

Creative Creatures

The ideas and the work of the American and European painters, songwriters, photographers, fiction and non-fiction authors, musicians, film makers, architects, designers, poets, and dreamers I met during my 20 years in America.



44 / Cindy Hoedel, journalist, Matfield Green, Kansas

She is the best public relations officer Matfield Green could ever get. Whenever she writes about (her) life in Matfield Green and on the prairie, which is often, in her articles and columns for the daily Kansas City Star and especially in her features for the weekly Star Magazine, she encourages many city folks to get their car out on the road and drive two plus hours to be “there” and have a live experience of our town’s not so average life, the magnificent prairie scenery, the roaming cattle, and the contemporary, often prairie-inspired art in The Gallery at Pioneer Bluffs and The Bank. Ever since Cindy Hoedel came to Matfield Green to buy the old Delbert Armstrong home next to mine –in the spring of 2013—to fix the place up, to create a strawbale garden to cultivate her vegetables and to plant fruit trees for her future jellies, cars slow down often on Highway 177, the national scenic by-way, to make the turn into our miniscule town and enjoy its flavor. Quite often they stop some local on the road to ask, “Where can we find Cindy’s gardens?” For Cindy in her writings invites everyone to come and see.

Cindy Hoedel’s life started in Shawnee Mission, Kansas, but she is one of those Kansans who wanted to see more of the world. After graduating she spent a year in Rennes, France as an exchange student. She’d rather have studied in Paris, but Rennes in eastern Brittany proved to be not disappointing at all even if she, a young student, did not have the opportunity to wine and dine in one of the many Michelin * restaurants such as Corsaire in the Rue Antrain, where one day long ago I myself was lucky enough to enjoy an unforgettable *poêlée de langoustines et de foie de canard*, followed by some *civet de rouget-barbet*. At a second time it was a memorable *petit ragoût de queue de boeuf à l’ancienne*. Those were the days of the good old French cuisine when calories were frowned upon but *only if they lacked presence*. Nevertheless, Cindy had a good time in Brittany’s capital with its old town dating back as far as the 12th century; its simpler but lively *brasseries* proved to be highly enjoyable too.

Then, suddenly she found herself in Stuttgart, Germany married to her German friend Dieter. They got two kids and Cindy first worked as a translator for amongst others Mercedes Benz and later as an English as a Second Language teacher. Ten years later Cindy returned to the United States to live in Kansas City and her language experience took her to writing. Her career as a journalist and later as a roaming reporter, lifestyle columnist and feature writer for the Kansas City Star took many turns. An enthusiast cook herself, her cooking writings earned her many accolades such as Great Plains Journalism Awards. Her writings are published in many newspapers and magazines belonging to the Star's national syndicate, The McClatchy Company, news publishers since 1890. After her cooking writings came articles about working the soil, growing vegetables, in short anything that had to do with food production and the people who are involved in the food chain. Cindy wrote about barrel-aged Old Tom gin which should be mixed, but only if preferred diluted, with all-natural Q Tonic made from Peruvian quinine, and with some house-made cranberry-thyme shrub syrup and dried cranberries added. Which beside a good thirst for fine drinks demonstrates she eventually caught up with all those enriched French meals and imperial wines she missed while living in Rennes. Cindy also wrote 'The \$5 Lunch Guide', a Kindle book about 25 Kansas City venues offering plain good food. Her tweets can be found on the 'Muck Rack Daily', a digest of journalism; moreover she is an active sustainability, conservation and zero waste blogger; in short, she is one of the few people I know who really understand how to work the Internet creatively.

It's not just food and drinks and growing produce with sense and sensitivity that attract Cindy's attention. Roaming all over Kansas and parts of Missouri her subjects may just as well be the tax men Henry and Richard Bloch or Gene North, the Kansas City poet-in-residence at the American Jazz Museum. She is an old-fashioned journalist with a healthy appetite for news and an eye especially for background stories. She is a deep-delving researcher not content with sloppy fact-finding or nonchalant writing. She herself became the subject in a poetry book written by one Zanzibar "Buck Buck" McFate, who for his 'Power Through' composed a delirious poem about one of Cindy's columns, in which she wrote, "Panties and paint brushes have a lot in common, even if you won't find them for sale on the same aisle anywhere." Buck Buck for an instant thinks that he "might take panty painting up as a hobby. / 'Look, honey,' / I would say, / Daintily holding up between my forefingers and thumbs / My latest handipantywork, / And I would be breathless / ... / Imploringly say, / 'Howsa 'bout you try them on'." Buck Buck suspects Cindy Hoedel is a lonely one "Who probably has a very nice personality, / And who probably works the evening shift in Lubbock, Texas / Where the wind never stops / While she dreams of Monet in Normandy / Where the bracing Atlantic sea breezes / Tease the feathery hems of long whitest skirts simply /... / She writes, / 'Buy all-cotton underwear' ..." And so on and on.

Atlantic breezes—Buck Buck got that right, although Cindy was on the Brittany coast, not in Normandy. Lubbock, Texas is Matfield Green, Kansas where indeed the winds seldom stop. He was wrong on so many details. Lonely she is not. Since Cindy came to live in Matfield Green, the town is more alive than ever before. Nowadays, around five p.m. quite a few people stroll with a glass of *vino* in the hand under the bemused gazes of Matfield's Bud Light cowboys (some of whom are willing to join on the condition they won't be forced to drink *wine*) to assemble at what I call the "bodegazebo" in the new neighbor's garden, where Cindy and her partner Mike Boyts (himself quite a Bud-der) play host to a happy community of fellow boozers and story tellers. I praise myself lucky with Cindy as a close neighbor for I understand her dry humor well and she understands mine; her French and German years (and the crazy Brits, of course) provided her with a Monty Python sense of absurdity. She is more European than any American I've met. Which, in my opinion, is no mean compliment.