

# VILLAGE VIEW

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VILLAGE ADVERTISER November 4, 1982

It was still pitch dark when I awoke the other morning. Too early to get up. What, I wondered, had disturbed me? I was aware of an unfamiliar feeling of anxiety and concern. And then I remembered. A dream had brought me to the surface of consciousness. I had just wakened from a dream. I dreamed it snowed.

That my dream will come true, there's no doubt. That the dream is a forecast of the future, however, doesn't make me a seer. I make no claim to prescience; instead, I know the dream was based on past experience. Winter is on its way and winter brings snows. Before the first flakes descend on Cape Cod, I expect to be heading south for the winter.

As preparations get under way for the trip, I find myself treasuring the minutiae of home. Each familiar sign of seasonal change, every view through my windows as I go about my daily tasks, every single autumn leaf floating gently to earth seems particularly lovely. The knowledge I'll soon be where trees stay green year round gives special savor to the changing colors of fall.

Outside the garden door, an enormous thick-bodied orange spider spins a web, a new one every day. Lit by the afternoon sun, the web is a tracery of lace against the blue October sky; by morning the web has disintegrated, shredded by winds or showers of night. The spider rebuilds its web again and again. Will the spinner of webs survive the winter snows?

To the birdbaths come all the neighborhood's feathered creatures. Even, one morning, a crow. In its beak the great black bird carried a desiccated morsel of food; after dropping its bite into the shallow pool, the crow stood, knee-deep, waiting for the pellet to absorb water. Retrieving its softened prize, the bird spread its huge inky wings and flew to the pine tree-top.

Jays, chickadees, goldfinches, and tufted titmice are regular visitors, of course. While over on the Vineyard this summer I learned these last-named friendly little fellows are never seen on the island. They don't fly over water, someone said, and apparently none have been imported from the mainland. Surprising, I'd judge the habitat ideal for them.

When on Martha's Vineyard I first heard of Joshua Slocum, the first person ever to sail, solo, around the world. His story was new to me, his name unfamiliar. Upon coming home I found his biography at the library. Written by his son, Victor, his story of a man with a dream and the determination to make reality of fantasy is inspirational. It might make pleasant reading some snowy winter's night.

At first light every morning I check my concrete doorstep; it's one of those pre-cast slabs of cement. The surface usually appears smooth and unmarked, but experience has taught me the step possesses unusual talents. It can forecast the day's weather.

A leaf-shaped section of the top must have been of a different consistency when the mix was poured. This part looks wet when it's going to rain, even though the rest of the surface appears perfectly dry. Conversely, even though the step is wet with rain, if the section looks dry, the sun will shine before noontime.

Under the doorstep, all summer long, lives a chipmunk who relishes acorns. The bright-eyed little rodent leaves gnawed evidence of his meals in littered debris atop the step, morning, noon and night. Where does the chipmunk go, come winter? Perhaps he hibernates in a cozy nest under the concrete step.

"What will you do," I've been asked, "with your house plants when you leave?" A problem. The cyclamen, now beginning its third year of prolific bloom, will find a home in a sunny south window of a cool bedroom not far from my own home. Perhaps a neighbor will enjoy boarding the African violets and watching their blossoms appear in profusion.

A dear friend who is a gourmet cook has promised to welcome the potted rosemary. As for the rest of the herbs, tarragon will winter over in the garden; thyme and chives will also survive freezes, their roots protected by patio bricks along the garden path. At least one aloe vera will return to its native clime and become a permanent resident there.

Perhaps some kind soul will accept the begonias, just for their cheerfulness. White, pink and red, they require only a square of sunshine and regular watering; in return they bloom brightly all winter long. Whenever they get leggy, I shear them back to three or four inches and am rewarded with new masses of flowers a few weeks later. If nobody wants them, they'll end up in the compost because nothing but a warm indoor temperature will save them, once winter comes.

Putting the gardens to bed each fall is rather like putting the period at the end of the last sentence in the final paragraph of one of my Village Views. All the rich compost comes out of the bin; a layer of seaweed brought from the beach goes on the gardens as soon as the tomato plants finish producing their succulent scarlet fruits; over the seaweed go several inches of compost from the base of the bin. The top layer, only half-rotted, starts a new batch for next year's supply. By next fall, there'll be a full bin, ready for blanketing the garden once more.

Meat scraps and bones are the only kitchen wastes that don't end up in the compost. Those I deposit on a big pine stump out back. As I leave them I holler to invisible but alert sentries patrolling in overhead boughs. "Hey, Crows," I hail, "Come on, Crows." Within minutes after I leave, the flock converges to enjoy the treats. No scraps, no litter, no mess do they leave; not the tiniest edible shred.

Buttoning up and battening down to leave is a matter of innumerable lists. Notify plumbers, post office, trash collector, electric, phone and water companies. File an absentee ballot. Bring in hoses, dispose of stuff saved because it might come in handy some day, scrub and store the bird baths.

There's one tremendous plus to all this. It forces me to discipline my penchant for collecting useless paraphernalia. Astonishing how much clutter gathers. Even more astonishing is how I manage, without it all, once it's discarded. Never miss it.

Finally, the day of leaving will dawn and with loving looks at home, a swift turn of the key, and an early morning start, I'll drive out of Osterville, up the mid-Cape, over the Canal, onto Interstate 95, and head south.

Yes, it's a wrench.

If I don't go, though, you know what will happen? One morning I'll waken too early to get up and wonder what disturbed me. I'll have an unfamiliar feeling of anxiety and concern. And the world will be wrapped in muffled quiet that means only one thing.

When I look out the window, I'll see snow. And it won't be dream.