

THE ELLE WORD
A NEW COAT OF PAINT FOR A NEW YEAR
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Last weekend—the last of winter break—I decided that I was going to paint our family’s basement bathroom. I really didn’t even ask my mother; I flat-out told her that I was going to do it. She looked at me skeptically and said, “Well, you better ask your father.”

In most situations, I would probably begin to panic. My father is an absolute perfectionist at everything he does. Everything has to be perfect. Example: A few years ago, I repainted my bedroom. It was *my* project, and my dad wasn’t supposed to get involved. But, oh, I came home from work one day, and he had re-“cut in” with paint where the walls and ceiling met because I hadn’t gotten close enough.

However, that night, when I told him my plan, all he said was, “You better clean my brushes well.”

The silly thing about our basement bathroom is this: Over the past ten years or so, our home has practically been under constant remodeling, my dad doing most of it. We’ve done our living room, dining room, kitchen, den and bedrooms. But the basement bathroom has always, through it all, been neglected—always put on the back burner. And in all 20 years that we’ve lived in this house, I don’t believe it’s been painted once.

That Thursday evening, I stepped into the four-by-four half bathroom and just looked around. I began ripping off the art I’d taped to the walls a few years back. Behind one of the oil-pastel drawings were spider webs and peeling paint. The other pieces of “art” covered a retro-looking mural of giant daisies.

Later on that night, my mom asked me if I was going to miss those daisies—the huge, obnoxious flowers that were so bright and ugly.

“No,” I said. “Not at all.”

The next morning, I rose earlier than I normally would, and began to primer the walls. With one or two roller slides, the daisies faded from nasty robin’s-egg blues and lemonade yellows to mere outlines of what the flowers used to look like. In a few hours, even the outlines were covered up by coats of a more pleasing gray-green hue.

When my parents came home from work, they both were amazed by what a fresh coat of paint could do for a room untouched for two decades. But I know that none of us will ever forget the coats that lie beneath the new, shiny one.

Just how a new coat of paint could drastically improve our bathroom, with the dawn of a new year, we are all given another chance to change our lives. And it doesn’t have to be something huge—meet new people, volunteer, exercise, try something new—just do something for yourself to improve your life.

There’s no reason to forget the daisies, but there’s always room to improve. Just don’t be too lazy to say that you’ll paint next year, or the year after, because it will never get done. Take the plunge and just do something good for yourself.

I wish you all the best in 2006.