

the resolution revolution

New year revelries may be behind us, but many of us will be reflecting on the year ahead. Have you made some resolutions as you set off on the journey into 2009? How many do you really think you'll achieve? **Heather Barker** suggests a new approach that could lead to meaningful change.

You're a best-selling author (worldwide, not just in island bookstores). You've lost that jiggly 10lbs you lugged around after indulging in one too many servings of baked pork, punch a creme and black cake last Christmas. You're engaged to the beauty you first spied in between the foliage at the jazz festival. And you've purchased that lush piece of land with dizzying views of the coastline. Or you would have if you'd been faithful to a love that often turns sour. Her name? New Year's Resolutions. The "R" word! Unique in its ability to carry us on a journey from smooth to swervy before careening to a halt sometime around February, March if we're lucky. Graveyards burst at the seams with them – long-lost magnanimous dreams, promises and vows we make in sweeping, optimistic (sometimes tipsy) gestures to ourselves, our friends and families. Cold cases they become. And we become frustrated and disgusted with ourselves.

Take the best-selling author, for example. "If there's one thing, just one thing, I want to finish by the end of the year, it's a book manuscript," I effused to anyone who would listen, my tone dripping with confidence and resolve. My friends would 'ooh' and 'ahh', experiencing a vicarious high. I would affix my derriere to a seat every day and write for the entire year until over 70,000 words were crafted. Well, that was the plan. And when it was clear the plan wouldn't materialise I felt like a fraud and a non-finisher.



CONDITIONED TO DREAM LARGE

You see, we've been conditioned to dream large and to have what we desire now. This Big Mac combo, however, can often leave the arteries of our souls clogged as we fall and fail. When did life in the idyllic Tropics become so, well, NYC Grand Central – teeming with the hustle and bustle; focusing on the destination but not the journey?

One psychologist friend stopped making resolutions because they weren't emanating from a place of genuine motivation. She would go through the motions merely because of self-imposed pressure to do something big at the beginning of a new year. Eventually, and predictably, her resolutions fizzled.

I'm not a best-selling author (not yet anyway). But there was a resolution, a smaller, non-descript one that I did commit to – enrolling in a short fiction-writing course. And it didn't take the whole year. Twice a week for three months, a fledgling group of writers began to weave tales – and, yes, some did come unhinged before we patched them up – with Caribbean life, people and settings. I realised how powerful and valuable the Caribbean expression of voice is. I also discovered that I had the stamina to complete a story I'd started, however small. And that that short expression of voice could lead to my winning my first award in a literary arts festival.

SMALL THINGS MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

So will our resolutions be mammoth tasks with few successes along the way because they focus on singular outcomes that can only be achieved at the end of 2009? Or should we opt for something a little different? In discussing this article a friend and I made a simple resolution to spend more time together. Within a few weeks this can be easily achieved. She's also resolved to teach me the violin, an instrument I downed when I relocated to Barbados as a child. And I'm excited by this challenge. What other small yet meaningful challenges or changes can we take up in 2009 or throw out to ourselves to make sure we're living, not merely existing? Something that will energise us and bring others joy?

Small things make a big difference. Look at Barack Obama's election campaign fund-raising strategy. Look at our archipelago and the contribution we're making to the world's culture, sport, cuisine, medicine and more.

Perhaps resolutions should not seek to necessarily conquer the world, but create windows of opportunity through which we can perceive and pursue meaningful acts. We may well surprise ourselves and others.



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take one a month!

LiME's prescription for achievable and meaningful resolutions. If your resolutions have, in the past, been so unwieldy that they collapse under their own weight before the end of January, why not try a smaller dose – one challenge or change a month? Here are some ideas to churn up your juices.

1 Learn the steel pan. You'll be euphoric when you start making sweet music!



2 Take a sabbatical. You don't have to join a convent or monastery for this one. Simply carve out one day, clear your diary, and totally dedicate it to connecting with you. No TV, radio, or Blackberrys allowed!

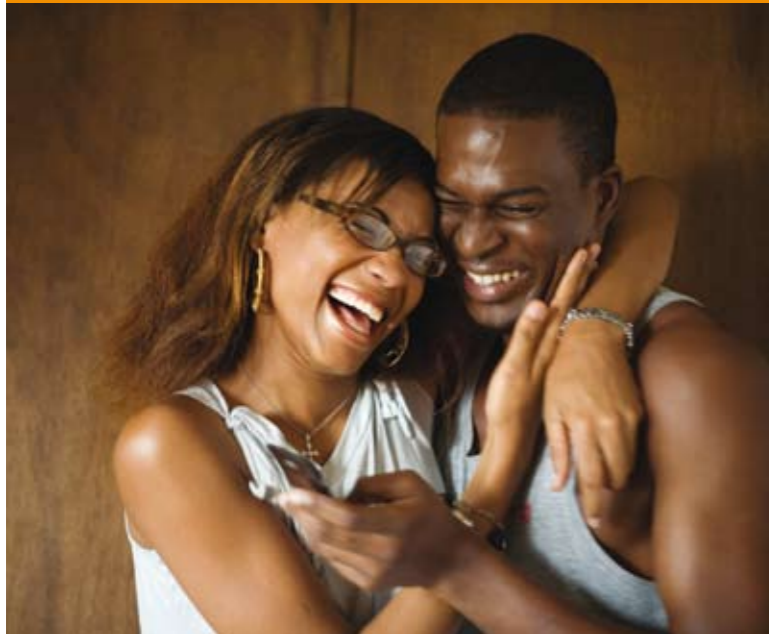
- 3 Get a small group of friends or family members together and volunteer at a local church or do a mini-fundraiser for charity, or adopt a cause.**
- 4 Postpone that jaunt to the concrete metropolis and visit an island you've always wanted to see.**
- 5 Do a beach clean up with your children, then head into the water to cool off.**
- 6 Line dancing has taken off in the Caribbean, so join this electric slide!**

- 7 Start a micro-enterprise. Sell vegetables from your kitchen garden or your home-made ginger beer; or create postcards using images you take with your camera.**
- 8 Host a small dinner party and prepare nouveau-Caribbean cuisine. Coconut shrimp on the menu may well ensure a full house.**
- 9 Treat yourself to a night at a hotel. Just because.**

10 Take an art course. Learn batik or pottery.



11 Go out for a drink with that old dear friend you hardly saw in 2008 (Facebook doesn't count) because you got married, were buried behind the files on your desk, or addicted to the Internet.



12 Go horse-back riding along the beach or through a nature trail. Once you get used to the horse's rhythm you'll feel majestic.



BROOKE SLEZAK/GETTY IMAGES

27 Start eating more fruit – especially those indigenous to the region. Who knew eating healthily could be so much fun?

28 Learn to swim. For many of us whose skills don't extend beyond the doggy paddle it's time to take lessons.

29 Host a movie night and select from the increasing number of Caribbean feature films. Chat about the movies after.

30 Learn cricket – whether you're male or female. The West Indies team needs you!

31 Paint a room, just one room in your home... yourself. OK, refer to HGTV if you must! In a colour that reflects the life and vibrancy of the Caribbean.

32 Don't merely enjoy the beach as you drive to and from work. Head into her beautiful waters. 🌊



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14 Go cruising on a catamaran and swim with the turtles or snorkel. You'll experience and appreciate a colourful new world by simply entering the water.

15 Try deep-sea fishing or, if you're a little tentative, try it from a jetty. There's nothing like your line being tugged!

16 Buy a piece of art that reflects the beauty of your surroundings, however small, and have it framed and mounted in your home or office.

17 Speaking of framing, frame one of your certificates – your degree, your key employee award; your daughter's report card!

18 Make a gift. Instead of store-bought gifts, why not hand-make or tailor a gift for someone's birthday or anniversary. Shells, sand, and other textiles can augment your creations.

19 Since this region is becoming one large melting pot, why not befriend someone, in your country, whose nationality is different to yours? You'd be amazed at what you both could learn and share.

20 Do an island tour. Bundle a few friends and a picnic basket into your vehicle and take to the road. Don't forget your map and cell phone!



JASON TODD/GETTY IMAGES

13 Change your appearance. No extreme makeover needed. Simply colour your hair; cut your beard; change your glass frames; experiment with your make-up and SMILE!

21 Start taking early morning hikes. Stroll (or take a brisk walk) through the undergrowth to stimulate your lung capacity, heart and senses!

22 Learn a new language, at least the basics, since French, Spanish, Dutch are spoken widely throughout our region.

23 Bake banana bread or coconut drops, nicely package them, and surprise your neighbours, or volunteer to mow their lawn.

24 One day a week or so leave your vehicle at home and take the bus. It's kinder to our fragile environment and frees you to look around, without fear of plunging into a ditch, at the natural beauty all around you.

25 Learn tiling. With building costs rising it makes sense to do some of the work yourself. Imagine the sense of accomplishment you'll feel as you glide across your floors.

26 Read a book by a Caribbean author you've never read before. Then pass it on to someone you think will appreciate it.

