

# village view

by Andrea Leonard

"Cynic," he said, "you're too much of a cynic." He's right. I am. But a strange sort of cynic who's still twitching, since I've an underlying conviction we'll really end up "muddling through somehow" in spite of ourselves and our own stupidities.

Underneath it all, I still believe in the goodness of people. In fact, if you were to make a fair comparison between him and me, you might find he's the greater cynic, because he doesn't have the dreams, never did have the dreams, I started out with.

The conversation began when he wondered what sort of column I'd write this year for Thanksgiving. My own feeling at the time was we haven't such an awful lot to be thankful for.

I confess I'm still smarting from the defeats of November 2nd. We lost the bottle bill. That's the biggest disaster of them all. If only we'd won the bottle bill ...

Lousy loser. Always was.

This same fellow, before the elections, wasn't sure he'd support the bottle bill. "There's a lot of litter other than bottles and cans," says he. "Sure," I countered. "Would you walk around the block with me and you pick up the bottles and cans and I'll pick up the rest, and see who's got the most when we get back?"

Wasn't interested. Don't blame him.

So when it came to talk of Thanksgiving, I asked him what he thought he had to be thankful for.

"Technology."

Oh, you can't be serious ... but he was. "There's a calculator on my desk that costs under \$20, and it can do things it would take me a week to figure out with pencil and paper."

But, but, but ... hey, man, I got a print-out notice from my bank that read "I know it's easy to forget ... you've neglected to pay \$.01 on your mortgage." That kind of technology? Outrageous waste of 13 cents - even if it were true, which it wasn't.

"Don't you see, it's cheaper," he tells me, "to send that than to correct the error any other way? It's the computer's way of making a correction."

I'm still outraged. Doubts cloud my mind about the capability of the bank's computers to cope with the complexity of my simple mortgage. It's run for nearly fifteen years and only since everything was computerized has there been a mix-up.

Must the computer mail such notices, notices that place the blame on the customer, when the error is "in the house"? It has to be in the house since the bank is empowered to instamatically and automatically deduct from my account whatever figure is proper to pay my mortgage.

The thing that distresses me is that the bank's correction makes me appear to be the guilty party, when all the error is the bank's.

Their message is that I'm to blame, I'm responsible. I've not met my obligation. This is how modern technology corrects a one-cent error.

To me, this is an outrage.

To the computer this is a correcting entry.

And to the person with whom I was speaking, this method of adjustment made sense.

The most upsetting part was that I couldn't find words to explain to the man why I rejected his viewpoint.

That evening, however, in the November 22 U.S. News and World Report, I read an interview with Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, husband of Queen Elizabeth II.

He said it for me; he explained why I'm not thankful for modern technology.

The interviewer queries: In the past you've talked about human, ethical and moral values becoming more important than simply turning out more and better products for a consumer society. What are the values you find people concerned about, and what are they doing to make them an integral part of their lives?

Prince Philip says, "My impression is that political and economic theorists are so awed by the achievements of modern technology that they make the mistake of assuming that human organizations can be made to function as efficiently and reliably as a machine.

"They make the assumption that it is only necessary to establish a rational management structure with effective

power and all will be well. When they are inevitably disappointed they assume that the mistake lies in the lack of power to control, so they apply more controls and are amazed to find things get worse.

"The crux of the whole thing is not an understanding of machine technology, but a sympathetic and realistic understanding of human nature."

Prince Philip continues that he suspects "a great number of people value the opportunity to be self-reliant, to feel responsible for the upbringing and development of their children, and to feel that their own efforts will enable them to provide for their health and old age.

"They want to live in a law-abiding, fair and decent society, and they want to make a useful contribution to their community in one form or another."

This Thanksgiving I shall be thankful for the insight and understanding that Prince Philip's words display. It is good to realize there's a thoughtful and articulate person amongst the leaders of the world who is so closely in touch with the way people feel.

His interpretation of how people are reacting to our modern technological wonders defines precisely why I was outraged by the bank's communique, and why I rejected the suggestion that we should be thankful for technology.

"Democracy," says the Duke of Edinburgh, "can only flourish in a free society." He's quoting someone, I think; and he goes on to say, "Freedom in this sense means freedom from fear, freedom of choice, and freedom to succeed."

"That - it seems to me - is what's denied us today. Those of us willing to work and able to succeed are denied success by the cost of supporting the society to which we belong.

"Personal freedom in a democratic system no longer provides human satisfaction and social harmony, since the cost of productivity are greater than the rewards."

It takes a great deal of courage to express these ideas when the majority of people are worshipping at the feet of technology.

"Man has discovered," Prince Philip asserts, "how to make and control the most complicated machinery, but he has yet to improve his self-control and his understanding of his

own human nature."

Our Pilgrim Fathers, in whose memory we celebrate this holiday and who celebrated it themselves because they had left England and survived their first year in the New World, would wonder at an expression of gratitude to His Royal Highness.

Those people, however, were the sort who would understand my reasons if they were living in today's world of modern technology.

HAVE A HAPPY THANKSGIVING