

Starting New Year can be like a new journal — if you let it

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I have always thought of New Year's Eve as being a time to let loose — because getting rid of the old and ushering in the new is an idea worth celebrating with a bang.

I was thinking about this business of new starts the other day, and realized I have been having a string of little New Years every year for the last 10 years. Since 1974, I have kept notebooks of thoughts and ideas (hopefully these have translated into stories or articles), and I have also written in these journals the day-to-day events that have made me said, mad or glad.

But I noticed, too, that every time I started a new notebook it was like a brand new start on life. I would begin each journal with new schedules to keep, new resolves to do better, and I would outline new projects to undertake as well as rethink old projects that were left behind.

A New Year is like that — a big New Journal, a magical fresh start that gives us the tabula rasa liberty of seeing ourselves as untarnished and ready to face the world with a whole new schedule. With this, we can accomplish what we've always meant to accomplish in our lives.

But it doesn't take long before the old self settles back in and one resumes his or her old tricks. In reviewing my notebooks, I've no-

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ted that my new schedules last a short time, and worse — I hadn't spent any time thinking why this was so.

As the Christmas season approached this year, I was working on a book project involving adventurers and their adventures — a compilation of interviews I'd done with people such as Jacques Cousteau and Sir Edmund Hillary.

In talking to these people, I realized that the true adventurer has the courage to chart his or her own life and has the strength to remain separate from popular tides of thinking.

When one decides to be an adventurer — or, more correctly, when one learns that he is an adventurer — he has committed himself to trying something new and different, something that has never been done by anyone else, at least not in the same way as it has been done before.

We are reminded of what happened when Christopher Columbus went his own way, in a direction

completely opposite from popular opinion. In so doing, he opened up the entire planet to exploration.

And during the Christmas season just past, we were reminded of what happened when a man, born in a manger and just as human as you or I, lived a life so unwavering in his duty that he changed the thinking of the world.

There is no reason each one of us cannot do likewise — even if it is a simple matter of speaking up like the little girl in the story of the Emperor's New Clothes, calling a situation what it is even though everyone else is going along with it.

Every one of us has a particular courage or talent to exercise, no matter what our subject of interest may be, and every one of us can make a difference in this world with what we do.

The chief stumbling block is to wait for outward circumstances to allow us to do what we want to do, to think what we want to think, to enjoy what we want to enjoy.

Such a stumbling block is making Jan. 1 the starting point. My 10 years' worth of new schedules, I am now beginning to see, have, in fact, been a hindrance rather than a help, because I have been seeing them as something to do later. In this light, I am now re-evaluating the wisdom of the "traditional" New Year's Eve celebration.

We need to be already what we want to become, and there are no old or new years in this process.