

VILLAGE VIEW

ANDREA LEONARD

It's only a chair. Not an antique, not new, not a reproduction of a classic style, not even a beautiful chair; it's just a nice chair that holds me comfortably while I read in the evening, when friends drop in for an afternoon visit, or when I'm doing needlepoint or mending socks.

It's a chair that has taken a certain amount of abuse over the past fifteen years. Probably between forty to sixty hours a week someone's in it. Some time ago, maybe three or four years, in a moment of wild extravagance, I decided it deserved reconditioning and reupholstering. Decision reached, I called the man, chose fabric, and he took my chair away for refurbishing. He returned a handsome piece of furniture, much too good for continuous use and abuse.

But I did love that chair. The solution was simple: get another just like it and use them both so neither would wear out so quickly. Revisiting the store where I'd bought my chair, I was delighted to find they still carried the item. The same style and shape was available. Only the fabric appeared to have changed. And, of course, the price. I ordered the new chair; in good time, it arrived. Now I had a pair of chairs I could call "mine."

Time passed. I used both chairs. To make sure neither got more wear, I alternated them in my favorite corner, much as good housewives turn mattresses. And yet, no matter how frequently I switched them, I found myself choosing to sit in the older one more often. It wasn't long before I caught myself and made a conscious effort to use the newer chair. After another while, I realized the older chair was really more comfortable.

Not only was it more comfortable, it was quiet and the newer chair was noisy. It squeaked. When I sat down in it or stood up, whenever I changed position, it squeaked. What's with this chair, anyhow?

It looks the same, it's the same size and shape, it's equally as attractive to look at. But it feels different, and it sounds different.

How can two chairs, made by the same manufacturer and sold by the same store, as identical to one another as two chairs can be, be so different? Wouldn't you think, if there were a difference, that perhaps a new chair would be the one of choice for comfort and 'sitability,' rather than an older reupholstered one? And would you think a new chair would squeak?

All this combines to make me ask myself if it isn't I, rather than the chair, that's out of order. I admit to a strong tendency to develop affection for things that have been around a long time.

Thinking back, I remember other furniture I've grown fond of: the first was a bed, the first bed I used after graduating from a crib. Of course I was quite young when this incident took place; perhaps 11 or 12. I'd been sleeping in my bed for less than a decade, but at that age, it was almost all my life.

My parents had agreed to get me a new bed and Mother took me with her to make the choice. We found a nice maple bedstead with wooden pineapples carved at the tops of its four posts. The order was placed and included a new box spring and innerspring mattress; delivery was scheduled within the week. We also picked out a flower-patterned candlewick spread.

The night before my new bed was due to arrive, I snuggled down into my old bed for the last time, filled with excitement and anticipation about how beautiful my room would look with the new bed.

Thinking of the new reminded me of the coming separation from the little old bed I'd called mine since I could remember. Its slightly sagging flat spring and its somewhat humped and lumped mattress suddenly seemed disproportionately dear. I thought of all the nights of childhood it had cradled me, warm and safe, while I slept away the darkneses of childhood. I reviewed all the times this bed had proved a snug haven where, like all children, I dreamed my dreams, good and bad, watched through the windows the star-shine and the moonlight fall across my pillow. When I finally fell asleep, a sadness filled my heart.

Next day, of course, when my new bed came, I couldn't wait to get the old one apart, the new one together, made up, and covered with the new spread. And my room was enhanced by the change.

Changing from the known to the new and strange still disturbs me. When changes come to Osterville (as they seem to more and more often recently), I resent them. There is strong desire within me to maintain the status quo. As houses give way to new buildings, as bulldozers rip into hillsides, as heaps of yellow sand rise next to cellar holes where new construction will soon replace treed lots of land or green open spaces, I yearn for the village scenery to stay as I've always known it.

In the years since the day my first bed was replaced, I've exchanged many old things for new: old shoes, old clothes, worn-out furniture; but seldom have I parted with the old without a pang, however suppressed. Since college days, I've moved a dozen times. Always, on the last night in the place I'm about to leave, I am overwhelmed with memories of the good times enjoyed inside those walls. Departing is a wrench; a feeling of being uprooted, no matter how enthusiastic I may be about transplanting myself to a new location.

If it weren't for the squeaks of the newer chair, I could quite easily convince myself that the difference between the two is no more than a matter of my personal penchant for the old, but in this instance I haven't retired the favorite. The known and the familiar is right here in the same room and it's the one I prefer.

Comparison is easy. Sitting in one isn't like sitting in the other. It's not a matter of having given up one for the other; quite the contrary.

It's only a chair. Why, then, does it possess the capacity to give ease its counterpart sadly lacks the ability to impart?