

# village view

by Andrea Leonard

It's not 'til winter arrives - as it does in these parts every year about this time -- we quite believe it can be as cold, as snowy, as miserable, and as beautiful to look at as it really is.

Early in December of '77 we waked to our first cold snap, a foretaste of things to come. Thermometers stood in the single numbers. The wind, sharp as a blade, rattled barren tree twigs, rustled through sere oak leaves clinging to grey branch tips, and -- whetted by the sub-freezing cold -- seemed to cut through the warmest clothing and chill our very bones.

The wind and cold slithered through the smallest cranies, like a pair of mice flattening themselves to slip through the narrowest slits, and entered our houses, stealing warmth and comfort as silently as mice steal crumbs and orts.

Although the storm sash were all firmly in place, windows and doorframes let in the cold; we scouted around for those sticky twists of weatherstripping and filled every crack to be found.

Finding them is easy once the temperature drops and the wind blows. You need but to hold your hand a few inches from door and window frames; you can feel the wind forcing the cold into the house.

And weatherstripping helps. Other helps are available too. You can pull the shades down as soon as the sun drops low in the west each afternoon. You can close draperies to provide another layer of insulation.

If your favorite chair stands close to an outside wall, moving it to another part of the room may eliminate that shivery feeling that makes you chilly while you sit sewing and reading.

Why do you feel colder sitting near an outside wall when the room temperature is equally high in both places? The outer walls of the house are constantly being cooled by the wind and low temperatures. The cold sucks out the house heat like a giant sponge, drawing it away from the interior, from your chair, from your body. You'll remain comfortable inside the house, even though your thermostat is set below 70°, if your chair is placed on an interior wall.

Almost invariably our coldest winter winds come from the north and northwest. It's a good idea to line those walls with insulating furniture if you can. Bookfilled shelves placed against those walls help keep your house warm.

If your kitchen faces north or west, cupboards built on outside walls provide dead-air space and conserve heat. Plates from those cupboards will be icy cold and need warming before you serve hot food on them, but forming the habit of removing the plates from the cupboard and permitting them to warm up in your cozy kitchen while you prepare meals will pay off in fuel savings.

For this to help, of course, you'll have to keep those cupboard doors tightly shut.

Turning off radiators in rooms you seldom use and closing the doors to those rooms will conserve heat as well. Trees, especially evergreens, growing on the north and west sides of your house will act as a windbreak, a buffer against the worst of winter's blasts.

Just as cupboards and bookcases provide protection from the cold, closets accomplish the same purpose. If I were to build another house, someday, I'd plan to "double" the north walls, wherever possible, with closets, cupboards and bookcases. The house would be warmer and fuel bills lower.

Banking the foundation with pineneedles is an old-fashioned Yankee heat saver. I've even heard of people collecting those plastic egg cartons to place around the perimeter of their foundations, and then covering them with pine-needles. The resulting dead-air spaces save heat; heat escapes readily where the foundation is exposed. Concrete and cement aren't good insulating materials.

You can verify this by looking along your foundation after a snowstorm. you'll see the snow melts quickly all around the edge of your house; foundation heat loss causes that.

Another method of preventing foundation heat-loss is insulating the top of your cellar walls with fibre-glass batts or 6" thick pieces of styrofoam, glued in place. If your basement is finished and panelled, you might check behind the paneling to make sure there's insulation above ground level and extending at least a foot below it.

The earth maintains an even below-ground temperature of 58°; while that's not warm enough for comfort, conserving the natural heat of the earth lowers demands on your heating system.

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Attic insulation in our New England climate should be your first priority if you haven't already made that investment. At least 6" is needed; 8" is better; 12" will pay for itself over the years.

Is it really worthwhile to go to the extra trouble and take these steps to save heat and energy? That depends on what's important to you.

If conserving to help our country solve its energy problems seems a good idea to you, and you're willing to be slightly inconvenienced for the ultimate general good, if you get satisfaction from doing your part, then it's worth it.

If saving money on one expenditure seems to you like getting a pay raise, if it supplies extra dollars for other necessities or even for luxuries you'd otherwise forego, if you get satisfaction from stretching your income and getting the most value from it, then it's worth it.

If, on the other hand, economizing makes you uncomfortable, erodes your self-esteem because playing the role of the Big Spender gives you a sensation of well-being and self-respect, then I guess it's not worth it. People differ; and everyone has a right to his own "kicks".

Will any one of these methods really make a huge difference in your heat bill? Yes; insulating the house will save many dollars over the cost of materials and installation.

Will the other things make much difference? No, not much, taken one by one. Taken together, however, they could have a measurable effect. Small economies do pay off.

The importance of small things has been described many ways and by many people; a fragment of Robert Louis Stevenson's children's poem is one that, for me, is unforgettable and always appropriate.

"Little drops of water, little grains of sand,

Make the mighty ocean and the pleasant land."

Next time you're over at Sandy Neck admiring the view, think about all those drops of water and all those grains of sand.

Fifty cents buys about a gallon of heating oil; a cent's worth is approximately one-sixth of a cup. Those gallons of oil your furnace burns are made up of little drops; those big heat bills you're paying are made up of little pennies.

Every single little thing you do to keep the cold out and the heat you're paying for inside the house saves pennies.

They do count up.