

The Blonde on the Prairie says “There’s no place like home!”

Hello, Devils Lake. Did you miss me? Because I missed you! I missed you like a woman misses her good bra after wearing the sports one all day. I missed you like farmers miss sleep in October. I missed you like the Lutheran Church Ladies miss a fresh pot of coffee when someone *dares* to brew it without an egg!

In short — it’s good to be home. Now, officially, I “took a sabbatical” from this column. But if you picture me lounging on a beach with cucumbers over my eyes, you’re giving me far too much credit and also making me laugh until my mascara cracks.

My sabbatical involved zero hammocks and 100 percent chaos. Because while I stepped away from writing, I stepped directly



into two jobs I cherish but test my almost 60 year old body - I’m the Chief Joyologist (also known as Activity Director) at the nursing home in Cooperstown, where I spend my days convincing grown adults that pumpkin bowling counts as exercise. I referee towel-folding rivalries, and dodge whipped cream during planned, epic food fights.

On top of that, I was traveling the Midwest in a food truck selling Monkey Balls, Monkey Wieners, and enough Monkey Slushes to hydrate a small nation. So no — it was not a sabbatical. It was more of a prairie-style boot camp with snack foods.

That husband of mine and I hit the road the first weekend of May and didn’t stop until late October. That man of mine and I hauled ourselves and our deep-fried dreams through three states, countless counties, raucous rodeos, county fairs, dance events, car shows, craft fairs and even threw anchor in some of the very, most questionable parking lots imaginable!

If it had electricity, we were there. If it didn’t have electricity, we prayed over

the generator and still set up. Here are some of what I call, “Highlights of the Summer of Monkey Balls” (hold onto your stretchy pants) - The event where a gust of prairie wind blew through at precisely the wrong moment, sending an entire tray of fresh Monkey Balls rolling across the grass like they were escaping from prison. A toddler chased them like he’d just spotted treasure.

Honestly, he wasn’t wrong. It was funny to watch and there is no use crying over a little spilled Monkey Ball!

Then, there was the time I discovered there are exactly two kinds of people in this world - those who hear “Monkey Balls” and blush and those who yell “I LOVE THESE BALLS!” across a crowded fair-

ground without a speck of shame. Bless them.

I was touched at the farm couple who drove 42 miles out of their way because someone at a gas station told them, “You haven’t lived until you’ve had a Monkey Wiener.” That’s the kind of word-of-mouth marketing you absolutely cannot buy.

Or, the weekend we went through so much Monkey Slush that my forearm became permanently shaped like I was scooping frozen lemonade. I think it’s my dominant limb now. Owie!

Oh! I taught myself how to juggle lemons, so there’s that!

It was joyful. It was exhausting. It was ridiculous. And it was holy in the way that only small-town summers can be — where

the roads are dusty, the skies are big, and everyone is a stranger until they’re suddenly family.

But through it all, I missed writing to all of you. I missed sharing the weirdness, the wonder, the heartbreak, the hilarity, the things that make life out here what it is — raw and beautiful and occasionally sticky with butter and powdered sugar!

So the Blonde on the Prairie is back. My hair is still misbehaving, my cats still outnumber my common sense, and my stories are still equal parts “inspirational” and “is she okay?” I can’t wait to laugh with you again. Cry a little. Think a lot. And keep finding the humor in the holy and the holy in the humor.

Buckle up, Devils Lake. It’s going to be a fun ride.

Useful Thinking: Northern Plains Premium Beef

President Trump’s efforts to import Argentina Beef reminded me that in 1995 the president of the North Dakota Stockmen’s Association, Dean Meyer, led a massive effort to create a beef producer-owned packing plant.



Patrie

Northern Plains produces a higher percentage of fat cattle that grade choice than other parts of the country. The quality of the hides of Northern Plains cattle was also better.

I retired nine years ago, but I have never quit thinking about what still could be an opportunity for the beef producers of the Northern Plains. I have watched the Industrial Commission spend millions of dollars to entice pipeline companies to carry natural gas to eastern North Dakota as a fuel source to generate electricity for data centers. I have watched the Wonder Fund invest millions in all sorts of supposedly “innovative” ideas.

Gov. George Sinner was fond of saying, “the runway behind you is of no use to you.” A runway ahead of us needs to be built. The lift off provided will answer the question “how can North Dakota State Government lead an effort that results in a state-of-the-art beef packing plant owned in part by beef producers?”

Ranchers tried by themselves, but now need the lift the State can provide. The State of North Dakota can aggregate the finances and the interest groups. Stock-

man’s Association, Farm Bureau, Farmers Union, North Dakota State University, Farmers Union Industries, Beef Commission, North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives and their cooperative development center, Bank of North Dakota, Corn Growers, Soybean Growers, feed lot operators, cow-calf operators, breed associations, grocery chains, labor unions, worker cooperatives, industrial engineering firms, dairy producers, and more, all have something to gain from this effort.

State leadership is needed to pull together all groups who will benefit from the successful implementation of this idea. All those willing to learn the answer to “how can North Dakota State Government lead an effort that results in a state-of-the-art beef packing plant owned in part by beef producers?”

State government belongs to all North Dakotans. As North Dakotans we already own the Mill and Elevator, Workers Compensation and Insurance, the Bank of North Dakota, and the Industrial commission’s commitment to oil, gas, coal and data centers. Now is our chance to use State Government to convert the grass lands of the prairies to a profitable way of life for North Dakotans.

Bill Patrie is a retired planner and economic developer having worked in regional and statewide positions. He is the author of “Creating Co-op Fever” printed by USDA as a service bulletin, and “100 Stories of Hope” a book about his interviews with 100 people in poverty.



Holiday Recipe Cookbook Correction

Correction for recipe found on page 25 of the 2025 Holiday Cookbook: BITTERSWEETS

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup soft butter
- 2 teaspoons vanilla

Blend ingredients together. Take rounded teaspoon

and roll into a ball. Press down with thumb to make an indent. Bake until you see a little light brown starting. Bake 12-16 minutes at 350 degrees.

Filling: 1 cup powdered sugar, 1 tablespoon flour, 1 teaspoon vanilla, 3 oz. cream cheese, ½ cup nuts, ½ cup coconut. Stir and

put in the indent of cookies while warm. Frosting: ½ cup chocolate chips, 2 tablespoons water, milk or cream, 2 tablespoons butter and ½ cup powdered sugar. Put on a dollop or drizzle over cookies.

Crystal Maier, Devils Lake, ND

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