

Robert A Nickle

Art Cards – Image Story

1. **BLUEBALL** – A huge sycamore tree stands guard over the farmhouse that was once the Blueball Inn. It has seen the passing of the giant Conestoga wagons loaded with wheat as they headed to the nearby mills. Often the teamsters would spend the night, before heading back to their homes perhaps a day's drive away. The stagecoach would stop if the innkeeper had hung out the "blueball" telling that there was a passenger to be picked up. There are no more wagons or stagecoaches for the old sycamore to see. But with pride it still casts its shadow over the farm, once an inn that has always been known as Blueball.
2. **FISHERMAN'S SHED** – there is a timeless, ageless quality to the fisherman's life. Day after day he heads out to sea full of hope that the creator who controls the wind and the waves might shine success on his efforts this day, As we gaze at the charm of his shed, bleached by the sun and worn by the heavy salt air we are treated to a glimpse of his character – the character of a faithful maim tested over a lifetime, building perseverance. It is that which we do in faith that builds character that endures.
3. **INSPIRATION** – For those of us who are fortunate, there are, even if but a few, times in our lives when we experience moments of deep understanding. For a brief time our spirits commune with what it is that brings meaning to our lives. It is then, when we stop and smell the roses, that we find worth and purpose.

Much of the time we can thank someone else for these moments, someone who not only touched our hearts but stirred our souls. It may have been a parent or grandparent, a minister, teacher or simply a friend, but what we learned from them, what they told us, or more likely, how they lived, has put their signature on our being. We understand that when we display kindness, generosity, or compassion that it is character forged in the crucible of their inspiration.

There is joy in remembering their example and blessing in thanking them by being that "someone" to another.

4. **LIGHTHOUSE OF LIFE** – there is a lighthouse on the sand near the surf that once stood all alone. Now, crowded by development and her life saving beams diminished by technology, to many she is only a tourist attraction and a monument to the romantic years of sailing ships and high seas adventure.

But as I gaze at her charm, I am reminded that those of us who are fortunate have had a lighthouse of life in our past. When we found ourselves in a time of trouble or storm there was a beacon of light shining out of the darkness to show us the way. Some, in their hectic pace through life, never see that source of light and crash upon the rocks. But, for others,

there is joy, not only in seeing the course changing light, but in living with thanksgiving for having been rescued from the storm.

5. **LITTLE LADY** – Moored at her dock is a “Little Lady”. Her days of putting out to sea are passed. There are no more storms to ride out or large catches to bring back. But, her days are not over nor her usefulness gone. The rugged beauty weathered into her hull by a lifetime of hard work have given her a new purpose – to tell us a story, a reflection of what was and an inspiration as we go forward. We, like this Little Lady, are a witness to those around us. We can inspire good character with the integrity of our experience, or we can give false direction. The “Little Lady” of Menemsha shares with us the beauty and wisdom in reverence for experience.
6. **LOVE WREATH** – A green wreath hangs upon the white of the door, while a bright crimson bow sings that love is inside. It floats on the front of that rustic stone home and paints us a picture that’s ageless and unchanged over time. Scripture tells us, “knock and it shall be opened to you”. Love is that way. Love never fails.
7. **MESSENGERS** – There is a little bit of child in each of us. We are excited with anticipation to open a birthday present from a loved one or to receive good news we’ve been waiting on. Often, it is our mailbox that becomes the messenger. As I view this row of boxes, waiting quietly at the end of the road, I wonder which ones hold good news, which ones bad news, and which ones no news at all. Each day, as we approach the mailboxes of our lives, we have the opportunity to be childlike with optimism, to feel lowly with pessimism or to not care at all. How we approach these opportunities, day after day, speaks a great deal about our character.
8. **SPRING SNOW** – It was spring and the buds on the trees were about to burst into color, bushes began to replace their winter gray with scarlet and green and pink. Everything was speaking of new beginnings and the promises of life. Then, a spring snow arrives. The soft white blankets the ground and seems to cover our warm hopes even as its beauty fills our hearts.

We’ve all experienced spring snows in our lives – times when our character is built or our enthusiasm dashed. They give us glorious opportunity to turn promises delayed into resolve for victorious new beginnings. Whether we struggle under the circumstances of life or above them often depends on how we approach the Spring Snow.

9. **THE JOY OF THE JOURNEY** – Twice each day I cross a little red covered bridge which spans an ancient stream. There is something haunting about it that recalls a time less busy, a slower paced era when life seemed simpler and more restful. Ours is a time when the pace of life is fast and getting faster. Being somewhere else is often what is on our minds. We are so busy trying to get somewhere that the pounding of life’s pace drowns out the joy of the journey.

As we approach that little one lane bridge, sometimes we have a decision to make. We can speed up and beat that on-coming car across the bridge, or we can slow down, give them the

right-of-way, and enjoy the beauty of the moment. It is a time to discover a life lesson – that value is found not in the pave of our lives, but in service rendered to others.

10. **WALKER’S MILL** – It was a bright, sunny spring day down by the river. The world almost seemed to stop. You could hear the delicate chirp of a finch and feel the quiet breeze as it gently moved along the mirrored surface of the water. At times like this it is easy to reflect on the river of our past and ponder ageless questions about the meaning of our lives.

Sometimes our spirits are lifted as we gaze at the reflection of a life well lived, an abundant life reflecting love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Such richness is truly a gift.

But, sometimes we muddy the waters and cloud that reflection with pride, business, self-centeredness or the hustle to acquire things instead of the pursuit of relationship with those around us.

“WALKER’S MILL” shows us the answer to life’s questions is in the beauty that is found in the reflection of good character.

11. **WEATHERED SHED** – It was a bright, sunny day, freshly dusted with snow, as we passed the old shed near the side of the road. Its weathered beauty and charm cause me to search how much we, like the old shed, are shaped over time. Life wears on us so that the strength of our sunrise becomes the character of our sunset. When our day has passed, it is our character that endures.

12. **WHAT SO PROUDLY WE HAIL** – On the eve of the battle, Francis Scott Key saw that huge flag of stars and stripes raised over Fort McHenry. The future of the rag-tag American militia didn’t hold much promise against the vast army of war tested British troops. But he saw the flag that was hailed at the twilight’s last gleaming was still flying by the dawn’s early light. It was a victory, not of men against men, or country against country. It was the victory of a righteous cause that can only be explained by the same divine providence of our founders acknowledged.

As we witness countless acts of kindness and service to others in the smoke of national tragedy, we can see that what man intended for evil, God intended for good. As we see our nation moved to focus not on what we have, but on what we believe, we can understand that it is not the emblem of our nation, but the character of our purpose that is “WHAT SO PROUDLY WE HAIL”.