



AMY ILLARDO / PHOTONIC / GETTY IMAGES

Resolution SURVEY

Pam Houston rings in 2007
by turning over a new leaf.

DID I MENTION THAT I FEAR THE HOLIDAYS?

It seems like just about this time last year, I was writing about Christmas and my family's all-night drive down I-95 to Florida, my Dad swearing at the bowl games on the radio, my mother sipping straight vodka out of the thermos, and me in the backseat, letting the endless string of South of the Border signs cheer me up as if they were old friends. For many years I have endeavored to get myself to some part of the world where there is no Christmas, which is getting tougher and tougher to find; and sometimes the slightly misconceived versions of the holiday that non-Westerners offer up can be even worse than the genuine article. (If you have ever eaten turkey and stuffing in a Laotian hotel, you know what I mean.)

I try to avoid Christmas because it depresses me. I try to avoid New Year's Eve because so many things about it scare me half to death: drunk people, icy roads (separately and in combination), pointy hats, noisemakers, Dick Clark's face-lifts, eggnog, not having anyone to kiss. Then there are the drunk people, wearing the pointy hats and holding the noisemakers

and wanting to know what your resolutions are, and they won't take "I'm just trying to live through the holiday season" for an answer.

This year I'm going to stay home for the holidays, for what feels to me like a bunch of good reasons (to hang out with my goddaughter Sarah, to play in the snow, to play with my dogs, and to reinvent that which has in the past gotten the better of me). After so many years away, I might be a little rusty, but at least I have a plan. I'm going to take all of the money I would normally spend traveling and find a unique and wonderful gift for each person I love. I'm going to get outside and move my body through the snow for at least three hours a day no matter what the weather is. I am going to read three books, not for work but only for pleasure. On New Year's Eve, I will stay home, watch football, cook dinner, wait for the ball to come down in Times Square on television (10 p.m. mountain standard time), and pretend it's midnight and go to sleep.

And because this is the year to embrace holiday customs, I decide maybe I should give the resolution thing a try. But when I get out my favorite pen and turn to a new page in my notebook, my mind goes completely blank. The intention is there, but my synapses seem to be stuck in their old patterns. After a half hour of staring into space, I e-mail my friend Kate in Sacramento, and she e-mails me right back:

Kate's Resolutions

1. Climb two times a week and be leading outside by June.
2. Call a friend when poetry freaks me out, or call a friend every day.
3. Get up 20 minutes earlier.
BE ON TIME.
4. Make my own fun. No waiting for T. or anyone else. Leave town when I need to.
5. Stop filing my nails so much; they're too short.
6. Have e-mail account open only when actively checking it.
7. Eat better.
8. Write a song.

I'm grateful for the help and a little intimidated. I pick up the pen and try again:

Pam's Resolutions

1. More friends/dogs/sleep. Less work.

This seems to encompass it, but I'm not really satisfied. I call my friend Heather in Seattle, and she offers a less ambitious list of her own:

Heather's Resolutions

1. Quit any job that makes me cry more than twice a year.
2. Spend all my bonuses on art.

I return to my list:

2. Become fluent in French.
3. Go to Tasmania.

I stall out again and decide to conduct a little survey of my friends:

- Leslie in Pasadena resolves to get rid of every single thing in her closet that she shouldn't be wearing and do at least one thing a month that she has never done before.
- Karen in San Francisco resolves to sleep outside at least 50 nights this year and find a way to survive—vegan month—(January) with her boyfriend. (Every other girlfriend has broken up with him during his annual monthlong diet change.)

- Susan in San Jose resolves to swim three times a week, meditate twice a week, and finish writing her novel.

- Sue from Princeton resolves to stop volunteering for every single thing and to start keeping a journal.
- Wendell in Denver resolves to summit at least four more of Colorado's 51 fourteens (she's up to 12, lifetime).
- Gillian in Cincinnati resolves to finally polish all of the silver her grandmother left her in the hopes that it will make her want to have dinner parties.
- Liz in D.C. resolves to start assignments as soon as they are given to her.
- Helen in Portland resolves not to cook one more meal for her boyfriend until he cooks one for her.
- Katherine in the San Juan Islands resolves to be nicer to her sister.
- Kathy in Maine resolves to be calmer.
- Charlotte in Cambridge resolves to floss every day.

Now I'm starting to get the hang of it:

4. Make a long-term relationship work with a man (G.).
5. Yoga! Yoga! Yoga! (Or, if not yoga, at least daily stretching.)
6. Be kinder to every single person I encounter.
7. Get off the damn cell phone.



I decide maybe I should give the resolution thing a try. But when I get out my favorite pen and turn to a new page in my notebook, my mind goes completely blank.

This is fun after all!

8. Kayak the Na Pali Coast.
9. Weekly massage (I know what you are thinking, but in truth you can't afford not to).
10. Backpack at least two more sections of the Colorado Trail.
11. Every now and then just let myself lie on the couch and read.

Oh yeah, I almost forgot:

12. Try not to fear the holidays. [WA](#)