

Ring Out the Old, Ring in the New...

Exit 2003, Enter 2004

By Alan Bennett Ilagan

Alan's New Year's Resolutions for 2004

1. I will write more and submit my writing to publishers.
2. I will be a better boyfriend – more patient, more understanding, and more forgiving.
3. I will be nicer to people, no matter how dumb or inane they behave.
4. I will make my parents proud of me.
5. I will organize my “stuff” and get rid of 50% of it. No, 25% of it. At least 10% of it.
6. I will spend less money on clothes and magazines unless I really, really need them.
7. I will stop using my parents' credit card except for emergencies (see above resolution).
8. I will subvert my ego in my artistic endeavors.
9. I will take my Grandma out to dinner at least once a month.
10. I will be less quick to judge or scream or get upset.

My New Year's Resolutions are pretty standard stuff I suppose ~ maybe even unduly dull for anyone else to read. But it's the idea of a new beginning that appeals to many of us and brings about such hopeful intentions and promises. The long-talked-over plans and ideas finally have their moment to shine. Most of the holiday mayhem has concluded, there's no excuse to eat badly or over-indulge in drink, and it's the perfect time to start anew. Our resolutions may differ in detail and design, but in the end it all comes down to this: a resolve to be a better person.

I don't make change-the-world resolutions ~ stop world hunger, control over-population, bring peace to the Middle East ~ because I'm not important enough to bring such a plan to fruition. I'm not the President or the Pope or even a minor celebrity. But I have to believe that if I make myself better, it will somehow affect the world, no matter how small the way. We have to begin somewhere.

Now is also the time we reflect on the past year, and though I don't always like looking back, it's an appropriate time to assess what the hell happened and why. A bit of reflection on the past year is good in order to see where we've come from and where we are headed. Take stock of your life. Are there things you regret, decisions you wish you hadn't made? Instead of dwelling on what might have been or how things didn't work out the way you wanted, think about what you learned and how you changed or grew from the experience. I've had a number of disappointments in these past few months, but none worth mentioning anymore. There are always going to be setbacks and obstacles, and the only thing I can really control is the way in which I deal with them.

On the flip side, it's not always the best idea to rest on your laurels and revel endlessly over success or achievements. I've had my share of those this past year too (I'm not a total loser). Make the most of those moments, but don't get caught up in them. Arrogance and haughtiness are quickly remedied by the universe, and no one tolerates unchecked vanity for very long. It's a difficult balance, and I am still learning.

This is also a time to think about the larger picture, of human society as a whole. The state of the world is indeed cause for worry. I honestly believe we are moving too quickly, advances are being made without the forethought or planning necessary to fully fathom the long-range results. The Internet is spinning wildly out of control. The world population continues to rise exponentially on a planet that can only sustain so many people. Our government is being run by a buffoon, who in turn seems to run much of the world. There is social injustice everywhere – from our own backyards to the furthest reaches of the globe. Almost as soon as the ruling on gay marriage was made in Massachusetts, a proposal to amend the constitution to ban it was issued as well. There are battles yet to be fought, and none look to be easy or quick. And yet we hang on ~ to the hope, to the ideal, to the promise that something better will come ~ something more magical, more colorful and more spectacular. It is a quality unique to humans, and one that we should cherish and honor. A new year has begun ~ let us make the most of it.