

Resolutions for personal space, litter

Jan 5, 2014 by Daniel J. Bauer

This is the time of year when people talk, often quite glibly, of New Year's resolutions and new beginnings, both personally and professionally. I am like everyone else on this score.

One of my resolutions relates to a lifestyle issue with which I've long struggled. This sounds suspiciously like a thread of a fairy tale from the play "Into the Woods," I'm afraid, but once upon a time I actually did keep my books and a few personal effects orderly arranged on my bookshelves. I had a couple of requisite tables a step or so away from my desk, upon which I piled unread student homework, sheets of agenda details for meetings, and notes to remind myself of errands or promises I had yet to carry out.

And then The Big Bad Wolf jumped out of nowhere, and . . . no, I cannot blame it on a fairy tale monster.

Somehow, you see, my bookshelves shrunk. I guess I needed a Jack and the Bean Stalk to reach high into the air with shelf upon shelf stretching up into the clouds, some mythical solution like that to organize and store the artifacts of my life.

Before I realized what I was doing, I began stacking books and other paraphernalia of my life on the floor. As the years of writing this column came and went, I accumulated for months at a time stockpiles of old newspapers. Articles that readers sent me in hopes (usually in vain) of prompting topics to write on began to shout for space, too.

So, a New Year's resolution still hovering overhead for me is to literally redo my room. I want to separate the useful from the useless, the keep-able from the toss-able, the lean from the fat. I want a new environment for myself. I want a room that welcomes me as a human being, not as the work-machine and packrat I've largely let myself become.

One reason I am on this jag about simplifying my life and creating a new living space is because of a piece I read in The China Post three days ago about a clean-up project in which students from National Taipei University of Technology got involved in the very first minutes of New Year 2014.

Some fifty NTUT students, clad in work clothes, voluntarily descended into the belly of the Xinyi district in the early hours of the morning on January 1st as part of a garbage collecting team. They picked

up and stored a mountain of junk that revelers had left behind after the big countdown at Taipei 101.

If you happen to like statistics, here is one for you: in the Xinyi district alone, following the fireworks and hoopla there, workers assembled 22 tons of garbage, nearly a third of which was able to be recycled. They did this before the stroke of the bell at 2:30 a.m. Yes, Cinderella did have to move more quickly, but 22 tons of garbage collected in less than 2 ½ hours sounds mighty impressive.

I have a question for the students at NTUT and students everywhere else, as well. Are you equally as vigilant about litter issues at your own school as you may be in volunteer projects for the public?

My campus owes a huge debt to the dedicated maintenance crews that regularly patrol our hallways, classrooms, assembly halls and restrooms to keep them presentable. Nevertheless, with a heavy heart I confess I occasionally refuse to begin class until we "pick up the garbage and make this room a pleasant learning environment," to quote You Know Who.

My name will never appear on the short list for candidates for the Nobel Prize for Keeper of a Neat Room, but I try when possible to pick up and dispose of litter I find in my path on my campus. I am astonished at the carelessness and rank laziness of a handful of students at my university who unabashedly throw candy wrappers, paper cups, plastic bottles and bags, used face masks, "bien dang" boxes and the occasional cigarette butt anywhere they please, but certainly, positively, 100 % absolutely not in a wastebasket.

So, those two challenges loom before us. The first is to design and nurture a humane, life-enhancing personal living environment. The second is to show our care for others by not littering and, even more, by getting rid of litter we may find around us. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

Talking points :

1. This column focuses partly on the importance of keeping a neat and orderly personal living environment. Is it easy or difficult for you to keep your room / rooms neat either at home or in a student dormitory? Are there advantages for you keeping things neat and orderly"?
2. The column compliments students at another university for volunteering to pick up garbage in the Xinyi district after the firework show at Taipei 101. Do you have experience as a volunteer in any project? Describe what volunteering taught you. OR, what might you volunteer for IN THE FUTURE.
3. This column mentions trash and litter at Fu da. Do you notice trash left by students or professors in the hallway or in classrooms? Does litter bother you at Fu da?

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