The Catch

COCORAHS AND A DAY IN THE GARDEN

FORT COLLINS, CO — Thursday, May 18, 2006

Dear CoCoRaHS weather watchers and others:

I've been quieter than normal lately. Lot's has been going on, but I'm still here and still watching the amazing patterns of rain and no rain that, collectively, we and our rain gauges are helping to monitor.

I've enjoyed several hours in my mother-in-law's garden this week—weeding, watering, and finishing a new raised bed. Every year around Mother's Day we help her with some of the harder jobs of gardening. This year was no different—except we knew she would not be gardening with us much longer. For several years her health has been failing. Last week, she took a quick turn for the worse and Monday she passed away -- before I finished her Mother's Day present and before we had planted all the seeds.

Even so, it was a beautiful day here. Nearly all of her family was with her at the end. The sky was a deep blue, the air was warm but not hot, and the lilacs and honeysuckle visible from "Grandma's" bedroom window were in full bloom—richly fragrant. From a gardener's perspective, it was a dandy day to die.

I will miss her greatly. She was the 6th of 9 children born to eastern Colorado homesteaders who somehow managed to eek out a living on 160 acres of land north of Vona, Colorado (Kit Carson County). Unlike many of those early homesteads, their little house on the prairie still stands. I've had the privilege of listening to her siblings, most of whom are now deceased, talk about their growing-up years -- the good years of the 1910s and 1920s when the land yielded crops, the well yielded plentiful water, and their family ate 3 good meals a day. Then life went from hard to downright miserable.   There was the frigid winter of 1930 when the coal supply ran out and they started burning cow chips to stay warm. Life turned really ugly in the 1930s when the rains failed, dry summer heat was miserably oppressive, the winds howled, and cloud after cloud of dust swept over their poor homestead (her job was to get the animals in the barn before the cloud of dust arrived). Then, to add insult to injury, there was the Republican River flood of May 1935 (she was 13) where she saw their neighbor float past on the roof of her house.

To this day, this flood stands out as one of Colorado's worst with up to 24 inches of rain overnight not far from their leaky-roofed homestead.

I could get sappy and poetic, as Mable contributed a lot to my climate education. She also helped with our family CoCoRaHS rain gauge for most of the past 8 years. With my son graduating from high school next week and heading off to college, my team of rain gauge substitutes has been depleted. I hope I can adapt. I know that many of you have already experienced these sort of changes. I also know that some of you are fighting your own battles with illness and old age. CoCoRaHS still seems so new and fresh, yet more than 20 of our volunteers have died since the project began. That is so humbling—and just makes me want to hug all of you who share a few minutes of each day just to help a few scientists gain a bit more knowledge—because the day will come for each of us when it will be our turn to set down our gauges and move towards the hereafter.

Back to business—upcoming special events:

We are delighted that we will have a packed house for the 2006 Rocky Mountain Weather and Climate Workshop in Boulder on Saturday. Folks are coming from as far as southern New Mexico to attend. Thanks for making the special effort this year to pay a registration (lunch) fee in advance.
It really helps our planning efforts.

One of our guest speakers, Mr. Grant Goodge, is flying in from North Carolina for this occasion. He has maintained his own home weather station for close to 35 years, and has been a friend to all weather observers in various positions at the National Climatic Data Center in Asheville, NC.

While Mr. Goodge is in Colorado, he will be giving two other presentations that are open to the public.

On Friday, he will be giving a seminar here at the CSU Dept. of Atmospheric Science about a special new weather observing network designed to measure temperature and precipitation as accurately as possible in order to convincingly determine if our climate is indeed changing.

Title: The Climate Reference Network (CRN); What is it? Where is it?
And, what can it do for me?

Host: Nolan Doesken, Nolan@atmos.colostate.edu
When: Friday, May 19, 2006, 3:00 pm

(Refreshments will begin at 2:30 pm in the coffee lounge)

Where: Atmospheric Science Bldg, Room 101 (CSU Foothills campus on W. Laporte Avenue)

On Monday, he will be presenting an extraordinary slide show of weather phenomena.

Monday, May 22nd, 7PM
Loveland Public Library
Gertrude B. Scott Multipurpose Room
300 N. Adams Ave.
Loveland, Colorado 80537

http://www.ci.loveland.co.us/library/geninfo/directions.htm

I hope some of you can attend.

New e-mail system:

Some of you will be thrilled to know that we are now only days away from a new e-mail system. Some of you get my messages totally unformatted—which must be terrible. Also, we will soon be able to send messages only to the specific states or counties and not to the whole country. This will probably please you folks from PA and MD who keep hearing about our drought and weather seminars in Colorado—neither of which mean much to you.

Conclusion:

I know we have little (no) control over these matters, but if any of you would be kind enough to send rain to much of Colorado and New Mexico we would certainly appreciate it. Despite a snowy winter up in the northern mountains of Colorado, our spring has been SO dry east of the mountains. Grass only briefly turned green and now has been going dormant already. Perhaps we could get a small fraction of those recent floods in New England and have it shipped here. Well, it was just a thought.

Best wishes to all—and if you still are fortunate enough to have a mother or mother-in-law—appreciate them as much as you can.

Good night,

Nolan