

VILLAGE VIEW

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Occasional, regular, or just-once-in-a-while readers of this column often ask, "How do you find things to write about?" That's seldom a problem; all of us are surrounded during every waking moment of our lives with things worthy of more of our attention. Most of us, including me, know so little about ourselves and our environment that we could be described accurately as "abysmally ignorant."

The problem is not finding something to write about; it's deciding which. It would be fun to write about the history of glass-making, or the invention of the wheel. Or to trace a world-wide use of such a simple thing as stairs.

Such an article might begin with the pyramids in Egypt, tell how they were built, and give a view of the interior of a pharaoh's tomb. I could recount climbing, on all fours, to the pinnacle of a pyramid, from inside; of the motionless air deep in the central part of the mass of stone; of the sensation of impending doom that is almost overwhelming. It's no place for a claustrophobic, believe me.

The path would lead, eventually, to memories of climbing the ramps and steps of the Provincetown Monument to reach its observation platform; included would be the great rotunda of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, and that city's Spanish steps, as well as ascending to the Parthenon in the old city of Athens under a full moon. It might culminate with elevators and escalators.

If you've followed this far, you understand why I say we're ignorant. We use steps and stairs dozens of times a day without ever thinking about them, without questioning the obvious, without wondering when the first street curb was made, and how and when the technique spread to cities and towns throughout the world. Nor do I know any more about it than you do.

Recently there has been much publicity about wasting our water supplies, air pollution, acid rain that destroys life in lakes and ponds, and the alarming reduction in the amount of acreage devoted to farming. I read a short time ago that prior to WWII, Cape Cod produced and sent to Boston and Providence markets 90% of the farm produce sold in those cities. Today, only 40 years later, 90% of the farm produce consumed on Cape Cod reaches us through those cities.

A study of water, ways we treat it unwisely, ways we waste it, what we may face if we don't begin to take better care of it, could include an exploration of historic examples of irrigation systems in heavily populated countries like the Japanese archipelago; in India where rice, the staple grain, must grow in flooded fields; and how we, in this country, dam powerful rivers and divert waters from one section to others.

Salt-intrusion on seacoasts, the effects of sewerage waste water, de-salinization of seawater, and ways rain water is conserved on Caribbean, Greek, and other islands where ground water supplies are non-existent, could provide enough material for a book.

Entire cities, in some parts of the world, stand abandoned because water supplies are depleted entirely; the streets are vacant except for tourists who visit to admire the architecture and observe the dry fountains, the baked garden-plots, the empty rooms of buildings sprawling over acres of land, all unusable because there is no water.

Although I know of these things, I am ignorant of solutions. Pure air and water and wise use of land are subjects about which I hold opinions; but until my massive ignorance is replaced with intelligent recognition and reasoned ways to protect these basic resources, opinions can only raise questions, not supply answers. Answers, ultimately, lie with an informed, aroused, and caring society.

And as long as society includes a majority of people who don't care about air, water, and land uses unless their own immediate needs are threatened, the purity of air and water and the arable food-producing land are in jeopardy. By the time such individuals recognize the dangers, the damage may well be irreversible.

Closer to home, I might write of Osterville's parking situation. Specifically, the three parking spaces in front of the post office concern me. As often as not, especially during the summer season, these three spaces are taken by people visiting the library, shopping at specialty shops nearby, or doing their banking.

The time it takes to deposit a handful of letters in the collection box, or to dash inside, open a mailbox, and retrieve a bundle of mail, is approximately one minute. The posted time limit is ten minutes. The three parking spaces would be almost adequate if used exclusively by those with an errand in the post office.

One police officer patrols the entire village center; when

his rounds take him to the corner of Viano Avenue and Bay Road, he warns postal patrons not to park next to the orange-painted curb or across the street between the No Parking signs. When that officer is walking his beat at the opposite end of town, however, those spaces are illegally used. There is no alternative during any of the hours the post office is open.

To maintain Osterville's welcoming image, the officer makes every effort to overlook the posted time limit. I have spoken to him about this; I have sat across the street for 20 minutes while three empty cars sat in those spaces; I have watched him cross the street to the library and warn patrons there that their parking time has expired. But tickets were not written. Were I to ignore his warning and to park against the orange curb, I'm sure I'd receive a ticket forthwith. And I should. But so should the cars monopolizing the spaces intended for postal patron use.

The parking problem in Osterville has become so severe that at least one person who requires daily medication was found without it for two days when no space to park a car was to be found within walking distance of the drug store. Not in front; not in back; not behind House and Garden.

I'm not an advocate of covering more acreage with macadam for parking cars. I do feel that parking should be limited and time periods enforced. Strict adherence to limits would go a long way toward solving the parking problem in our village. This can be achieved through cooperation among residents and summer visitors, alike, or by having violators discover overtime parking means a ticket.

Should you wonder how thoughts of a pharaoh's tomb beneath an Egyptian pyramid can lead me to the curb at Osterville's post office, consider the complexity of the human brain. A curb is but one step; a pyramid contains thousands. Is that so far-fetched, after all?

And, if our careless use of air, water, and land seems remote from ancient abandoned cities of Asia, recall what's behind those empty streets and buildings. No water. Can you imagine life continuing without water? Or fresh air? Or productive farms? Can you imagine lakes and ponds lying lifeless under the benign sunshine because their waters are too acid to permit fishes, frogs, and turtles to survive?

That has already happened to Barnstable's own Hathaway Pond off Phinney's Lane. Which Cape Cod pond will be the next to die?

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