Editor’s Letter

What’s In Your Notebook?

January 1, 2006 By Angelo Ragaza

I’ve kept a journal since I was a teenager. Now there are volumes and volumes of those black-and-white, wide-ruled notebooks that you can get at every corner pharmacy for 99 cents—the ones with the metric conversion tables and dry and liquid measures on the inside back flap—collecting dust and mildew in boxes in my mother’s garage and in the storage space my boyfriend and I keep in Manhattan. And I have one with me in my office right now, in my Puma bowling bag. I don’t reread these tomes. I hope that when I die, they make a nice, toasty bonfire—some things I don’t want me or anyone else to revisit. Anyway, reading them couldn’t possibly be as rewarding as it has been to write them. Whether it’s elation or fear or frustration actually spilling from my pen, nothing is more freeing than the act of self-expression without fear of judgment.

As my life has grown busier and revolved more and more around words—reading them, editing them, e-mailing them, texting them and, less and less, writing them—my journals have become a hodgepodge of lists. To-do lists. Lists of times it took me to run Central Park.

Accounts of how I spent my money and time and what I ate (don’t ask). Lists of nutty ideas—businesses that should be started, songs that should be composed, short stories and novels that should be written. Someone, in some other life, will actually accomplish these things.

And then, of course, there are the resolutions. Often several at once. But last New Year’s Eve, I started a new kind of list. I don’t know why I did this—I was probably just bored. But rather than listing what I wanted to accomplish in 2005, I began to list what I did accomplish in 2004. I had created two magazine brands, bought an apartment with my boyfriend and produced and recorded a song I wrote. And those were just the “measurable” things—not the intangibles, like learning to judge myself and others less and to laugh more.

Reading that immediately after writing it was like an out-of-body experience. Who had the time—nay, the courage—to get all that done? Certainly not me. But for the first time in years, the New Year wasn’t filled with regret for all the things I had yet to accomplish. I had something solid to celebrate. And I began to feel—by degrees—that I could dream even bigger.

On page 24, we talked to several positive people about their goals and got advice from experts about achieving them. You can also try my exercise, if you haven’t already. You don’t have to list

big things. It could be the time you shared some encouraging words with someone who really needed them. Or the time you dragged yourself to the doctor rather than wait for some physical annoyance to grow into something bigger. Or the time you looked up a support group or a weight-loss program, even if you didn’t go. You looked it up. Don’t make me go there with the old cliché about ripples in a pond. But you catch my drift.

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