

CLEANING

NAME WITHHELD

While getting ready to leave the house for a four-week summer vacation, my family and I set out to make the house completely spotless. That meant it was the time of year again for me to clean everything out from under my bed—the accumulation of a year’s worth of junk that I had put out of sight and subsequently forgotten. I dreaded the task, but it had to be done. So after cranking up my music and setting it on “shuffle,” I got to work.

I spent the next few hours on my stomach, reaching as

far as I could underneath my bed and pulling out handfuls of old school papers, Halloween candy wrappers, my sister’s doll accessories, and countless other knickknacks. I dragged everything out onto my bedroom floor. When I was satisfied that not a crumb was left under my bed, I turned and found I had thoroughly trashed the rest of my room.

Exasperated, I began the seemingly impossible task of sorting the trash from the keepsakes. Near the bottom of the pile, I found three papers stapled together and folded into fourths. I unfolded the bundle to see if it was something I wanted to keep or something I wanted to toss into



ILLUSTRATIONS BY DILLEEN MARSH

UP

I started cleaning up my room. When I found my dad's letter, I started cleaning up my life.

the recycling bin.

Immediately I recognized the letter I was holding. I sat on the edge of my bed to read it. The date at the top of the first page was my 12th birthday—the day I became old enough to enter the Young Women program, the day I became old enough to go to the temple and perform baptisms for the dead. My dad had written the three-page letter and given it to me along with my presents. At the time I received the letter, I didn't even read the whole thing through, I admit. But now, reading it five years later, I knew that it was the best gift I had been given that year.

Lately I had started to feel a decline in my desire to read

the scriptures and to go to Church activities. Sometimes at night I would collapse on my bed and go right to sleep rather than take just a minute to pray. It wasn't that I didn't believe in the gospel; I did believe. But I wasn't acting on my beliefs. I wasn't going out of my way to serve others or to do the things I had been taught to do. I was struggling in my decisions, in limbo between following the world's ways and following God's ways.

Finding my dad's letter again made the pathway clear. Two things about the letter really jumped out at me. First, after expressing his own love and testimony of the gospel—and adding that he knew I loved the gospel too



Dad's letter showed me that just as I needed to clean the junk out from under the bed, I needed to clean out the worldly things in my life.

and wanted to live righteously—my dad shared this advice:

“You become what you think about. If you spend your entire day thinking about the things the world thinks about, you will become like the world. It's impossible to become anything that you don't think about. If you want to become a righteous daughter of God who understands the Savior and His mission, you must study and think about those things.”

When I read that passage, it hit me that I hardly spent any of my time thinking about the eternal plan. I would think more often about what was going to happen in the next chapter of the novel I was reading than about the words of the scriptures.

When I daydreamed, it wasn't about the celestial kingdom or about serving others but about what I would do with my friends that weekend.

The next thing my dad wrote also hit me:

“The captain on the biggest ship in the ocean needs three things if he wants to get his cargo to the port: he needs to have a reliable map that shows him the way; he needs to believe that the map is reliable; and he needs to actually drive the ship in the direction indicated on the map. It's the same for you. You have the map already. You need to have faith in Heavenly Father's plan for achieving eternal life (belief in the map), and you need to work every day toward your destination (follow the map).”

At the moment that I finished reading those words, my music, still set on “shuffle,” switched to an Especially for Youth album. The lyrics to one song, “Stand in Holy Places,” brought tears to my eyes.

The song and the words of the letter, combined with the sudden sense of the Spirit, made me realize that, just as I needed to clean the junk out from under the bed, I needed to clean out the worldly things in my life and live in the uncluttered, spotless ways of the Lord. Like my chore that day, it would be difficult and would take time, but in the end it would be worth it.

Who knew that such a spiritual awakening could occur because of housework? The Lord works in mysterious ways. As I went back to cleaning my room, I made a silent covenant with the Lord that I would clean up my life, too, and strive to live how he would have me live. **NE**

NEmore

For ideas on setting and reaching righteous goals, look in the Personal Progress booklet, Individual Worth, Value Experience 2. You'll find a link at newera.lds.org.

