

THE NEW YEAR, ONE DAY AT A TIME

The traditional resolutions don't seem to have much power this year, if they ever did, do they? I hope you are clinging to good memories of time with family and friends to help you weather the tragedies that surround us.

Ever since we saw the photograph of the beautiful blue ball taken from space, we have had to rethink our vision of planet Earth. How awestruck the first astronauts were when they saw Earth as a single entity. No longer does a terrifying earthquake happen "over there." There is no over there. Everything that happens happens here on our Earth. It makes us want to live and work and garden in a way that helps, not hurts, this small blue planet.

If you garden on a fairly large scale, you are really farming on a small scale and you may be interested in an article on farm subsidies, which appeared in the November '04 "Bay Journal." As you well know, the health of our beloved Chesapeake Bay does not begin at the water's edge so it is quite appropriate that people interested in the bay are interested in farming practices to the same degree.

The complexities and complaints of federal agriculture programs are beyond the scope of a modest gardening column but of course as taxpayers we have a vested interest in them. As a taxpayer you may be interested that in 1995 the top 10% of subsidy recipients took in 55% of the payments, earning them \$4 billion. By 2002 the top 10% collected 65% earning them a \$7.8 billion slice of the pie.

Overall less than 40% of U.S. farmers grow crops that are eligible for subsidies, but all farmers and ranchers would be eligible for the conservation subsidies based on practices that improve air and water quality. In 2003, 75% of farmers seeking conservation assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program were turned away.

It is extremely difficult to change any program, regardless of merit, once it is ensconced. Such programs develop a life of their own and it is difficult to rethink the purposes and procedures. Difficult, but not impossible.

Since few of us have the power to affect anything, past the quarter-acre we inhabit, we have to try to make a difference in our own neighborhoods. Those efforts will ripple farther than you know. We hope so.

Vaclav Havel, Czech statesman and dramatist, wrote a definition of hope that perhaps was forged in the years he spent as a prisoner of the communist regime.

"Hope is not prognostication. It is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart; it transcends the world that is immediately experienced and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons. Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction

that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.”

For the new year I wish you a small piece of the good earth in which to plant and weed and make beautiful. I wish you faith and love and hope