

## Get well soon...

Hi. Yjos osm't Gommu = tjos os <uLee[er/ — oops, what I am tryng to say is: This isn't Ginny. It's MyKeeper. I mean HerKeeper. She's sick this week. She sat here in front of the computer screen looking kind of green. Yuk!Yuk! that's a joke. Green.

I thot it over: shes' not riting, she's not fixing my dinner. I want my dinner more. So I told her, go to bed for awhile. I'll do your colum for you this week. She said I was awful sweet. Awful is about rite, she doesn't know I'm doing it to get my dinner.

My fingers got mixxed up on that first line. you know how if you get your fngers moved over one key the whole centense, er - sentence comes out rong. Rong? No, I think its' wrong.

Scuse me a minit - I gotta go find out where the apostrophy goes in the word "its".

I'm back. She said it depends. She'd haf to know how I used it. But since she doesn't care, she said

put it anywhere. Maybe I'll put it here - it's, or its', or its, take yore pick.

I'll be right bak. I don't know if I need all those commas.

She sed this: A very smart lady by the name of Elizabeth Clarkson Zwart said (right here Im sposed to use quotation marks - she said be sure you do!) enyway, the lady was a writer and she said" ,The older I grow the less important the comma becomes. Let the reader catch his own breath". I guess that's how she feels right now, cuz she's sounding kinda wheezy.

I wonder if its sposed to be a comma or a semicolon in that sentence. And how do I make the whole page double spaced?

To tell the truth, I'm not much of a wordy person. Less is better, or it just gets all complicated. So, I think I'm done. Just a minit. I want her to read it to make sure its allrite. She said coud I please - I mean COULD I please turn off the light, uts hurting - er,,, its hurting her eyes.

Shge's laughing! I think she like's it, maybe shes'feelig better!!! I hope sew. I sure don't want to have to do this again next week.

Till next time, its HerKeeper sigh-ning off and wishing you well.

## Red Bird

by your color  
or by your call  
I find you  
bright  
glorious  
red  
or  
hearing your  
staccato rant  
search branches  
finally  
spied  
see  
you  
where you sit  
crested and claret  
claiming your  
place  
little  
Red  
Bird

## *Photo shoot...*

MyKeeper and I grouped around the kitchen table to look at the snapshots just developed. The photos were taken during our family Christmas holiday in Kentucky, and most of them were of five-year-old Riley. We couldn't wait to see the color prints of that cute little bundle of energy, my grandson and my youngest daughter's boy.

We planned to pick out a couple of the best and send them off to friends and family that don't get to see Riley very often.

We especially wanted to see the series of pictures I took of Riley playing in the snow. I'd hoped to frame that rosy face smiling out of his bright snowsuit, radiant in the contrast of blue sky and a sunlit snowfield.

Riley was so eager to get out in the snow. Bundling up was a long process because he kept running to the window to see if the snow was still there, and to find out who was out in it already. He

wore an excited smile and happy eyes, and was much too impatient to take seriously the reminder that the thumb goes in the thumbhole of a mitten. He wanted to touch snow, catch it on his tongue, blink it out of his eyes. It was exactly that rapturous face I hope to capture with my lens once outdoors.

Outside at last, I snapped a picture of Riley brushing snow off Mama's car. Then I got a shot of Riley hunkered down, rolling a snowball. Next he was off sliding on slick ice. That quickly gave way to stomping on it. Then I was jumping back from the muddy splash that made him laugh and laugh. My shutter missed that laugh.

Back to the snowball. It was on its way to becoming a snowman, but Riley hurled it like a bowling ball into the ravine, instead. I wiped off the lens and missed capturing the devilish giggle on film.

I got a picture of Riley making snow angels and running in the snow and sitting in the snow, kicking his feet in the air.

All the time, he was laughing and laughing.

When I opened the envelope and spread the pictures out for MyKeeper, here's what is actually preserved for all posterity:

Riley's hand as he raced off around the other side of the car.

The toe of Riley's boot as it left the smashed ice.

Three shots of Riley jumping up from making a snow angel - one where he's pointing back at it.

I did remember calling after him, "Wait, Riley, wait," - and "Could you do that for me again?"

Riley moved faster than the camera's eye could blink, and much faster than me. All I caught was him rushing off to the next ecstatic moment. Next time, I'll have to start training ahead of time. I'll need to get myself up to speed if I'm going to catch anything other than the backside of a kindergartener chasing an adventure.

## *Dog days of winter...*

It is so hot today, I need a cold story. Something to make me think of shivers and icicles. I sit myself in a chair, sweat trickling off my forehead and into my eyes (I hate that). I breathe deep and exhale slowly. Twice. Snow is what I want to see behind my closed eyes. I try to picture the drifted snow I trudged through with buckets of hot water for my goats.

Too much work. Works up a sweat. Next I thought and gritted my teeth and thought some more until I pictured myself looking up into a thick grayish blanket of snow falling straight down. I felt snowflakes on my nose and eyelashes. No. It's just sweat.

The blistering heat of this time of year creates in me a desperate need to feel cold. Probably my traitorous Northwest blood waiting eagerly for the first hint of fall.

I try again. Moving my chair over a vent, I breathe in the refrigerated air. Ahh, I feel a thought nudging its way through. It's a cool thought. I see Duchess, my hotdog doggie. She's sitting beside MyKeeper, warmed on a cold winter evening by his body heat and their closeness to the fireplace. Arghh! Too hot!

Two more slow, deep breaths. It's Duchess again. This wiener dog was so aptly named. Until Duchess, I didn't know dogs were supposed to get up on the furniture. She taught methey most assuredly do. Dachshund Duchess was a patient and persistent trainer.

This night is a cold, cold night. One that no one would want to be anywhere but tucked under mounds of blankets. I woke up chilled to the bone. Something was not right. I figured it out. There was no Duchess plumped in a blanket and lodged in the crook of my leg so I couldn't move.

I sat up, shivered mightily, and reached around in the dark to find her. I called to her in loud whispers, but no Duchess.

Alarm woke me thoroughly. I got up. Brrr. Cold tootsies. Where are those fuzzy slippers? (Oh, this is feeling so good back here in the real world on this hot day). I put on my thick terrycloth robe, still shivering. (I love this part. I'm still sitting in this



chair, hanging over a cold air vent, still sweating, but enjoying it more.)

Fumbling my way to the living room, I turn on a light. I can see my breath in frosty clouds. Duchess is not on the big chair, not on the couch, and she's not huddled up to the warm bricks around the heater stove.

It strikes me with a sudden pang. We must have left the poor little thing outside when we retired for the night. I picture her frozen on the doorstep. She's not there, but a blast of cold charges into the living room and swirls into the bedroom. MyKeeper hollers, "What are you doing? Shut the door!" I'm calling for Duchess, calling and calling, but, no answer.

MyKeeper tugs at the blankets. He wants them up over his shoulders, but they won't budge. He yanks at them. "What the...!" he mumbles. He turns on the light. The top blanket is on the floor at the foot of the bed. He plops it onto the bed. It is rolled up tight as a jelly roll. He unrolls the blanket. At its center, not wanting to move a muscle, blinking her eyes and shivering, is Duchess!

Ah, the mere memory cools my fevered brow.

*Music of  
laughter*

Nothing more joyous or medicinal than laughter. No laughter better than the laughter of children. Nothing more satisfying than to overhear children laughing.

## *Dusting with flour...*

I walked into the kitchen as Sweet Pea dusted herself with flour. Cheeks. Shirt. Hair. And an extra dab on the nose. Then she slapped her hands together and flour dust powdered the air, settling on the table, the chair, the floor, and the dog.

I spoke to the white-daubed child. She answered, acting as if everyone walks around with flour on their nose.

It's a ritual. She and Peanut were getting ready to make cookies. And it's all Mrs. Barstad's fault. I wrote a feature story about her when we lived on the west coast. She was originally from Minnesota and frequently made potato lefse for her family and friends.

She told me the story would best be told by demonstration, so she invited me to her kitchen.

The whole house smelled warm and fragrant as she greeted me with smiling eyes, wearing a bright blue sweatshirt painted with chickadees in the snow.

They are esteemed in Minnesota, she says, because they sing to you on shivery winter mornings.

Mrs. Barstad loved chickadees, and was proud of her sweatshirt. She said it reminded her of home. She loved making lefse, too, and watching her guests enjoy it.

She ushered me into the kitchen where a pot of tea brewed under a knitted tea cozy. The teapot was from Sweden, a treasure from her mother and the Old Country. We ate home-made sugar cookies and drank tea while we talked about her family in Minnesota and her years of Scandinavian cooking.

After a bit, she went to the counter where potatoes were already cooked and mashed. All the ingredients were laid out, and I thought how organized she was. Half done already. This would be a snap.

Wrong. Preparing potato lefse is for people who have time to cook.

So Mrs. Barstad began. "Step One," she said. "First, you throw a little flour around." She dipped her hands into the flour bin, slapped some on her sweatshirt, patted her hair, and dabbed her cheeks. We laughed. She said there's a reason for this. "Once you've tossed some flour around, you don't mind the mess. And making lefse is messy!"

When finished, we cleaned up and enjoyed the lefse of our labors. I took a picture of Mrs. Barstad Opecialty. She looked like she was having a great deal of fun. Her eyes glowed, her cheeks were rosy, her hair and shirt were still white with flour.

So, when I taught Peanut how to bake cookies one day, Sweet Pea poked her head around the corner and told me I forgot the most important thing about cookie baking.

She took over. "First," she said, "you throw a little flour around..." The air was thick with the ritual of two little cooks in my kitchen, and laughter.

## *We Ride At Dawn...*

When I was a girl in the Northwest, I read about ranch life and pioneer settling and especially about horses. Eventually, TV came. The first ones were little screens in big boxes. They arrived first in our neighborhood, then in our house (probably to lure us back home from the neighbor's television). Programming included many Westerns. I liked that.

Invariably, a particular line was boiler-plate stamped into each book, movie, and TV series:

"We ride at dawn!"

Another repetitive theme was a standard skit in Westerns: The bad guy or a funny guy always ended up in the middle of the desert without canteen, without boots, and wearing only long-johns. What a hoot! Miles from town, limping and groaning and thirsting.

Living in the city, insulated from farm, ranch and desert realities, no whiff of hot dry air came through the TV or movie screen, or the pages of any

book. I knew nothing of the venomous creatures crawling the sands, had no frame of reference to envision miles of land with no trees for shade, and had never sweated a desert sweat.

Now that I have lived several more decades of life, much of it in the deserts of the South, a new perspective pervades my thoughts. You could say I've learned a thing or two.

One thing gained is a great sympathy for those long-johned barefoot cowboys I laughed at in my youth. And more than a little shame for my enjoyment of their misery. Sitting in our family living room in the Northwest, how could I have known of all the burrs and stickers that populate desert soils? Nothing else will condescend to grow there, so sharp things volunteer. Like cactus and prickly pear, and grass burrs, which are not grassy at all, but barbed. They really know how to hurt soft-skinned mammals, two-footed or four.

I'm always grateful for boots and brogans, and at the very least, sandals or flip-flops, letting them take up the heat of the burning hot sand. And it is by far easier to pry grass burrs out of flip-flops than feet.

And then there's still that favorite line that fades off into the West in a flaming sunset -

"We ride at dawn..."

In all those books, all those long-ago TV Westerns, I'd pictured ranchers lighting a kerosene lamp at three o'clock in the morning. (I also wondered what they used for an alarm clock. Probably their most reliable rooster.)

Yes, 3:00 a.m. - in the morning! It had to be. In the Northwest, and in my experience, summertime dawns arrive shortly after that. I didn't see how humans could possibly keep up a schedule like that, day after day, especially if the story involved children, and especially if that child was close to my age. They were always lighting fires in fireplaces before dawn, doing barn chores before dawn, hitching up the wagon before dawn, starting out on the trail before dawn.

Now I know. From a vantage point in Texas, it is clear to me that the sun sleeps in a little, down this way. It gets up and winds the gears of morning at a much more reasonable hour. So, like today, if someone were to say to me, "We ride at dawn," I'd say, "Okay, fine, see you then!" Because I know that tomorrow's sunrise isn't scheduled until about 7:30 a.m. And that's doable. Easy.



## *Peanut's discovery...*

"Over here, Peanut. Put the grain in this bucket while I get the milking pail." I was in such a hurry I threw directions every which way.

I had a meeting to get to, so chores had to tick like clockwork or I'd never make it in time. Dinner was in the crockpot, the critters had to be fed, and I still had to change my clothes.

We kept moving. "I'll get the hay, Peanut. You feed the bunny. Don't forget to pick him some johnson grass or he'll never forgive you."

A few minutes later I handed her the bucket. "Take this milk into the house. I'll put Reva back in her pen and be right in to strain and chill the milk."

"Grandma..."

"Hurry! I have to leave in 20 short minutes!"

"But, Grandma..."

"Scoot! Go! And don't forget water for Pansy."

"Grandma, it's warm."

I was halfway to the barn, and only half listening.

"Gramma. Gramma. It's warm. The milk is warm!"

"What?"

"The milk is real warm when it comes out of the goat."

The light of discovery glistened in her eyes, and it stopped me in my tracks. I hugged her, and remembered back to before her Mama was born.

Puddin' was my first born and, oh, the plans I had for her little life. I saw myself with the patience of Job, introducing her to the wonders of our planet. I pictured her held safely in my arms while she reached for a delicate blossom above her head and I taught her to say "flower."

But, what happened? Instead, it went more like this: "Don't touch that - get down from there - time for your nap - eat your peas - don't forget to brush your teeth - make your bed - do your homework - be home by 10 - no more TV tonight - be home by midnight - yes, here's the keys, be careful..."

Now I'm a grandmother, still pushing to meet schedules. But Peanut just discovered one of the secrets of life. Stop the clock. This could take awhile.

## *Triage: a time sort*

Emergency! Emergency!  
Schedule's gone awry.  
Re-sort! Milk the goat.  
Trash can to the roadside.  
Change gears, change clothes,  
get to the meeting, late.

Hurry, Jessie, Hold this bucket!  
Gramma...  
No time, sweetie.  
Gramma, Gramma, but...  
What?  
Milk is warm  
fresh from the goat.

Re-sort. Level 1:  
a child's discovery.

## *Oh, nuthin' much...*

"Hi, Bunny. What'cha doin'?" Smiley Riley was on the other end of the phone.

"Nuthin' much." I replied. "Let's talk awhile."

My four-year-old grandson in Washington State learned something new. It's called "Leave a Message." If I'm not home, he asks Bompá to "leave a message to have Bunny call me."

"Are you still in Texas?" he asked. He always asks. Maybe to be sure. Maybe to practice the word Texas.

"Yes," I tell him. "It's a hot day and it's lunch time." It's raining there, where he is, and he just got through eating breakfast. He thinks it's silly that I had spaghetti for breakfast. He eats cereal, or toaster tarts. He named all his favorite flavors.

"Mama's sick," he said. Worry painted concern in his voice. He said, "I keep giving her back rubs, but it's still so not working."