

# VILLAGE VIEW

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As a recycling freak, I'm frustrated in efforts to have old newspapers re-used instead of tossed into the dump, and trees destroyed to make new paper products. Not only is my garage storage space being usurped by mounting stacks of grocery bags packed tightly with newspapers dating back to early 1981, when the collapse of the construction business caused the DPW to send the last van-load of newspapers to wherever they went, but it goes against my grain to throw newspapers into the dump because it's being filled, and the more we put into it, the sooner an expensive alternative must be found.

Surely, I keep telling myself, there must still be good uses for old newsprint. Hang in there, I keep telling myself; the market for this stuff will pick up again, eventually. Be patient, I keep telling myself; we've been through slumps like this before, and first thing you know prices for old newspapers will rise, and once again it'll be profitable for the town to bring back a paper van, and I can take a huge load to the van with a feeling of virtuosity.

Meanwhile, I continue to recycle aluminum and glass. A lot of other people do, too. Once you start, it becomes a habit. You'd no more toss away an empty bottle than you'd throw out a length of good string.

Added to my compulsive penchant for saving is postage stamps. No, I'm not a philatelist; quite the contrary. The stamps I save are just ordinary everyday ones, the kind that come 100 to a sheet or roll. Oh, I save commemoratives, too; I'm not a bit fussy. Any stamp. Any denomination. As long as it's one that can be steamed or soaked off the envelope. I add it to the box I keep at the back of my desk for that purpose; I save them all.

Silly, you say? For what purpose would anyone keep a bunch of cancelled stamps? Let me tell you.

You've heard of fraternal organizations; you know they are involved in "good works" and helping people. There are the Elks, the Moose, the Kiwanis, the Rotary, the Lions, and maybe others. Fine thing. Good groups. Nobody ever heard anyone say bad things about the fraternal lodges, right?

Until recently, that's all I knew about them, but not long ago I was talking to a fellow who is a member of a Lions Club in Florida. He mentioned that their membership gathers

stamps. I sort of laughed casually and agreed to save mine for him if he wanted.

"But what do you do with them?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "when we get a big batch of them, we soak them off the paper they're stuck to, dry them, bag them up in little packets of 50 or 100, and ship them to foreign countries where collectors buy them inexpensively, hoping to find a stamp or two worth adding to their own collections. We try to be sure that each packet contains three or four nice commemoratives and some special issues. Those, of course, can be traded among collectors."

"Sure, I understand," I nodded. "But then what do you do with the money? Does it help finance the Lions?"

"No, not really," he told me. "You know, don't you, that the Lions are especially dedicated to helping the blind or partially blind?" I did know that. "Our particular club finds this a good way to raise money to help people who would otherwise be unable to afford eye care, new glasses, operations, or even to have their eyes examined."

I was a bit skeptical. "You mean, you can earn enough, with cancelled stamps, to really make a dent in someone's expenses for eye care?" It just didn't seem possible.

"Oh, yes," he assured me, "we collect lots and lots of stamps, of course. Next time I get a good load, I'll show you." And a few weeks later, he did. His car pulled into the driveway one afternoon while I was working in the garden. He hailed me, saying, "I brought stamps to show you."

We walked to the rear of his big old gas-guzzler with its enormous trunk, and he opened it with a flourish. Inside were hundreds of plastic vegetable bags, plastic bread wrappers, baggies, all kinds of bags, all crammed with cancelled postage stamps. I was astonished! And I was impressed.

"You mean, someone is going to take these and spend the next month soaking, drying and packaging all these?"

"Yup."

So, now I save cancelled stamps.

It takes, maybe, a tenth of a second when I get my mail to rip the corner off an envelope and tuck it into the box. In fact, I can do it without looking, while reading my correspondence. And the stamps gather rapidly. They don't take up much room, don't make a mess, aren't in my way. When the box gets fullish, I pour them into a plastic bag and tie a knot in the top. Each time I see my Lions friend, I give him my contribution. He's always appreciative.

It's a small thing, this stamp-saving routine. You'd hardly think it worth the trouble, small as that trouble is. On the other hand, if you were a child with a sight problem, and your folks couldn't afford to take you to an eye doctor, couldn't buy glasses you need, couldn't pay for an operation to correct a problem, and you were trying to learn to read in school, it wouldn't seem such a small thing.

If you can't see, you can't read. If you can't see, you can't learn arithmetic. If you can't see, education and training is down the drain.

And if you were older, a lot older, and developed cataracts, and needed surgery you couldn't afford, you wouldn't think it a small thing. Or if you found you had glaucoma and needed prescription drugs, drops to put in your eye, three or four times a day, so you wouldn't lose your sight, and the drops cost more than your tight budget allowed, you wouldn't think it a small thing, either. Not everyone has insurance. I can't think of many things much worse than being blind.

That's why I'm recycling cancelled postage stamps. Whenever I turn over a batch to my friend, I get the same good feeling, inside, that comes when I deposit scrap aluminum and glass in the recycling bins at the dump; and, if the paper van is near the gate, then I get that feeling when I add bundles of newspapers to those other folks have piled inside it.

Contributions from other people who save stamps for me help fill my own plastic bags. Relatives and friends, whenever they think of it, pass me little packets of used stamps, an old envelope filled with them, or tuck a dozen or so in each letter they mail me. And I, in turn, see those stamps reach the Floridian Lion to help preserve the eyesight of someone I'll never even hear about, but who, otherwise, might go through the rest of his life with impaired vision, or, worse, in total darkness.

I may be frustrated because there's no demand, at present, for old newspapers, but I'm satisfied with doing a bit to help someone else by recycling cancelled postage stamps. All contributions gratefully accepted.