



May 14, 2007

**THE JOURNAL REPORT: TECHNOLOGY**

*Consumer Technology*

**Blog Watch**


By **KEITH HUANG**  
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**NOVICE FARMING**

- **Farmgirl Fare**  
[FarmgirlFare.com](http://FarmgirlFare.com)<sup>1</sup>

"Nearly everyone dreams of moving to the country, but few are crazy enough to actually do it," writes Susan Thomas on her Farmgirl Fare blog.

**THE JOURNAL REPORT**

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Need more room<sup>3</sup> for your files? Here are your options. Plus, [an intranet guru](#) talks about<sup>4</sup> what the best ones have in common.

- See the complete [Technology report](#)<sup>5</sup>.

Since 1994, Ms. Thomas, 38, has kept an online journal about her experiences living on a farm after selling her bakery/café in Northern California and moving to a 280-acre, 140-year-old farm in southern Missouri. Ms. Thomas has since moved to

another farm in the area. "We're so far out in the country the U.S. Post Office won't deliver our mail," she says.


Over the past decade, Ms. Thomas has taught herself to be a cook, gardener, shepherd, farmhand, vet, wildlife expert, and surrogate mom, midwife and undertaker to farm animals—all the while chronicling the experience on her blog. "You never know what might disrupt the day," she writes. "It may be a late-evening phone call announcing the arrival of the sheep shearer the following afternoon, or an ear-piercing grinding of metal in the farmyard heralding the urgent need for me to jump into my Tractor Mechanic Assistant's coveralls."

- **Fast Grow the Weeds**  
[FastGrowTheWeeds.blogspot.com](http://FastGrowTheWeeds.blogspot.com)<sup>6</sup>

Ellyn Parcels and her family moved from a 100-year-old house just south of downtown Minneapolis to a five-acre farm in southwest Michigan in November 2004.

Ms. Parcels, an architect, says she and her artist husband "farm for fun," but she also finds comfort in producing her family's food. "In general, we eat from the garden all summer and fall, and it makes up about 75% of my daughter's and my meals and maybe 60% of my carnivorous husband's," she writes.

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Ms. Parcels is raising several free-range chickens for eggs, and her lack of experience raising farm fowl is often amusing. The chickens "are fabulous for pest control," she writes. "You should've seen three of them eating a tomato hornworm yesterday—gross, but satisfying."

While many of her posts include photos of her prized homegrown vegetables and recipes for dishes that make use of the fresh produce, Ms. Parcels does reveal some tender moments: "Our daughter is going through her 'Charlotte's Web' phase. Mine has lasted 41 years, so maybe hers really isn't a phase."

#### • **A Homesteading Neophyte**

[A-Homesteading-Neophyte.blogspot.com](http://A-Homesteading-Neophyte.blogspot.com)<sup>7</sup>

Erin Phelan and her husband moved to a five-acre farm in Kansas with their son five years ago. Since then, they've begun raising two more boys along with an abundance of fruit, vegetables and various organic foods.

Ms. Phelan says her family's goal is to live harvest to harvest, and she also takes great pride in making ketchup, soap and rice flour from scratch. She has discovered that farm living means taking nothing for granted.

A Homesteading Neophyte is a compilation of "a beginner's tale of mistakes," says Ms. Phelan, and some of them are big, such as discovering after purchasing the farm that its topsoil had been stripped away. But mostly she writes tidbits so other first-time farmers might learn from her mistakes—or laugh at them: "Do not under any circumstances mix wet, cold weather, bad shoulders and scythe work."

### **ROCK CLIMBING**

#### • **Katie Brown's Rock Talk**

[YourClimbing.com/blog/katie](http://YourClimbing.com/blog/katie)<sup>8</sup>

Professional climber Katie Brown, 26, has been scaling rock faces since she was a teenager, making an early name for herself by winning titles in the U.S. and in Europe. She says her blog helps readers "get an idea of who I am as a person, rather than just an image."

Along those lines, she discussed a recent vacation from climbing, writing that "realistically, climbing for a living, and all that comes with it, in addition to everything else that goes on in life, can be tiring, and I think it's okay to want to get away from it for a bit, even something as fun as climbing."

In addition to her writing, she posts video clips, perhaps the most notable a nail-biter in which she falls about 40 feet before an anchored rope stops her. In another post, she accentuates the positives despite failing to reach the summit of El Capitan, a famous 3,000-foot vertical rock formation in Yosemite National Park: "When I got to the ground I had the immense pleasure of telling, essentially, the whole world about our lack of success." Ms. Brown led the ascent most of the way, "something which, a year ago, I would have been far too intimidated to do," she writes, adding: "best of all, I got to sleep on a wall." Other entries by Ms. Brown include accounts of climbing trips to Chile and Greece.

#### • **Wow, We're Really Up Here**

[ReallyUpHere.blogspot.com](http://ReallyUpHere.blogspot.com)<sup>9</sup>

Kevin Quaderer quit his office job in Salt Lake City in January, planning to live as a "climbing bum" for at least six months.

After fashioning a makeshift bed in the back of a 1995 Ford E250 van, he hit the road with a checklist of climbing destinations in mind. In just a few months, he has written about crack climbing in Moab, Utah, and boulder climbing in the Hueco Tanks in El Paso, Texas.

While Mr. Quaderer snaps photos and writes extensively about these treks, he also describes his downtime, when his knuckles "need time for the swelling to go down" and his mind "starts to unwind a little bit."

He adds: "It's surprising to see how twisted up my mind had become running the rat race."

In an early post, he offers advice to those who may be riding the fence about taking a personal adventure such as his own: "The people most psyched about your decision will be those who wish they had done the same thing when they were your age," he writes.

### • **The Diary of a [Newbie] Rock Climber**

[NewClimber.com](#)<sup>10</sup>

After moving to Colorado in 1999, it took David Mejias nearly six years to work up the nerve to give rock climbing a try.

"When I started, I was very afraid of heights," he says. "Now, I'm still afraid of heights but can manage my fear better."

After his first climb, in July 2005, Mr. Mejias began his blog, largely to document his personal growth in the sport. Within a month he described "pumping out," or overexerting himself: "I have grudgingly concluded that I should curb my enthusiasm a bit. I'm trying to be patient and listen to my body." Nearly two years later and still hooked on the sport, Mr. Mejias can now lead an ascent, whereas before he could only "top rope"—follow routes that others had established on a rock formation.

Mr. Mejias, a free-lance photographer, also provides a stunning look at the sport through his camera's lens.

—Mr. Huang is an editor for The Wall Street Journal Online in New York.

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