Pick-A-Little Talk-A-Little

By Jenny Diveley - Prairie Star

A nosy neighbor may be just what is needed to bridge the gaps between us

The move to Tulsa five years ago for our family brought big changes. We were accustomed to driving "across town" in just a few minutes. Heavy traffic usually stemmed from a funeral procession. And the four acres that surrounded our home in Kansas put a nice buffer between us and next door.

Now traffic has to be gauged at all hours of the day, every day of the year. A trip across town requires much more planning and scheduling to accomplish. And our windows are within earshot of the neighbors, with not much barrier aside from plantation blinds.

It's that last one that, surprisingly, has appealed to me. I'm a nosy neighbor.

It helps that I'm a good neighbor, too. The minute we moved in, we rang doorbells, introduced ourselves, exchanged phone numbers, and have even delivered a few gifts for different events that have unfolded since then.

But that nosy neighbor that everyone sees portrayed on television shows as annoying, kind of fits me. Hopefully not the annoying part, but just that person who keeps an eye on everyone. I like to know who is traveling, the timing of arrival and departure, the names of their pets, and maybe even if they need an invite to church.



These things never crossed my mind with the rolling prairie that unfolded out our back door in Kansas. We had neighbors, but without a good pair of binoculars, there was never a need to do much looking in their direction.

Oh, really I do miss some of that cushion between houses. Maybe I would be able to dose down my anxiety medication with less to see out the window. But it's just enough now to keep my mind busy and encourage new friendships that otherwise would have never happened.

"City life" versus the small town world that we knew for so long is definitely on opposite ends of the spectrum. Sure, the traffic causes us to say things we never even imagined in a one stoplight town. And the sound of silence is rarely heard in a busy location.

But being a nosy…or good…neighbor doesn't change, no matter where the home is. And with some good plantation blinds and a set of binoculars, this gal can bridge the gap from acres to arms length, between new friends.

Year-end thoughts that make us smile



Rudy Taylor 'Off the Cuff'

Time to turn the volume number at the top of our front page. We do it every January, and it shouts the message, "start all over."

Sounds easy, but it's a tall order. Aren't you glad our Heavenly Father lets us start over every time we approach his throne? Who doesn't love an opportunity to turn a page in life?

* * *

My job, when our entire family arrives for Christmas dinner and a day of laughing, dining and gift-sharing is meeting everybody at the front door and taking their coats. I carefully lay them on a bed for later retrieval.

This time, there were no coats at all. In fact, my job turned to keeping the house cool.

So the air-conditioner was flipped on most of the day.

It was nice that nobody had to drive on icy highways, but I had to admit that everybody wearing coats and sweaters was missed this time. And, the darkened fireplace looked sad.

But in Kansas, we take it all.

We didn't have two feet of snow as they did back east, and we didn't have one street that was flooded, California style. We also don't fear seeing a haboob on our western horizon.

This is still a pretty good place to call home … especially at Christmastime.

* * *

When my wife shops for Christmas groceries, I notice she always picks up a can of black eyed peas. Then on New Yeas Day, they are served as a side dish to whatever we eat.

Did you know that Americans were eating black eyed peas even before pinto and navy beans hit the scene?

Originally called cowpeas, these legumes are actually beans, but nobody cares about that. And, they're not the favorite food for anyone — they just land on kitchen tables at least once a year.

We're supposed to eat them for good luck and wealth. Let me know how that works out for you.

* * *

A special gift for my 80th birthday was a vintage radio — with knobs.

That last part is a joke in our house. I gripe constantly that today's cars, TVs, computers and radios all have too much technology, and not enough knobs and levers.

So, Kathy found a 1940s looking radio — obviously online. It totally resolved my grousing, because it's got two knobs, and an AM/FM dials.

It works too.

We needed a real radio at our house.

Now, if we can just transfer that concept to our car which is a maze of screens, computer gadgets and sounds that we don't need at our age.

Yes, we'll grump a bit more.

* * *

We lost a former staffer this week --- Janice Cron, 74.

She was working in our Caney office when we bought the newspaper in 1970, coming in after school to learn the soon-to-be-outmoded trade of typesetting.

Janice was a sweet person, always smiling and never complaining. Working for a weekly newspaper won't make a person rich or famous, but it does merit a mention in an old publisher's column when life takes that Heavenly move.

God bless Janice Cron.

* * *

I like the sounds of words — and dates.

And, Two-Thousand Twenty-Six has a good ring to it!

Bill Sproul keeps telling stories to boost better ranches



Longtime rancher Bill Sproul of rural Sedan

Bill Sproul of Chautauqua County continues to find prominence in regional publicity about ranching and conservation.

An article in this week's Kansas Reflector gives a tour of the Sproul Ranch located northwest of Sedan, and quotes the well-known rancher with some of his iconic stories.

This is a series of articles exploring the relationship betweeen cattleranch and grassland conservation in Kansas.

* * *

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY — About 15 years ago, Flint Hills rancher Bill Sproul was given an oak sapling, sprouted from an acorn dropped beneath the tree where conservationist Aldo Leopold sat and wrote his seminal 1949 collection of essays, "A Sand County Almanac."

Sproul brought the sapling home to his ranch near Sedan and planted it, looking forward to the shade his Leopold oak would one day provide.

It grew slowly. After two years, the sapling had four leaves. By the fourth year, it had six. But in the fifth year, one day the oak was gone. Next to its tiny stump sat a pile of rabbit pellets. And Sproul thinks Leopold would be thrilled by that.

"Because that rabbit belongs there too," he said. "That tree belongs there, the rabbit belongs there, they all belong there. Somebody eat somebody, somebody eat them. So, I don't have my Leopold oak no more. I got a Leopold rabbit. And maybe the coyote ate the rabbit. And now maybe I got a Leopold coyote. And that's how I view everything out there."

Cattle ranchers like Sproul have translated this conservationist philosophy into land management by adopting practices collectively known as "regenerative grazing." This approach aims to preserve native grasslands and keep healthy ecosystems intact.

Sproul was the first recipient of the Sand County Foundation's Kansas Leopold Conservation Award, in 2015, for the work he has done on his 2,200-acre ranch in the southern Flint Hills. There, he has removed thousands of woody invasive trees and incorporated holistic practices such as patch-burn grazing, which selectively burns pasture each year and rotates cattle at rates that allow native plants to flourish. The annual award is given to farmers and ranchers who, like Sproul, embrace their roles as environmental stewards.

Courtesy of the Kansas Reflector

Sproul knew he was doing something right when, after eight years of this type of management, rattlesnake master reappeared in his pastures. Rattlesnake master is a native flowering plant that can indicate healthy, high-quality prairie, but cattle will overgraze it if they're allowed.

Some native species like rattlesnake master and compass plant, he said, are a "snickers bar" to cows.

But practices like overgrazing, Sproul said, are ingrained in a system that pushes for a maximum dollar return on every inch of land. Letting a pasture rest, or reducing the number of cattle during drought years, often means less profit.

"We push stuff too hard. We overgraze," Sproul said. "If you can grow 200 bushels of corn, let's shoot for 300. More fertilizer, more chemicals, better genetics, more and more and more. And if we don't use it all up, it goes into the water system, and we have pollution, and we have all these problems with nitrates in the water and all kinds of stuff. But we're going after 300 bushels of corn, because that's what we're taught. If there's any grass left standing out there, get it."

Life's Little Lifesavers



By Kathy Taylor

. . . making only a couple of New Year's resolutions that are attainable and good for the soul . . . packing away all the Christmas decorations for another year . . . spending a quiet, loving day with your kids during Christmas break . . . being more attentive and sincere to others . . . a tasty meal of bbq ribs, creamy coleslaw and baked beans . . . smiling eyes . . . moving your living room furniture around for a new and different look . . . visiting with people in the grocery story check-out line . . . the anxiousness of a college second semester starting with all new classes . . . promising yourself and adhering to reading through the Bible in a year — knowing every day is a step forward with Jesus.

Happy New Year, dear readers!

Opinion

Prayerful thoughts for 2026 could remake America's heart

We have high hopes for 2026, realizing we live in a rural bubble where morality, friendship and honesty are standards that we still honor.

America's heart needs to be remade.

Let a lofty prayer rest lightly on your soul, dear readers.

Let all put-downs be put to rest.

Allow positive words to frame our lives, actions and thoughts.

Make us into givers, not just takers.

Scatter us into places where help is needed, and outstretched hands are grasped.

Take us into churches that are different from our own; stores that appreciate our patronage; conversations that need a lift.

Allow us to look deeply into eyes we meet. Help us to feel the pain when others are hurting.

Guide us down roads we've never traveled, through doors we've not yet opened.

Slow us down, dear Lord.

Simplify our ways.

Catch our dreams, and hold them until they make Godly sense.

Pull us together in 2026, not for political gain nor ladders of power.

Keep us silent until our voices need heard. Then quiet the crowd so your amazing voice can be heard through your children.

Touch our eyes for good sleep, our ears to hear the birds and wind chimes, tongues to taste the goodness of each new day.

Show us beauty, even when skies turn grey.

Give us strength to swim upstream, but give us rest to float with the wind on calm days.

Restore unto us the vision, hope and gentleness that made our parents and grandparents into our heroes.

And, thank the Jewish prophet Isaiah for reminding us so tenderly: *The Lord God is our strength, our song, our salvation.*

Nothing else matters.

Twelve months can reform our nation, if we will but humble ourselves in the sight of our wonderful Lord.

Amen.

— Rudy Taylor, publisher

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