

# VILLAGE VIEW

ANDREA LEONARD

Sometime in the misty past I received the impression it wasn't big problems in life that proved hardest to bear, but little ones. Niggling, nagging, recurring incidents wear us down; repeated small annoyances eventually lead to outbursts of temper and flaring violence.

In family relationships, it's not the obvious and important difficulties posed by too small a house, insufficient income or physical discomforts that divide. It's the nailbiter's constant gnawing at his fingertips that embarrasses, the sight of the thumb-sucker's protruding upper teeth or macerated digit that disgusts, the knuckle-cracker's clicking and crunching that drive his family to distraction.

In a marriage, it's not decisions about where the family lives or how to furnish the living room or whether to install a dishwasher that bring it to the verge of divorce. Rather, it's neglect, day-after-day, to replace the toothpaste cap, clean the ring from the tub after a bath, toss soiled clothing into the hamper instead of leaving it in a heap on the floor, or the tendency of one spouse to procrastinate or the other to plan ahead. (Either can be as irritating to the one of the opposite persuasion.)

In society, especially today, I find myself irritated by a plethora of "little things". They loom important, taken together, even though they may be insignificant in themselves, taken one-by-one.

For instance, there's the rebate. SALE, the advertisement says. SAVE \$12. Then you read the fine print. A \$40 item is offered, on sale, for \$33. After you buy it and pay \$33 plus 5% sales tax, you can send to the manufacturer and get a \$5 rebate. But you paid sales tax on \$33 instead of \$28. You've been had. Why can't it be sold for \$28, to start with?

On a \$40 item selling for \$33 instead of \$28, the difference in sales tax is only \$.25. But on a big-ticket item, like an automobile, it's considerably greater.

A \$6,000 car carries a sales tax of \$300. If you get a rebate of \$500 after your purchase, you're out \$25 in taxes. In addition, if you buy the car on time with \$3,000 down, the loan is on the full amount; you pay interest on the amount of the rebate as well as the higher sales tax, for the next 36 months.

The rebate, then, is nothing but a carrot hung before the rabbit, and you're the dumb bunny. The rabbit would get a better carrot if the car had a sales price of \$5,500.

These insidious little annoyances add up to big dollars out of collective pockets of Americans. Think how much additional sales tax is collected as a result of this mathematical mumbo-jumbo. It almost seems as though the automobile industry is in cahoots with the sales tax collectors. It leaves us wondering what sort of deal they've cooked up between them for an equalizing pay-off.

Robbery is what it is. I wouldn't take kindly to some thug removing \$25 from my wallet at gunpoint; why should the car industry, the loan sharks, and the Commonwealth be empowered to commit the same crime and leave me not only \$25 poorer, but helpless to protect myself?

Must we cooperate in our own fleecing?

That's just one example; others are constantly bedeviling us, and on such a huge scale, at every level of government and business, that the individual consumer-taxpayer is overwhelmed (as he's supposed to be).

Federal tax credits are available to those who install certain energy-saving devices in their homes; state tax credits have also been legislated. These, however, can't be applied to the remainder of costs after the federal credits are taken. The state tax credit, then, is negated when the federal tax credit is used. It's a subterfuge. The taxpayer reads credits are allowed and feels satisfied; only when he attempts to apply them to reduce his taxes does he discover he's been duped.

Repeatedly we hear promises that newly-elected Presidents or governors will work to reorganize government bureaucracies for greater economy. We seem infallibly trusting and incredibly naive; mostly, though, we're just hopeful.

"Surely," we assure ourselves, "the time has come when it's self-evident something's got to be done because things are going right down the drain now. And these intelligent, articulate and dedicated people we're voting for have the power and the brains to do what's necessary. They recognize the dangers inherent in traveling the same road we've traveled in the past. They appreciate it's vital to the nation's continued existence to curb government spending, waste and inefficiency." So we vote for them.

Then we discover the President's advisory commission has been persuaded by the powerful bureaucracy (dedicated primarily to maintaining itself) that step-pay-increases for federal employees shouldn't be subjected to inflation guidelines.

And we learn the same federal bureaucracy has influenced the Merit System Protection Board to throw out regulations that would allow government employees to be fired for "unacceptable performance."

Should we have the temerity to investigate, we can learn the Civil Service Reform Act has been emasculated by a report from the Office of Management and Budget concluding that only a few thousand jobs could be moved to field locations without "undue cost and disruption." Therefore, the bureaucracy further protects itself, continues to grow, and continues to cost more and more money.

On all sides we feel threatened. We have no control over international developments or national waste or decisions made for us that affect the lives of every American. Those decisions are made by people who seem motivated only by their own self-interest rather than by what's best for the nation's citizens.

Our purchasing power is eroded. Our self-defense systems are destroyed. Our military capacity is a joke. The Department of Energy turns its back on solar energy development leaving the consumer to find his way through the maze of proliferating commercial solar equipment.

Industrial giants pay lip-service to alternate energy development and attempt to convince us "they're trying." When that doesn't wash with the American public, they attempt to sell us the idea they should be exempt from regulation so they can plow back their profits into production. So where do they plow their profits? Back into exploration for fossil fuels.

Yes, it's little things that are hard to bear. We hear of outbursts of temper leading to mindless and violent attacks by motorists on other motorists. We hear of fights erupting at sporting events. Isn't anyone paying attention to pent-up furies, steaming angers and explosive emotions of Americans? Doesn't anyone listen?

If someone doesn't, and soon, a lot of little people are going to be badly hurt.