

The Use of Things

Heather had nearly managed to get totally dressed and out the door to buy seven dollars of taffy at the little grocery down the street before she'd gotten stuck in the fog around Whatsthe Point, and with no beacon from the lighthouse on the sane side of town to guide her, she'd crumbled back into bed and resumed despairing, though it was difficult to say about what in particular. Why on earth didn't her clock have an AM/PM designation? Could she not get the smallest break here? How she hated her parents.

Enough. She was getting nowhere. It was time to start using the education her predecessors had fought so hard to guarantee her, and Heather resolved to begin straight away by thinking metaphorically more often.

There was no life left in her arms, so turning on the television was no easier than convincing the Amish to farm in stilettos and taffeta, but somehow it began to blather and glow. The TV was difficult to watch since it was as hard to hold her head up as it was to catch nuns with AstroGlide on their fingers, but Heather persevered. She was in a basement apartment with her back against an off-white plaster-on-brick wall. There were no overhead lights, and the lamps were all turned off or sporting blown bulbs, but some sun filtered through the tiny barred windows near the ceiling at the front of the two-room unit, so that she could see the four months of unwashed dishes strewn about her closet-kitchen, and the laundry on the floor, and other signs of the general squalor which threatened to envelope her at any moment, but not the television; there was a glare on the screen. Heather tried briefly to muster up the energy to become infuriated at the sun splotch, but failed.

She laid there whimpering for a while, becoming increasingly distressed at her lack of achievements. What was she doing with her life? Heather observed that at this point she

differed only from a sea anemone in that a sea anemone sort of did stuff; it waved around and ate things, but she couldn't even manage that. What was there worth doing anyway? Heather sighed and pouted, eyelids all aflutter just in case anyone was secretly watching.

No! Her people had fought too hard for her to just give up. She owed her hardworking ancestors more than that. It was time to get something done, by gum!

On the verge of becoming truly fired up, Heather decided that it would be best to just settle down and consider her predicament logically. She needed to straighten things out and put them in order, and consider them from all sides, as her instructors had always dictated.

What she needed now was an equation. Heather needed to set some goals and objectives, and then set up some equations to help her accomplish them. Wait -- first she needed to do an assessment of where she stood. Certainly she couldn't move forward unless she knew where she stood. Probably she could at least express that in an equation.

Okay. Today so far she had accomplished several things. She had gotten up, brushed her teeth -- although that was becoming a more and more distant memory with every breath she drew -- and had all but gotten dressed and out the door. That was a lot to remember, plus she needed to work out the equations and record the goals and all, so she flopped her arm off the side of her bed and let her hand loll around in the rubble until her fingers trapped a tampon box between them and brought it to her face for inspection. Heather dumped the plugs out of the box and pulled the flaps apart, back-folding the creases until she had, spread-eagled before her, a winged cardboard palette, printed face down. She put pen to plug box and wrote out the list, adding to it *Created an agenda* and the most important item of all: *Used things I learned in school, but thought I'd never use. Made plans to use more things.* Actually, that was two items. Heather made the appropriate correction. Under that she began a second list entitled *Goals / Objectives.*

It included the following: *Write an equation to help solve problems and accomplish goals, Assess current situation, Express accomplishments in an equation.*

Reviewing her accomplishments critically, she came to the painful realization that she had really accomplished next to nothing. In a row of integers, 1 was right next to 0 (nothing), so she let 1 equal her accomplishments. Heather considered what she should do next. She put her head down to block out any distractions which might get her all muddle-headed and interrupt her thought process. When she woke up, her neck was about as crimped and stiff as a week-old crinkly fry. She had rolled over into the pile of plugs which she'd dumped out of the box in order to make her lists, and drooled on some of them, so that their wrapping paper had degenerated into pulpy flakes and glued themselves to her face. She tried to peel them off, but they just came apart in little gooey slips, creating an even more disgusting mess. It came to her as suddenly as love that her metaphors might actually be similes, but she couldn't say so for sure. Heather started to cry. It was the kind of hurt you had to sleep off -- the reality that you had wasted so much of your time, had made so little use of opportunities -- so she drifted back to sleep, knowing that she hadn't learned a damned thing in school.