

Seeing the Glass Half Full

In a conversation with friends we agreed that while we knew great numbers of kind, generous, helpful people, the media coverage was dominated by the wild, weird, and wicked. Surely good people abound in every country, state, county and neighborhood but perhaps they are most easily seen in places like Gloucester and Mathews, places that are so small that little behavior goes unnoticed.

Most easily noticed are the good things done by groups of volunteers coming together to work on local projects. In fear of omitting some, I won't attempt a list. However one project is typical: Gloucester Master Gardeners contributed hard, hands-on labor to the development of Woodville Park, a fine addition to the county.

When it comes to the health of the Chesapeake Bay, often the soldiers in the first line of defense are farmers. Pastoral paintings of black and white cows meandering in a placidly flowing stream may be evocative of a simpler age but streams flow into municipal water supplies and cows are not housebroken. Hats off to the Virginia farmers who have taken advantage of the funding available and fenced their cattle out of streams. It is not merely an advantage to the water supply but the cows are healthier, avoiding such expensive to treat problems as warts, foot rot, lameness and illness caused by pathogens in the water.

Those individual gardeners are also Bay heroes who build rain gardens to trap runoff and erect rain barrels to capture water that could flow to ditches to benefit mosquitoes. Another group of unsung heroes are those people who trend toward a plant diet for the sake of the planet and their own health. For statistical backup: it takes 2500 gallons of water to produce one pound of beef. One and a half acres can produce 37,000 pounds of plant-based food but only 375 pounds of meat. Nearly half the water used by Californians is associated with meat and dairy production.

There is little unusual about such figures. What is unusual is our tendency to ignore the environmental cost of what has become an unsustainable way of eating. No, most of us won't become vegans but most of us may moderate the size and frequency of our meat-based meals?

When I was attempting to clean out the garage the other day, as a way to avoid the sun and the weeding, I picked up and put down numerous cans of paint and poisons. Having collection of these things available once or twice a year is not helpful and would it be feasible to have it available monthly? Puttering about in the garage reminded me that the first column I

wrote for the Gazette-Journal was on cleaning out the garage for the January 4, 2001 issue.

This is my last column. Master Gardener Susan Camp will continue this service to gardeners with great competence and enthusiasm. I would like to thank the Gloucester Master Gardeners for giving me this assignment that provided an excuse to visit delightful gardens and meet wonderful gardeners and readers. It has been great fun! I am grateful to Elsa Verbyla for the space in the Gazette-Journal that has allowed me to discuss gardens and their permutations into the wider world. Thank you.

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