

village view

by Andrea Leonard

Do you sometimes wonder if you've really got anything to be thankful for?

Do you feel the world's in such a sorry state we probably won't ever be able to straighten it out?

Do you think the economy is so messed up you'll be lucky to keep house and home together?

Are you concerned about the population explosion, our natural environment, taxes, what kids learn in school these days, crime rates, inflation, the energy crisis, atomic warfare, water shortages, air pollution, and what to do with nuclear wastes?

With all these things to worry about, what have we got to be thankful for? It's right and proper, of course, to worry about things we can change, just as it's right and proper to do all we can to improve them.

And we can. What's more, we have. For this, we can be thankful. During the past decade many things have been accomplished to make a better world.

Our economy isn't booming, but it's better than it was three years ago. The population growth rate is beginning to slow in many countries of the world, and the necessity to control it is being recognized by more and more emerging nations.

Famines may occur, wars will be fought, things will change because of food shortages. Nations will be on the march to acquire more land; death, destruction and disease are inevitably a part of the future for large numbers of people living on our planet.

The inexorable hunger for space and land could even seriously affect citizens of the United States in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, the problem is soluble and reality will force adoption of strong measures to control birth rates. And in time the pressures will ease.

Ecologists and environmentalists have successfully made us all aware of the importance of preserving our natural surroundings, changing those conditions that were destroying the balance of nature, and taking concerted steps to prevent more environmental deterioration.

Rivers are cleaner and fishes are returning to their old spawning grounds; when an oil tanker breaks up at sea, it makes headlines around the world, and for months afterwards, there's a spontaneous concern for cleaning up, fixing responsibility, and preventing another such accident.

People today know it matters and will join together to take the actions necessary to keep the world livable. Groups have accomplished what appeared to be impossible, only a few years ago. And groups are made up of individuals dedi-

cated to doing the job.

We protect our wetlands, control air pollution, meet much stricter water-pollution-control regulations. To accomplish these goals, it's been necessary to pass laws, laws which can be enforced.

A few individuals have resisted these laws, putting their own self-interest ahead of that of the nation, the world. In most instances, they've been out-shouted and out-voted by the overwhelming majority. Protective legislation now exists and regulations are being enforced. We can breathe easier but we can't relax our vigilance.

Taxes continue to rise and inflation, the hidden taxation, continues to erode our buying power. And yet, people aren't as badly off as it sometimes appears.

Sometimes we look back at the old days and remember only the good things about that time of our lives. That's nostalgia; it's pleasant to recall happy experiences of the past. Nature's made us in such a way we forget the unpleasanties and remember the joys.

Some factual comparisons, however, are enlightening; fifty years ago the average factory worker labored 41-½ weeks to earn the price of a new car. Today, 26-½ weeks of work produces that much income. He could earn enough in six weeks to purchase steamship fare between New York and Europe; today he can do it in half the time.

To buy a vacuum cleaner, a person labored 59-½ hours; now it takes only 13-½ hours of work.

Food prices, too, have decreased comparatively. Half a century ago it took 49 minutes of labor to buy a dozen oranges; now, only 19 minutes. Milk cost 31 minutes per half gallon; today, 12 minutes. Butter went by the pound at 57 minutes of work; at today's price, 15 minutes will do it.

The source of this data are the U.S. Departments of Labor and Health, Education, and Welfare, and various industry sources compiled from 1975 data.

Nationally, schools have responded to the dissatisfactions parents and employers were expressing about educational standards. By and large, children in school today are learning more of the basics than students did ten years ago.

While crime rates are still distressingly high, they have dropped in the past year. Our efforts to bring them lower are beginning to pay off; in state after state legislation is being proposed to improve court systems, prisons, youth programs for delinquent juveniles. We've still a long way to go, but life isn't a television show where problems are solved every half hour.

It takes time, work, thought, and patience. And vigilance. When we relax and feel everything is going to be all right, after all, things start falling apart again. We can be thankful there are still millions of people among us who remain watchful and ready to bolster the efforts should they show signs of faltering.

The energy crisis is an area where more people are needed to bend every effort to find solutions. Many more are

working at it today than were four years ago; their forces will be joined by others, tomorrow, and still others, the day after that. Where a vacuum exists, there's always a rush to fill it. It's one of the immutable laws of physics.

Threats of water shortages are based on reality; threats of atomic warfare aren't nightmares that will end when we waken in the morning; disposing of nuclear wastes will continue to plague mankind for centuries to come.

The world of Shangri-La will never be within the reach of man; it's unrealistic to expect it. There'll always be problems, worries, dissatisfactions, distresses. Man is imperfect; our world is imperfect. Our efforts to improve it give purpose to life. The smallest contribution to that end is worth the effort. The longest voyage begins with a single step.

As Thanksgiving Day approaches, arrives, and passes into oblivion, look back a few years and get some perspective; measure against 1967 or '68 where and what we are today.

Doing that, we have much to be thankful for. It's not been an easy battle; the battles to come won't be easy either. We've made visible progress, however; we've proven ourselves able, as a heterogeneous mass of people, to communicate our concerns, beliefs and desires to our legislators. In many instances, they, in turn, have responded and given us, often in the face of tremendous lobbying pressures, much of what we've asked of them.

We now have many needed tools to protect the world in which we live, the world where our children will grow up and live their own lives. As time goes on, we will have more such tools; it's up to us to use them wisely and teach coming generations to use them well and work for more.

In addition to the personal gratifications of family relationships, we have much to appreciate on this holiday, and in future years, if we continue to be alert, caring and concerned, we shall have more reason to be thankful.