that's okay. It is fun to watch others with more luck than I.

You Can Tell It's Spring – Issue 16

April 9, 2004

The Garden and Arts Center (where good things happen all year) has been my home away from home for the last week or so. The West Texas Photographic Society of Lubbock (TWPSL to those in the “know”) held its yearly photography show last week. I agreed to help register entrants, which was a great way to get to meet some of Lubbock’s talented photographers.

There were a total of 128 exhibits with 24 new folks hanging their work for the first time. It cost \$7 to enter with a limit of three entrees per person. Once all the entries had been submitted last Monday, students of museum science from Texas Tech hung the show (but that’s a whole ‘nother story).

It was fascinating to see the variety of people who brought works to display. There were students from Texas Tech who were majoring in art including photography. There were “ordinary” individuals who had taken truly wonderful shots and had them enlarged and framed who brought these to the show. There were very experienced photographers for whom this is an important way for them to measure their progress up against others with similar expertise. And then there was me who entered just to share the common experience.

Ann McDonald, the incredibly hard working president of the organization, brings in an outside juror (that’s judge for the rest of us) who selects the best from two categories: color and B&W. This year’s juror, Barbara McCandless, works for the Amon Carter Museum in Ft. Worth and brings a high level of knowledge and experience to the judging since she’s curator of photography. She’s used to looking at the best.

In explaining her own introduction to photography, Ms. McCandless told the anxious audience of photographers awaiting the results that she began to love the art of photography when she realized that it “woke up my eyes.” She then went on to give advice about how to get better. She encouraged the group to attend events such as the Photosynthesis Weekend in Austin or to join organizations such as the Texas Photographic Society (www.texasphoto.org). McCandless explained what she looked for in a good

photograph which included things such as sharpness and well printed images. She warned the group to pay attention to even the tiniest details such as dust spots on an image. She even discouraged the artists from using ornate frames and mats since she believes these detract from the image itself.

When McCandless was finished with the valuable mini-lesson, she then presented the awards. Having seen many of these photographs brought in by the artists and then having viewed the show as a whole, I had made my own decisions about which ones I liked. But that’s the difference between us. I know what I like. The juror knows what’s good. As a result, I learned much about what constitutes fine photography rather than merely pretty pictures.

The photographs remain on display at the Garden and Arts Center all month. Drop by to see what I mean. You’ll love the pictures. Some are breathtaking. Some are fascinating. Some are interesting. And yes, some are pretty. You’ll find it as valuable as I did to see the difference. And then next year, you can enter your own prized image.

Right next door to the Garden and Arts Center is the Lubbock Memorial Arboretum. It’s easy to spot because there is a small red brick house in front. We tend to bandy about words like “arboretum” acting as if we know what they mean. I have to admit that until I looked it up I couldn’t give you a very good definition. I knew what a grape arbor was because my elementary school had one. This word was similar, so I knew it had something to do with growing things. So just to put the issue to rest, I looked. It means “a facility where trees and shrubs are cultivated for exhibition, a botanical garden.”

Regardless of what it means, to be truthful, most of us don’t worry much about what is at Lubbock’s Arboretum. We are just glad we have one since it sounds like something a big city should support (and at a population that is now exceeding the critical mass of 200,000+, Lubbock is fast becoming a true city). In places such as Dallas, visitors flock to the arboretum and treat it as a tourist attraction. During the spring, it’s hard to find a parking place because no one wants to miss the

flowers in bloom. Booking a wedding there requires reservations months in advance.

Well, folks, it's time to find out what is at our arboretum, and Saturday, April 17 is the day. The Lubbock Memorial Arboretum will be providing free of charge a Gardening Symposium that will include the dedication of the Arboretum's Wheelchair Accessible Pathway. This is the first phase of the construction of a path that makes it easy for everyone to view the loveliest of nature's gifts.

The symposium has something for every type of gardening. If you are interested in growing drought tolerant plants (which this week isn't much an issue, but we know what summer will bring), Jim Brown will talk about water-wise gardening. If you want to attract butterflies and hummingbirds, Roberta Davis will tell you what plants are good for that. And if the exotic attracts you, come hear Tim Richards discuss orchids in West Texas.

The day will begin at 9 a.m. and last until about 3 p.m. with the dedication at 11. You can come for all or part of the experience and there will be drinks and snacks for sale. This is the perfect opportunity to discover one of Lubbock's attractions.

Schedule

9 a.m. Water Conservation in Lubbock Gardens presented by Gaylyn Chapman, City of Lubbock

10 a.m. Water-wise Gardening presented by Jim Brown, Master Gardener

11 a.m. Dedication of Arboretum's New Wheelchair Accessible Pathway by Arthur Elliott, Gary Boren, and Don Graf and Kay Sanford, representatives of the CH Foundation

Noon Great Plant Swap and Sale – bring your plants to trade, sell, or share

1 p.m. Orchids presented by the West Texas Orchid Society

2 p.m. Gardening Is for the Birds (And Butterflies) presented by Roberta Davis, The Garden Patch

Thinking Outside the Lines – Issue 17

April 16, 2004

I read lots of stuff. Much of my information comes from the Internet, but a significant portion come in print too. These include magazines (periodicals if you are using the “grown up” term), newspapers, books, and junk mail.

Because my day job requires that I keep current with the latest trends in technology, much of what I do read is geeky. At the moment many of the articles I encounter are discussing the chip that is embedded in products that allow businesses to track constantly the location of each item in their possession. The acronym for this is RFID for Radio Frequency Identification. Wal-Mart was the driving force behind all this when they told vendors that they must provide this tracking capability on all the products they provide to Sam and friends.

It sounds pretty scary to me. At the moment, I'm on information overload myself. I can't imagine what kind of memory storage it will require to keep this kind of inventory. But that's their worry fortunately. And I can tell you from what I'm reading that there are lots of folks worrying enough for all of us.

I do know that I could have used such a chip when my kids were living at home. And when “granddaughter the brave” comes to visit, I'd really love to have one that could warn me when she was approaching danger. I can see it now. A patch much like the ones that are being used pharmaceutically. Just attach the chip embedded square to the back of the child (where she can't reach it to remove it which I can assure you she would do). Then put a specially designed wristband on yourself. At any moment a glance will tell you where she is. An alarm will sound if she passes certain points such as exiting the back door. Touching the stove or turning on a burner would produce a tone loud enough to wake me.

It could even be set to notify me if she starts to move away from her bed after she has been put to sleep. No more surprises when one discovers that the child thought safely asleep is actually roaming about in the middle of the night (we have challenging children in my family).

If you think that such a patch couldn't withstand the wear and tear a toddler would provide, consider the description of one of the expected characteristics of the RFID chip. According to the website of the Association for the Automatic Identification and Mobility (<http://www.aimglobal.org>) the chip is designed with robust construction to allow for use in reasonably harsh conditions. That should take care of sandboxes and bathtubs.

As long as I'm inventing things, how about going the next step. As an added bonus, the chip embedded patch could be set to register her sounds much like the baby monitors in use today. We didn't have these when my kids were young for which I feel cheated. They are a wonderful invention worthy of a Nobel Prize.

There are possibilities here that the manufacturers of RFID chips haven't even considered. What else do you want to keep track of? Maybe lost keys or the cordless phone that is no longer charged so you cannot even get it to “beep.” Let's not leave out remote controls, of course. And I'd love to be able to track my eyeglasses since I'm too blind to find them if I don't have them on.

Perhaps the day will even come when all socks will have such devices. Then we will really know if the washing machine ate the missing one.

Once you start thinking about tracking things, the mind can get crazy. If every item in your home came already equipped with an RFID chip (or at least the things you bought at Wal-Mart), it should be a simple matter to track everything in your home from how many cans of split pea soup you have left on your shelf to the copy of Playboy hidden under your son's bed (Do sons still hide them under their beds now that porn is available on the web?).

You could even track how many piles of laundry had accumulated in the dirty clothes hamper or more likely under the bed since magazines don't have to be stored there any longer.

You could track a roaming pet. No more lost dog or cat signs on poles. The city council would even have a way to require owners to keep their cats on their property or at least to know when they jumped the fence.

The list goes on and on. I'll keep you posted about this topic. I've been very curious about the next big shift in technology. RFID may actually be it. Big brother may be just around the corner because when we start tracking objects, people can't be far behind.

The Perfect Gift – Issue 18

April 23, 2004

My family and I have had many discussions about what makes the perfect gift. The conversations usually happen around Christmas, but the rules are true for every occasion. The guys in our house want to tell you what they want and then to receive it. They don't want to be surprised – probably because they know that they wouldn't get anything they wanted. It's the basis of all those ugly tie jokes we hear about.

The gals in the family all agree that we operate under different rules. We don't want to supply a gift giver with a list. If we have to tell you what we want, then you must not be paying much attention to who we are. We do want to be surprised. For us the totally perfect gift is something that we love that we didn't even know we wanted in the first place. That does put some pressure on, I have to admit.

With Mother's Day coming up, families are suddenly faced once again with the gift quandary. Do we give Mother some pretty knickknack that has to be dusted? Do we give her a gift certificate? Do we buy her clothes that we aren't sure is even in a style that she likes. Let's face it, Mother's Day is more of a problem than even Christmas.

Last year I stumbled upon solution which was so successful that I'm probably going to repeat it. After all, success is a terribly thing to waste. What I'm going to do is to give miniature roses again. However, I'm not going to give my mother those that I find in the grocery store. They look really pretty the day I buy them. They even look pretty on Mother's Day, but they are heartbreakers. They don't survive. I'm not sure why, but it's true. Instead, I'm going to buy those sold by the Rose Society at their annual miniature rose sale.

These roses are ordered from a specialized grower, repotted upon arrival in Lubbock, and allowed to grow for a month to become acclimated to Lubbock. They are at least as beautiful as the ones I can get in the grocery store, but they are so much better. They are perfect works of nature – roses just like the huge ones I have in my garden only smaller.

The five I gave as gifts last year are all still thriving. Their proud owners have each called

me this spring to tell me that their roses have started to put out new growth and are thinking about blooming. For each of these "mothers" this was a surprise gift that they didn't know they wanted until they had them. It's been something that has given pleasure and delight for nearly a year now and should continue for many more years.

The Rose Society's annual miniature rose sale this year is on Saturday, May 8 which is just in time for Mother's Day the following Sunday. There will be a short program at 10 a.m. to explain the care and feeding of "minis" followed by the sale. These roses come in all kinds of varieties and colors – something to appeal to everyone. These delightful versions of full size plants can be planted outdoors just like larger roses or they can be used as container roses. The ones I gave have been used successfully in both ways.

The price is even a bargain. Roses will be \$8 each or two for \$15. The sale will be at the Lubbock Memorial Arboretum (4111 University – the red brick house on the east side of the street). I'm going to be there buying as many as I can. I'm not about to pass up the perfect gift – even if it's for myself.

Soaring Sights – Issue 19

April 30, 2004

I had a parakeet as a child. I bought it one weekend when I was allowed to go on an outing to spend my allowance.

My folks weren't too thrilled when I came home with this lovely creature that only cost a week's worth of allowance. My mother wasn't happy about it because she was one of those people who must have had a bad experience as a child. Consequently, she was terrified of having birds fly over her head. Who knows? Perhaps it was a too early exposure to Alfred Hitchcock. My father wasn't pleased because having used up my allowance I had no money left to buy a cage for the exotic bird. Faced with having a bird loose in the house at all times (which my mother wouldn't permit) and buying a cage, you can guess the outcome.

I never succeeded in teaching "Azul" (blue in Spanish – a language I was studying in school) to speak. I never even particularly tamed him/her because my mother wouldn't let me release the bird in the house, so it could perch on my hand. But I spent hours watching that blue and green parakeet and listening to its chirps.

This weekend I had another chance to observe birds for an extended period of time. But this time, the birds weren't cooped up in a cage. They were flying free and living as nature intended. I've always liked observing birds in my yard, but I've never watched them. I learned the difference on Sunday because I was invited to join a veteran bird watcher, Bill Phelan, in his wanders from city parks to the canyon lakes.

It was eye opening. First, I discovered that "exotic" in bird watching terms doesn't mean the same thing that I meant in an earlier paragraph. Instead, it means a bird that is not native to this region – one that was introduced by man for whatever reason. That means that doves are native, but sparrows and pigeons are exotics. Who would have thought?

I learned to watch for small birds that shot past us to land in trees and become invisible in the foliage. I learned to listen for bird song as a means of searching for the sight of them. I learned to watch for features such as a broken eye ring that helps determine the name of the

bird. I learned to look for flashes of color and to photograph it in my mind's eye in order to be able to compare my mental image with the one on the page of a bird book.

Along the canyon lakes, I watched gorgeous herons (Black Crown Herons) glide along the water. I even saw a water fowl with a blue beak. At first I thought my eyes were playing tricks, but they weren't. I learned it was called a Ruddy Duck. As we were leaving, we saw a Mississippi Kite sitting on wire as if guarding the area against intrusion.

It was an extraordinary experience that changed me.

We are truly fortunate in Lubbock to have bird visitors from places too far away to imagine. We joke that no one comes to visit us because Lubbock is not on the way to anywhere else. Don't tell the birds. They seem to think our playas and vegetation are a fine resting place on the way north or south or east or west. It's possible to see birds that shouldn't even be here because this is not their "zone." Perhaps they got lost along the way. No matter. They make for an interesting note in the bird watchers list of sightings.

I didn't realize how much I was influenced by Sunday's tromping through vegetation until I wandered into my backyard the following morning. Suddenly, I was listening and looking in ways I never had before. I went running back into the house for my binoculars because there was an interesting bird sitting on the phone line. I studied carefully trying to memorize the tail features, the head, the beak, and mostly the coloring. As the bird took flight, I tried to decide how wide the wing span was and where the coloring spread along the feathers. I'm hooked, you can tell.

I doubt seriously that I'll turn into a bona fide Audubon Society member, but that's okay. I've learned to see the world around me in ways I hadn't before. It was a gift that I won't forget. Next time you see a bird fly overhead, take a moment, and look. Really look. You may be as surprised as I was at the extravagant beauty and diversity. Bird watchers know something the rest of us don't.

Frustration, Despair, and Anger – Issue 20

May 7, 2004

I'm trying not to despair, but it's hard.

After a 30 year lapse, during which I raised children and earned a living, I have returned to a long lost love – genealogy. It was with great delight that I discovered that our public library had moved ahead while I was not paying attention. While the genealogy section of the library still has great books and other resources, a new opportunity has opened up using the Internet.

As part of the services provided to me as a library card holder, I now have access at home to an invaluable genealogy tool called HeritageQuest (part of the TexShare Databases). With it, I can search censuses as far back as 1790. Not only can I search, but I can see the actual images of the census allowing me to determine for myself if the name the indexer had said was “Janes” was actually Jones. I can also see quickly who was living near my ancestor which can be more helpful than you might imagine. Perhaps the best part is that I can save these images and include them in my files for each family.

In addition, there are countless genealogy texts available using this service that are also indexed and viewable. These books can be downloaded as PDF files and printed or read at my convenience.

So why am I in despair? Because, as a result of the deep funding cuts in the Texas library system, this service is about to be cancelled. What is particularly frustrating is that there has been a fund raising drive to guarantee funds to keep the subscription going. However, until I read about it in the Dallas Morning News last Friday, I didn't know about it. And the deadline has now passed. Grrrrrrrr.

If only I'd known. If only lots of us had know. Maybe I'm not the only one in Lubbock who thinks this library service is too valuable to lose. I spoke with Jane Clausen at the Lubbock Public Library to find out what hope there is. She told me that her last information was that 80% of the needed funds had been pledged. She didn't know if that would be enough to convince the powers that be to add the rest of the funding. Let's hope so.

Meanwhile, if you have ever used this subscription or think you'd like to now that you know about it, let the folks at the library hear from you. If all else fails, it may be possible for our library to purchase a subscription for their patrons.

Some things are too good to be lost.

A Better Lubbock – Issue 21

May 14, 2004

Change is hard – until you do it. At least that has been my experience. My guess is that it is a fear response. We are afraid of the unknown, and change (even if it's something we actually want) is always an unknown.

I retired from teaching a couple of years ago and constantly get questions from those left in the trenches. They ask their questions sort of quietly, as if afraid to hear the answer, "What's it like? What do you do all day?" Those of us who have "crossed over" just laugh because we know that what we do is try to find 36 hours in a day to get everything done that we want to do. I did the same thing myself. I remember asking one friend who had gone before me, "Do you like it?" The response was "What's not to like?"

It didn't help. I still went into this new world with great trepidation.

But it's not like we control all the changes in our lives. Some come to us unbidden – like death and illness. Others come more slowly and are only noticed when the change is nearly complete. I remember when Lubbock traffic wasn't something we even talked about. I remember when no one wanted to live outside the loop because it was just too far away. I even remember when we didn't have a Krispy Kreme (oh – that's right – that was only last year).

A change that has crept into our lives unnoticed has been the increase in the weight of our population as a whole. It used to be that most people were what today we'd call thin. Kids were so rarely overweight that it was an anomaly. Parents worried more often about their kids eating enough rather than too much. The Dr. Spocks of the world wrote magazine articles about how to get children to eat their vegetables and assuring worried mothers that it was okay that little Johnny only ate apples. It seems strange to think back to that time.

I don't know when all this changed. But it has. Today we read statistics that are pretty terrifying. According to the Texas Department of Health, 40% of our 4th graders are overweight or obese. By the way, these two words aren't synonyms. They are actually two different points along a spectrum. Experts

don't seem to agree at what point a child is considered overweight versus obese which is perhaps why we so often see the terms lumped together. The bottom line, though, is that these elementary age kids weigh more than is healthy.

Folks are spending a lot of time trying to identify causes. Common sense tells us that kids aren't as active as they once were. In the summer, they don't play all day outside without supervision which was my childhood experience. They don't ride their bikes or walk to schools which I did as a child. If you drive down a city street after dark, there aren't small roving bands of kids hiding in bushes trying to scare each other as we did. Instead, these kids are at home – inside. They are watching television, playing video games, surfing the net.

Come dinner time, meals are different also. Desserts were rare treats. Soft drinks were only for special occasions. Chips and snacks were only for picnics. Food was pretty boring. Lunch was a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and an apple. Dinner was a casserole and a salad and another vegetable. Chicken and roast beef were Sunday events. In the summer, watermelon was our treat. We didn't go hungry, and we surely weren't deprived. But we didn't eat out much, and Happy Meals were those times when you got to choose what to have for dinner because it was your birthday. For a real treat, you could get a candy bar to die for that cost a quarter at the local 7-11, which I remember doing on a regular basis.

Yep. Things have changed slowly and now we can see the difference. And it's not a good change. It's clear that we need to figure out how to back up or to reverse this reality.

The Community Program for Rural and Community Health Lubbock (funded by Texas Tech) is trying to help. They are deeply involved in the Healthy Lubbock Initiative which is sponsoring a kick off on Saturday, June 5 at Maxie Park from 10 to 2. It is designed to encourage families to be outside and to get more physical activity. There will be games such as sack races and free paddle boats. There will be nutrition and healthy

eating advice such as portion information. It's going to be a day of fun.

No one wants to change unless it's for the better and even then it's scary. If you are interested, Liz Inskip-Paulk (program coordinator) would love to have help in making this happen. She needs community members to join in effecting a change to make Lubbock a healthy place for our children and families. Contact her at 743-1338. She will show you how.

Meditation Gardens – Issue 22

May 21, 2004

I'm a member of the Lubbock Rose Society, which is not a tea sipping elegant organization but is instead a jeans and grubby hands from digging in the dirt kind of group. We meet monthly, and once a year we go on a rose tour to see what others are doing in their gardens. It's lots of fun and gives us a chance to learn from others.

This year one of the places we visited was unexpected. It wasn't a garden created for someone's home or even a business. Instead, it was a meditation garden (actually two of them) at Christ the King Church. These gardens were constructed to fill in two areas left unused as the result of a church renovation.

I'm not a member of this congregation, but I have been to the church several times. One year I was part of a group performing the Messiah (I was the one humming quietly) which meant that we went several times to rehearse as well as to give our performance. I've also been there for a wedding or two and a funeral. As a result, I was totally taken by surprise to discover these two beautiful alcoves that I had missed.

Morgan O'Brien, an Irish immigrant who arrived in Lubbock at the encouragement of Methodist Hospital who needed nurses, took on the task of converting a debris ridden vacant spot into something truly beautiful. He describes the area he first saw as "barren bits of ground ... polluted with mortar rubble, trash, and crabgrass." But the sight of such an unappealing location for a garden didn't keep him from developing a vision for an English country garden in Lubbock.

It took him six long months and many hours to bring his vision to fruition. He had to haul out old dirt and bring in new soil and sand. Much back breaking time was spent sculpting the area to allow for drainage. Railway ties and bricks were used to create a path. A drip irrigation system was put in place. The air conditioning unit housed in the area had to be obscured by a fence and another spot created to store the tools needed for the garden. Most importantly, six huge cedar trellises were built to provide the roses with a means of support. Morgan still has plans to add benches and

perhaps a statue or two as well as a few more roses.

The result is astonishing. There are now 50 rose bushes of several varieties that cover the high brick walls that were once only part of a building and are now the backdrop for this loveliness. Flowers and other ornamental plants add to the effect. Birds swoop in and out and have found a congenial place to build their nests. The area feels holy – as it was intended

It is open to the public as well as the parishioners of the church. Drop by to witness this garden that is more European than Lubbock. You won't regret the experience any more than the Rose Society did.

Thirsty Plants – Issue 23

May 28, 2004

I've been thinking a lot about water lately. It's that time of year when we get thirstier than usual. It's hot already, and a cool drink of something wet is pretty wonderful. I imagine our plants, grasses, and trees must feel the same way. With the new water ordinance in place, though, we can't water whenever something needs it. We have to wait till later in the day if we forget to do it early in the morning.

I can't argue with the logic even if it is inconvenient. There are few things as precious as water. Conserving it just makes sense.

However, just reducing the number of hours we can water isn't going to solve the problem. One of the things we will need to start thinking about is what kinds of plants we are watering. Some are thirstier than others. Just as in times of high gas prices we start thinking about automobiles that get better gas mileage, so do we need to start thinking about our choice of vegetation. Imagine that you could get a huge SUV with all the amenities that also gets 35 miles to the gallon. Compare that to the more traditional one that gets maybe 12-14. And if the prices were the same which would you buy? Seems pretty obvious, doesn't it.

Well, in gardening you can actually make that kind of choice. There are beautiful plants that use a fraction of the water that some of the more traditional ones require. You don't give up anything except your "we've always grown that" way of thinking.

One place to find out about such plants is a Web site that is currently under construction but should be available in early summer. It will be a "branch" of one created for the Dallas-Ft.Worth area. The name is Texas SmartScape (www.txsmartscape.com). The site lists plants that are particularly good for North Central Texas. Our needs are slightly different, but soon you will be able to go to the site and look for plants for specific needs and to see pictures of them also. It should be a valuable service.

Even Leadership Lubbock has even taken on this concern. They sponsored an event last weekend at the Science Spectrum to demonstrate some plants you might consider.

They also handed out brochures with lists and suggestions.

It's clearly becoming the "thing to do."

Meanwhile, Sandra Offutt Sandra Offutt, the City of Lubbock Public Works

Education Coordinator, has a list that will give you a place to start (see sidebar). Take it with you to your local nursery and ask for them when you are making planting decisions. After all, why not get 35 mpg if you can.

Recommended Vegetation for West Texas

Agarita	S	Dwarf Burford Holly	E
Althea	S	Dwarf Chinese Holly	E
Arizona Cypress	S	Dwarf Palmetto	E
Artemisia	S	Dwarf Yaupon Holly	E
Autumn Sage	S	Eleagnus	S
Baby Sun/Suray Coreopsis	S	Flowering Quince	S
Bald Cypress	S	Forsythia	E
Barberry Berberis	S	Fountain Grass	S
Bearded Iris	E	Fraser Photinia	E
Big Bluestem	S	Garden Canna	E
Black-Eyed Susan	S	Gayfeather	S
Blue Fescue	S	Glossy Abelia	E
Bouncing Bet	E	Goldsturm Rudbeckia	S
Bradford Pear	S	Grayleaf Cotoneaster	E
Bridal Wreath Spirea	E	Green Pittosporum	E
Buffalo Grass	S	Ice Plant	S
Burford Holly	E	Indian Blanket	S
Butterfly Bush	S	Indian Hawthorne	E
Canna	E	Italian Jasmine	S
Central Texas Sage	S	Japanese Boxwood	E
Cherry Laurel	E	Juniper	S
China Rose	S	Lacebark Elm	S
Chinese Holly	E	Lambs Ears	E
Chinese Horned Holly	E	Lantana	S
Chinese Photinia	E	Louisiana Iris	E
Chinese Pistache	S	Louisiana Phlox	E
Chinquapin Oak	S	Mealy Cup Sage	S
Columbine	Sh	Mexican Bush Sage	S
Common Bermuda	S	Mexican Oregano	S
Coreopsis	E	Muhly Grass	S
Cotoneaster	S	Nandina Compact	E
Crape Myrtle	S	Nandina	E
Crimson Pigmy Barberry	E	Nandina: Harbour Dwarf	E
Daylily	S	Oleander	S
Desert Willow	S	Pampas Grass	S

Passionflower	S	Zagreb Coreopsis	S
Perennial Verbena	S	Zebra Grass	S
Pink Rain Lily	E	S = Sun	
Pomegranate	S	E = Either	
Purple Autumn Grass	S	Sh = Full to partial shade	
Purple Coneflower	S		
Purple Heart	E		
Purple Wintercreeper	E		
Red Hot Poker	E		
Red Yucca	E		
Rock Rose	E		
Rose Of Sharon (Althea)	E		
Rosemary	E		
Russian Olive	E		
Santolina	S		
Sedum, Brilliant	S		
Sideoats Grama	E		
Society Garlic	E		
Spanish Broom	S		
Sweet Violet	Sh		
Switchgrass	E		
Tea Rose	S		
Texas Mountain Laurel	E		
Texas Palmetto	S		
Texas Persimmon	S		
Texas Redbud	E		
Texas Sage	S		
Turks Cap	E		
Variegated Pittosporum	E		
Verbena	S		
Vinca Major/Minor	E		
Vitex	E		
Western Soapberry	S		
White Rain Lily	E		
Windmill Palm	S		
Winter Honeysuckle	E		
Yaupon Holly	E		