

village view

by Andrea Leonard

Here it is, Thanksgiving, and you're wondering where the time has gone. Maybe you're wondering if there's much to be thankful for in these days of spiralling inflation, devalued dollars, and a yo-yo stock market.

It's not easy to stretch your income these days to cover living expense; it's hard to plan nutritious meals and feed a hungry family three meals a day, to afford to clothe yourself and the kids decently, to pay property and income taxes, scrape up the money to meet utility bills and the mortgage, find cash for car payments, and health, homeowners and car insurance. And Christmas is just around the corner.

Somehow, though, you'll manage. Somehow, most people do. And most can remind themselves of blessings for which to be truly thankful. There's enough to eat in the house even though you're serving economy meals more often than you once did. The house is comfortably warm even though you keep the thermostat set back to conserve that precious fuel and those precious dollars.

Perhaps you've decided new winter coats aren't an absolute necessity for everyone this year, and last year's holiday outfit will pass muster this season, too. It's possible you've decided all Christmas gifts will be practical things and, instead of buying sweaters, mittens, socks and hats, you're knitting them yourself for the loved ones on your list.

You've got a lot to be thankful for; you can't put a price on a loving family; it's not measurable in dollars and cents.

There are people living on Cape Cod who have far less to be thankful for, even though they, too, are surrounded by children, even though they love their children. A glimpse into their lives may help us be truly and deeply thankful.

Take Gramma B. whose son and nine children have lived in Oklahoma for several years. Recently the children's mother died; their father took his oldest, a girl of 16, out of school to care for the younger children. Last week the girl, along with two of her brothers, one 15 and the other 13, arrived on Gramma B's doorstep. They had hitchhiked to the Cape from Oklahoma.

They had no possessions but the clothes on their backs. The girl was wearing sandals; one of the boys had no socks. The luggage they had taken from home had somehow been lost, en route. Hungry and exhausted, the youngsters were taken in, fed and put to bed.

Gramma B. has no money to send the children home. Her income is inadequate to care for them. Their father has no money to send for them. To be eligible for public assistance, Gramma B. must be appointed guardian; their father is agreeable, but it takes time and involves legal fees to become their guardian.

To further complicate matters, the granddaughter is four months pregnant. Gramma B is nearly beside herself with worry.

Let's see how Widow G. is making out. She is 46 years old, unable to work because a physical disability makes her unemployable, and has four children ranging in age from 12 to 18. When her husband died, she used his life insurance to make a down payment on a two-bedroom electrically-heated house.

Her mortgage payments are \$135 a month. Her income from welfare is \$176 twice a month. She buys \$91 in food stamps with each check; \$182 is not a lot of money to feed five people for a month. It averages 40 cents a meal. Teenagers have excellent appetites.

On October 14th her welfare check did not arrive. She assumes it was lost and reported it to welfare. The social worker said she'd put a tracer on it. It will take six weeks to track it down; "Don't call back," she was told. Her October 28th check arrived on schedule.

Widow G. is \$176 short of expected income, couldn't buy food stamps for the last half of October, can't pay her real estate taxes, and because she owes a \$92.20 electric bill, her power has been shut off. She has no heat, no light, and can't cook. She and all her children need warm clothing for the coming winter.

Widow G. has a sister but no other relatives. The sister has a big family of her own to care for, is also on welfare, and cannot help her. Has she much to be thankful for?

What of Mrs. M? She's 37 years old, married, and has five children between the ages of 9 and 16. She and her husband have been serious marital difficulties. He drinks heavily and is physically and verbally abusive to her and the children. Although she is seeing a marriage counselor, her spouse refuses to participate.

One of the M children is brain-damaged, very hard to handle at home, and attends special classes in school. Except for a neighbor who has cared for the children occasionally, the family has no friends in the community. Mrs. M. is not a very stable person, herself, is emotionally disturbed and depressed.

Last month the M's had a serious battle. She called the police but he disappeared before they arrived. Later that evening he set the house afire and it burned to the ground.

Two of Mrs. M's children are staying with the neighbor temporarily; Mrs. M. and the three younger children are living in a motel at the expense of the welfare department. They must eat all their meals at restaurants since there are no cooking facilities in the motel. The neighbor is pressing Mrs. M. to take the two older children, too, because they present discipline problems.

Mrs. M. feels this won't be a happy Thanksgiving Day. Mr. M., arrested on assault and battery and arson charges, is in the Barnstable House of Correction awaiting trial.

On this Thanksgiving Day, money may be tight, our clothes may not be as stylish as we might wish, our ability to plan a lavish Christmas next month may be curtailed, but unless you're Gramma B., Widow G., or Mrs. M., you really have a great deal to be thankful for.

And, should you be thinking as you read these short case histories that these are isolated situations, be assured they are not. Welfare workers, social workers at various agencies who try to help people solve problems, counselors at the Needy Fund Office, others attempting to aid the poor and troubled among us, can all tell you there are literally hundreds of cases similar to these.

As bad as these situations seem, they're not the worst to be found; these are true stories and they are typical. Each case has its own unique details, of course. These are families in crisis. These cases weren't taken from records in a distant city; these people live on Cape Cod.

If you think you've nothing to be thankful for, put yourself in one of these situations. Try to imagine how you'd handle their problems. What would you do?

Then look around you and think of all the good things you've been blessed with. And be thankful.