

Hanging Up my Laundry by Howard Bowman

Hanging up my laundry is similar to tying up Tibetan Prayer Flags. It is my way of expressing the ancient spiritual practice of enabling significant messages to be carried far and wide by Himalayan breezes: Peace. Compassion. Strength. Wisdom.

I love hanging up my laundry. I try to make an art of it. Usually I go for a predictably orderly approach, like a Georges Seurat painting. All the socks with their heels facing one way. All the underpants lined up facing out. Unless one sock of a pair turns up missing, this is very satisfying.

This approach allows for a kind of “engineering” orientation to my task, challenging me to use one clothespin at each shared hem allocating the limited amount of clothesline in the most efficient manner.

Sometimes, when I’m feeling a little “wild and crazy,” I go for the random approach, like a Jackson Pollock painting. No two similar items hanging adjacent to one another. This is very stimulating.

But when it comes time to fold and put away the laundry, the Pollock approach can be vexing.

I must make an existential decision as to when to impose order; either while hanging the clothes up, or when taking them down. As the Existentialists taught, only I can make such a momentous decision. And I must take full responsibility for it. Such is freedom.

As I hang up my laundry, my ego-centered self takes some pride in reducing my carbon footprint, however minutely. We now live in a time when each of us needs to take these small steps, as well as larger ones, for the sake of our Mother Earth.

When I grew up in the 40’s and 50’s we did not have a clothes dryer. My assigned weekly laundry chore was to carry up the heavy baskets of washed clothes, sheets and towels from the basement to the back yard. There, my job was to “prop” up the clotheslines (with notched, wooden poles) as my mother hung the wet items on the increasingly sagging lines strung between our house and garage. A very satisfying “engineering feat” when done correctly, preventing the clean clothes from scraping the ground.

Can anything replicate the fresh smell of clothes dried outside?

I love the time it takes to hang up my laundry. In contrast to the efficiency of a dryer, this use of time allows for reflection and meditation in addition to some very good Yoga-like stretching. Plus, it turns out that things do actually dry pretty quickly on their own, even in our basement.

Whether using the orderly or random method, I gain a sense of accomplishment by looking at my hung-up laundry. *There, see, I've accomplished something constructive.* This is a wonderful satisfaction when most everything else seems contingent upon a “call back” or another email or text. I often choose to leave my laundry hanging on the lines even after it's dried--just to look at every now and then. Pure joy.

Unlike the neighborhood where I grew up, our condo association has guidelines about what we may or may not do outside. Property values, I guess. But it seems to me that this is a denial of reality. We each have dirty laundry to clean; why hide our humanity?

Until I'm prepared to take on the condo board, I'll have to settle for flying my prayer flags somewhat virtually from my basement:

Peace. Compassion. Strength. Wisdom.