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the
**ARTIST'S
WAY
WORKBOOK**

JULIA
CAMERON

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ALSO BY JULIA CAMERON

NONFICTION

The Artist's Way
Walking in This World
The Vein of Gold
The Right to Write
The Sound of Paper
Floor Sample: A Creative Memoir
Answered Prayers
Heart Steps
Blessings
Transitions
Prayers from a Nonbeliever
Letters to a Young Artist: Building a Life in Art
How to Avoid Making Art (or Anything Else You Enjoy)
(illustrated by Elizabeth Cameron)
The Artist's Way Morning Pages Journal
The Artist's Date Book *(illustrated by Elizabeth Cameron)*
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God Is No Laughing Matter
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Money Drunk, Money Sober *(with Mark Bryan)*

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Four Roses
Love in the DMZ
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Prayers to the Nature Spirits
The Quiet Animal
This Earth (also an album with Tim Wheeler)

FEATURE FILM

God's Will
(as writer/director)

The Artist's Way WORKBOOK



Julia Cameron

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INTRODUCTION

THE BOOK YOU HOLD IN YOUR HANDS is the very spine of the Artist's Way teachings. *The Artist's Way* did not begin as a book at all—it began as a series of class notes. I would gather my group into a cluster and say, “Here is what I suggest you try now.” I well remember my early classes, taught in New York in a high-ceilinged loft space in SoHo. I remember the mix of skepticism and eagerness on my students' faces—a blend of hopefulness and desperation. I particularly remember a punked-out redhead named Janet, who sat, arms crossed and defiant, daring me to devise tools that worked. The tools that work are the tools you will find in this book. They are the distillate of twenty-five years' teaching experience. If you work with them, a creative breakthrough will follow. It is a lot like doing Hatha yoga: you simply stretch yourself into certain postures and experience a heightened energy flow. Many of the tools will seem deceptively simple. What does finding five pretty rocks have to do with anything? The answer is “Everything.” The stones you select remind you of the beauty of creation. Carried for a week in your pocket, they remind you that you, too, are intended to create.

“Julia,” I am sometimes chided, “your tools remind me of kindergarten.” I say, “Yes, they do. When was the last time you had fun learning?” If you undertake the tools in this book, you *will* have fun learning. You will one more time awaken the childlike part of you that creates—the artist within. It does not matter whether you are a declared artist with a chosen art form, or simply someone who yearns for a more creative life. The tools will work if you work them. The Artist's Way is an experiential path. We awaken our creativity through using it, not through theory. If you are hungry to understand on a more intellectual level the tools in this workbook, you may wish to read the *Artist's Way* text in its entirety. The essays in *The Artist's Way* match the tools, but I repeat, you do not need to know *why* something works in order to have it work. As a rule, too much thinking is a part of being blocked. Artists and intellectuals are not the same animal. This causes a great deal of confusion. Our schools educate us intellectually but not artistically. We learn how to deconstruct art, not construct it.

Through the simple building blocks that are the tools in this book, you will

learn how to heal old wounds and move toward new horizons. You will examine and discard damaging mythology and painful personal experiences in the arts. A tool at a time, you will learn how to construct a new and more positive life built on greater optimism and resiliency. You will not learn to be fearless, but you will learn how to create despite your fears.

Art is a spiritual act. It takes faith to move onto the page, the stage, the easel. The pages of this workbook make up what is essentially a spiritual toolkit. Through morning pages and artist's dates—each of which is explained in this book—you will learn how to build a spiritual radio kit that amplifies the voice of inspiration. You will come in contact with a powerful spiritual force, which some may call God, and others merely the Muse. Do not allow semantics to block you. You do not need to believe in anything particular in order for these tools to work. Although they may seem quite Zen, the tools are in fact intensely practical. They work not on some imaginary life but on the one you've actually got. Simply add these tools to your life as it currently exists. Do not look for dramatic—or traumatic—change. The shift you will experience will be substantial, but it will come to you in many tiny increments.

Our mythology around art is very damaging. Our culture teaches us that creativity is a frightening pursuit. This is not the case. Creativity can be both safe and user-friendly. All of us are creative, and through the use of these simple tools, any life can be made more creative. It is my hope that you will enjoy the process of working with this book, that you will become larger, stronger, and more colorful—that your dreams will move from the realm of fantasy into reality. As you heighten your capacity to listen for creative guidance, you will find your path unfolding organically one step at a time. When I go out to teach, my students often greet me with the sentence, “Your book changed my life.” I always respond, “Thank you, but *you* changed your life. You did it through the use of a spiritual toolkit.”

You might want to think of this workbook as an owner's or driver's manual for artists. Together with *The Artist's Way*, or separately, it provides firm and steady guidance for the creative life. These tools have unblocked children's books and feature films. They have been used by Hollywood actors and midwestern schoolteachers. Operas have been written, plays have been penned, novels have come to life, and one-person shows have sprung into

being. If you have a creative dream, or even a vague yearning, these tools will clarify, prioritize, and energize your undertakings. We are far more creative than we imagine. We are far larger and far more daring. It is the purpose of this toolkit to help you emerge as an artist. This may mean you are in for some delightful surprises. You might undertake the work hoping to unblock your writer, only to discover in passing that you also embody an inner photographer, sculptor, or painter. We are more gifted than we know, and our gifts lie in many unsuspected directions.

The Artist's Way is a journey of discovery. You are the terra incognita that you will be exploring. Expect to fall in love with both yourself and the world around you.

Basic Principles

1. Creativity is the natural order of life. Life is energy: pure creative energy.
2. There is an underlying, in-dwelling creative force infusing all of life—including ourselves.
3. When we open ourselves to our creativity, we open ourselves to the creator's creativity within us and our lives.
4. We are, ourselves, creations. And we, in turn, are meant to continue creativity by being creative ourselves.
5. Creativity is God's gift to us. Using our creativity is our gift back to God.
6. The refusal to be creative is self-will and is counter to our true nature.
7. When we open ourselves to exploring our creativity, we open ourselves to God: good orderly direction.
8. As we open our creative channel to the creator, many gentle though powerful changes are to be expected.
9. It is safe to open ourselves up to greater and greater creativity.
10. Our creative dreams and yearnings come from a divine

source. As we move toward our dreams, we move toward our divinity.

CONTRACT

I, _____, understand that I am undertaking an intensive, guided encounter with my own creativity. I commit myself to the twelve-week duration of the course.

I, _____, commit to weekly reading, daily morning pages, a weekly artist's date, and the fulfillment of each week's tasks.

I, _____, further understand that this course will raise issues and emotions for me to deal with.

I, _____, commit myself to excellent self-care—adequate sleep, diet, exercise, and pampering—for the duration of the course.

(signature)

(date)

The Basic Tools

TOOL ONE: MORNING PAGES

IF THERE IS A SINGLE simple tool that is the bedrock of my creative life—and any creative life—that tool is morning pages. I have been writing them for twenty-five years. I do not begin a day without them. What exactly are morning pages? They sound like work. Why should we do them? They are three pages of daily longhand stream of consciousness, written first thing upon arising. An excellent meditation practice for hyperactive Westerners, the pages clarify and prioritize our day. Morning pages are not intended to be high art. They are not “real” writing. They are simply the siphoning off of the mind’s surface so that we can get to the deeper thoughts and impulses that lie beneath our daily voice-over.

What is the daily voice-over? It is that petty, picky voice that brings us up short so often. You know how it goes: “I forgot to buy kitty litter. I didn’t call my sister back. I should have spoken up in that meeting yesterday. I need to get Tide. The car has a funny knock in it... .” All of us have a voice-over of things we are concerned with. Morning pages are a catcher’s mitt for these concerns. By putting them onto the page, we are able to move into our days with fresh eyes.

Morning pages may be whiny and grumpy. They may feel petty and negative, although occasionally a shiny new insight may come glittering through. My daily pages might begin, “I am awake and I am tired. I feel discouraged. I need to get out for a better walk today... .” Rarely is there anything upbeat or anything that seems directly connected to creativity. Eugene, a painter friend of mine, says that he is depressive by temperament and that his morning pages help him to “dig out” every morning. I know what he means.

My pages are often grumpy. I use them to vent. I like having a private place where I can be as petty as I sometimes feel. “I didn’t sleep well last night. I had a nasty dream... .” In my pages I tell the universe what I don’t like and what I do. “It was great to talk with Mark yesterday. I need to make a lunch

date with Joel. I wonder if I can get to the piano today, if only for a little while.”

Morning pages are a witness to our passage and they are a cheerleader for our efforts. “It’s great that I got to the park yesterday. I needed the exercise.” Occasionally, morning pages are the seedbed for new creative ideas. “Wouldn’t it be fun to write a musical about Merlin?” (Yes, it was.)

Morning pages make us known to ourselves. They map our many contradictory urges. “I want to move back to Los Angeles, but I love New York.” A day at a time, a page at a time, the pages guide us. They make us proactive on our own behalf—and almost without our noticing it. Daily, they point us toward what in 12-step jargon is called “the next right thing.” That thing is usually small and doable. The pages move us into action on our own behalf.

“Julia,” writes Grace, a thirty-something writer, “I was perfectly happy drunk in the Outback, then I started doing morning pages and now I am sober and living in Los Angeles!”

Morning pages make us intimate with ourselves, and this, in turn, allows us to become more intimate with others. Comfortable in our own skin, we are more comfortable naked to another’s scrutiny. Our marriages improve. So do our close friendships. We become visibly healthier.

“My therapist told me to start doing morning pages,” I am often told, and many therapists do urge their patients to try the pages. Often I hear of therapists who run Artist’s Way groups. They have discovered that much of what we call neurosis is actually blocked creativity. As their patients unblock, they grow happier and stronger. “Therapy” is working.

It is my belief that in writing morning pages we are in effect building a spiritual radio kit. With every day’s writing, we are “sending”: “This is what I like. This is what I don’t like. This is what I want more of. This is what I want less of... .” We do not write into a vacuum. We write into an interactive universe that hears our daily pages as prayer. Often our prayers are answered

in the form of greater personal clarity. We “suddenly” see where we have been stymied and what it is that we can do about it. A clear-cut action looms before us, one we find possible to take.

Prayers are answered, too, as increased synchronicity. We are more and more often in the right time and place, “happening” to find exactly what it is that we have needed. We “wander” into a new art-supply shop and find exactly what we need for our project. We “happen” to spot a notice on a laundry-room bulletin board for the exact course of studies we have been considering. Out of the blue, an old friend calls with news of a job opportunity. We go to a reading and encounter a literary agent who is open to considering our manuscript.

Increasingly, the universe seems to be a place of open doors and richer opportunities. We are no longer stuck and stymied, alone with our dreams. In fact, our dreams tend to take on weight and substance until they are less dreams than plans. This metamorphosis happens almost without our effort. Pages are both gentle and thorough. We are transformed from dreamers to doers.

Morning pages are a spiritual practice that connects us, artist to artist, with the Great Creator. We are carefully mentored by the Presence we encounter through the simple process of moving our hand across the page. The Great Creator takes infinite care with us. Its energy flows toward us in the form of impulses and urges. We get a “funny feeling” that we should try something. We do try it and it does succeed. “This really works!” we catch ourselves thinking. We become bolder as we start to trust our guidance.

“But Julia,” asks Marv, a salesman and type A personality, “do the pages really need to be written longhand? That’s so slow!” Yes, it is slow, and that is a part of what is good for us. By slowing down, we connect to our emotions and our intuitions. We then tend to act holistically, in ways that reflect an integrated whole.

As a society, we are addicted to velocity and we tend to think that faster is better, but it isn’t, always. When we write by hand, it is the equivalent of driving slowly. At fifty-five mph, we notice our surroundings. We are aware

of how we feel. We say, “There’s an Exxon station. My exit is coming up.” When we write by computer, our thoughts and realizations tend to whiz past us—just like driving seventy-five mph and wondering, “Oh my God! Was that my exit?”

“But Julia, do the pages really have to be done in the morning?” is another oft-asked question. In my experience, the pages work far better first thing in the morning, and so that is the practice that I encourage. After all, if you do the pages at night, you are complaining about a day you have already had and are powerless to change. How much better to let the pages do what they do so well—prioritize, shape, and streamline our day.

By doing morning pages as suggested, we actually win for ourselves windows of time throughout the day. The pages take time—let us say twenty to forty-five minutes—but they also give time back to us. Our days become our own. It is difficult to write pages and allow yourself to be hijacked for someone else’s agenda. “This doesn’t feel right,” you will catch yourself thinking. Your pages teach you to honor such insights.

Morning pages are a tool for metabolizing life. They work for us in painful and intense passages: a death, a divorce, a career change, a lost friendship. Taking our hand to the page, we make for ourselves a handmade life. We raise issues, and the answers come. Nothing is too large. Nothing is too small. Morning pages walked me through my father’s lingering death from cancer. Morning pages helped me to name my new puppy.

“This morning I realized I could love again. I could allow myself to be vulnerable,” Annie, who is walking through a difficult divorce, tells me. “I was afraid I would always be closed off, but the pages helped me to open again. I am so grateful.”

Most people who work with morning pages do become grateful for their presence. Virginia Woolf advised us that all artists require “a room of one’s own,” and for many of us the pages become that room, that personal and private spot where we can be utterly and totally ourselves. A Jungian analyst tells me that the first forty-five minutes of the day are the time in which we are without our normal ego defenses. We are closer to the impulses that come

to us from our subconscious. We are more alert to messages from our dream state. Sometimes these messages really need to be heard. “Morning pages take advantage of a unique window of opportunity,” she relays. “They catch the ego in an undefended state and so it speaks to us with candor.”

“Whenever I get into trouble, I go back to the practice of morning pages,” Alan, a corporate consultant, tells me. Hearing him, I want to say, “Why get into trouble at all? Why not use morning pages consistently and see if you can avoid getting into trouble?”

Morning pages are an early warning system that lets us know when danger is lurking near. The pages are quick to identify a “funny feeling.” We have just a hunch, an intuition, that something is wrong—and it is. The “something” may be trouble in our relationship or at our job. It may be a buried resentment causing trouble between us and our sibling. Whatever it is, the pages will point out the problem and, if we let them, move us toward a solution.

- “You and your husband need to go on actual dates,” the pages might suggest. “The romance is fading between you, but the embers are still there.”
- “You ought to talk with your boss about your idea for restructuring the department.”
- “You could take yourself back to graduate school and pursue your interest in counseling.”

Morning pages leave no corner of our life unexamined. Our dreams, our hopes, our disappointments, our pains—all of these are grist for the mill. A day at a time, a page at a time, an issue at a time, we become intimate with ourselves. Our hidden feelings become known to us. We ourselves are the terra incognita that we are exploring.

“I never knew I had such a passion for color,” Martine, a petite, raven-haired lawyer, exclaims. Her pages suggested she paint her white-walled apartment in tropical tones. “When I get home from work now, I feel like I am in the Caribbean.”

“I hadn’t practiced a hobby in twenty years,” reports Eleanor, a classical musician. “My pages kept reminding me that I know how to sew and to crochet and to needlepoint and knit. One day on my lunch hour I stopped in a needlepoint shop, and since that day I have made half a dozen beautiful floral pillows.”

With morning pages, we frequently retrieve the parts of ourselves that we have lost. Lucy, a kindly blond kindergarten teacher, has returned to ballroom dancing after a twenty-year hiatus. “I think I had become too much Mary Poppins. I’d forgotten about my passionate side.” She laughs. “The tango is a vertical expression of a horizontal thought.”

For Victor, a securities analyst, it is a passion for poetry. “I hadn’t really read any poetry since I got out of college and I had no idea how much I missed it. Now I go once a week to hear local poets read and I am catching up on a lot of poets who have emerged in the past twenty years. I’ve even put pen to page myself a little bit.”

Although the content of morning pages seems to have nothing to do with art, they often move us first to more artful lives and then to art itself. “I think of morning pages as a vacuuming process,” Janet, a therapist, tells me. “I poke the pages into every corner of my current life, and when I am done with them my consciousness is clean and fresh and ready for new ideas.”

New ideas do come to us through morning pages. It was the pages that first suggested to me that I was musical, a proposition I found highly unlikely. I was, I thought, the nonmusical sibling from a family of musicians. Music was something I admired but nothing that I tried—until the pages insisted I should try. “You will be writing radiant songs,” they assured me. Trusting the pages, I tried a first song. Since that song, I have written many more—three full-length musicals and two children’s albums. And yet if it weren’t for the nudging of the pages, I might never have tried music at all.

“Julia, I was one very unhappy lawyer when I undertook morning pages,” Keith, a charismatic Broadway star, recently told me. “The pages got me out

of my miserable job and into my real vocation. I cannot thank them enough.”

Morning pages are not a magic wand, but they may be something very close to it.

Marilyn, an overweight writer with a wicked wit, undertook morning pages, and as she used them to record her issues and conflicts, she lost nearly fifty pounds—and gained a one-woman show. “The pages told me what was eating me and they told me what I was eating,” she jokes. “Once I became willing to look at my feelings in the pages, I no longer had to eat to stuff my feelings. Morning pages didn’t turn me into a sylph, but they turned me into someone far more attractive to myself and others.”

She is not alone in this transformation. Often, when I am teaching a twelve-week course, I find that at about six weeks, many students attract new lovers. So pronounced is this trend that I have sometimes been tempted to tease, “Write morning pages and you will rekindle your love life.” On more than one occasion I have given a book signing, only to have someone step up to the table and say, “Julia, I want you to meet my husband. We met in an Artist’s Way group.”

We are practicing tools of enlightenment and the “lights on” aspect is visible. I have often joked that we should take before-and-after shots of students who try morning pages. From the front of the room, the change in people’s appearances is astonishing. “You’re doing well. I can tell,” I will often say as a subtle but thorough makeover takes place in the class. New hairdos, new clothes, new makeup—all of these are a part of the new self that we are uncovering. Stacy, a fitness coach, begins the course dressed in martial arts black. At the midpoint she arrives wearing a pink silk shirt—and she looks ravishing.

With morning pages we have a spiritual makeover. We begin to feel better about ourselves and to treat ourselves better—this shows. It may be something as simple as getting enough sleep—or adequate exercise. It may be a marked shift in our color preferences or a willingness to stop hiding under tents and start wearing more form-fitting clothes. It’s probably any number of small changes that all add up to a distinctive shift. There is a famous

California joke: “What did you have? A face-lift or a surrender?”

With morning pages we surrender to being more truly ourselves, and those selves are colorful and beautiful. Pages may help one person to stay married and help another person to get divorced. Pages may help their writer go back to school or to drop out of a program that is ill-fitting. A day at a time, a page at a time, morning pages emphasize our unique individuality. They aid me in my life as a writer, but they aid lawyers and teachers and therapists and painters—anyone who tries their hand at them.

Among my Christmas cards this year was one from Maureen, a student from fifteen years ago. Since then, she married, and she is now homeschooling her hyperbright son. “Thank you, Julia, for morning pages,” she writes in the card. “They keep me sane!”

Morning pages do keep us sane. They do this by focusing us on the now, the very practical nuts-and-bolts reality of life as it is unfolding. Although pages may be responsible for many large changes, they accomplish those changes one small step at a time. They tutor us in doing that “next right thing.”

Sometimes that thing is “Sort your sock drawer.” Sometimes it’s “Submit your play for publication.” The next right thing may have nothing at all to do with art and everything to do with artful living. “Call your sister,” the pages may advise. “Look into lower rates for auto insurance.” No corner of our life is inconsequential to our pages.

“Don’t forget that tomorrow the postage rates go up,” the pages may remind us. “If you mail the package now, your friend will have it by her birthday.” Gently reminding us of our many duties, pages function like a personal servant: “Madam. Don’t forget your hat and gloves!” Pages teach us to care for ourselves, to minister tenderly to our needs and wants.

“I lived alone in a studio apartment and it often felt like a prison cell,” Madeline, an executive secretary, writes me. “At the urging of the pages, I acquired some houseplants. That would seem like a small change, but it made

a tremendous difference in my environment. A little later, the pages urged me to adopt a kitten. I thought I didn't want the responsibility, but the pages were insistent: 'You're lonely,' they told me, and they were right. Now I come home to a Persian kitten and a jungle. It's wonderful."

In order for pages to be effective, we must be open to what they suggest, to the many insights and intuitions that we will experience through their use. Sometimes, they will suggest a course of action that seems to be beyond our reach: "I wonder what it would be like to go to graduate school and study poetry?" the notion might rear its head. "Graduate school! Poetry! That's too difficult!" we might think.

The pages are a gentle nag. They will bring up an idea repeatedly until they have our attention. When they do, we may find that we have been stubborn and closed-minded about a change that is actually well within our reach. Bernice, the woman who was nudged about studying poetry in graduate school, now has a master's in poetry. She had told herself she was "too old," only to discover that poetry made her once more young at heart and that her chronological age—seventy-five—didn't really matter when it came to putting words on the page.

With morning pages, we are tutored in our own best interests. The pages put us in touch with a source of wisdom that is higher and wiser than our usual consciousness. Our hand is led through the labyrinth of our lives as we write. It has been suggested to me that with pages we get to know both our self and our Self, that higher octave of consciousness that guides us when we are willing to be guided. No matter what our dilemma, pages have a refreshing way of suggesting the many small actions we can take on our own behalf.

"I didn't want to do morning pages," Michael, a Harvard-trained educator, writes. "They didn't seem scientific enough for me. Then it occurred to me that *I* was the one who wasn't being scientific. Pages asked me to experiment and record the results for myself. I decided to try them. The results that I found were astonishing. My difficult job became far easier as I became more focused and less distracted. My sedentary lifestyle became that of an athlete. I started walking and then took up running. As I write, I have received a key

promotion and run in two marathons. Pages seem to give me a cutting edge.”

The cutting edge that pages offer differs for each of us. The businessman was offered shrewd counsel. That was his need. The pages respond to the unique needs of each of us. If we are lonely, morning pages offer us companionship. If we feel unseen, they offer us a sense of witness. As our sense of isolation diminishes, we are able to reach outward to others more easily. A day’s pages might remind us to get in touch with a long-forgotten friend or to phone a new acquaintance and foster a budding friendship. “I was just thinking about you!” our long-lost friend might exclaim.

As we use morning pages, we will often experience a heightened sense of synchronicity. We will be in the “right” place at the “right” time. Perhaps we will lay our hands on exactly the piece of research that we require. We might find the coat we were looking for on sale. As our interests sharpen, those interests seem to be fed. Curious about Tibet, we might encounter a photo exhibition or a concert given by traveling monks. We learn to expend our time in the direction of our curiosities.

Using the pages, we will become more shrewd about what we do with our money, tending to spend it along the lines of our genuine interests. The pages might suggest a magazine subscription or membership to a museum. They are alert to our hidden desires.

Colleen, a homemaker from Libertyville, Illinois, writes, “When I began the morning pages, I was convinced I was a dull person without much to say. I didn’t see how I could possibly fill three pages, but I soon found that it wasn’t too difficult. I had many more interests and enthusiasms and opinions than I had imagined.”

Taken at face value, morning pages seem to have nothing to do with art. After all, what does “I forgot to buy kitty litter” have to do with writing your opera? As it turns out, plenty. The kitty litter is a distraction, as is the conversation you need to have with your boss and the present you need to buy for a friend’s baby’s christening. All of these concerns eddy through your consciousness and keep you from thinking about the opera—unless you put them on the page. When you put them on the page, you put them out of your

mind. You silence an annoying voice-over. The mental static ends. With your worries out of the way, your mind is able to roam more freely, to turn in more adventurous directions. In the course of an ordinary day, the end of Act One might come to you with crystalline clarity.

There are people who consider their morning pages to be prayer. They think of the pages as “Dear God” letters informing the universe of their precise likes and dislikes. Whether you conceive of the pages as prayer or something far more secular, they do serve as a bridge to what might be called higher realms. In addition to recording impressions, pages may be used to receive impressions. This is very simple. It is largely a matter of posing a question and then listening for an answer and writing it down. Very often the most complex situations are addressed with startling—and revelatory—simplicity.

“What should I do about my ex-husband?” Margaret, a recovering alcoholic, wrote of the turbulent relationship that still haunted her. “Just love him,” the pages responded. Reading that answer, Margaret reports that her conflicted feelings began to ease. The truth was that she did still love the man and that by accepting that, she was able to move on.

Pages do move us on. You cannot write morning pages and remain stagnant. The pages themselves are a form of motion. I often compare the pages to both a river and a boat. A day at a time, a page at a time, you enter the pages and enter into the flow of life. You are able to ride out the rapids of your life and the quieter waters as well. The pages give you both a place to rest and a vehicle in which to move forward.

“I think of the pages as a meditation practice,” Sister Raymond Mary, a nun, tells me. She has been writing the pages for a decade, and they have seen her through many shifting phases in her vocation. “They are with me when I am full of faith and when I am full of doubt,” she reports. “Their consistency gives me optimism.”

Optimism is a frequently reported fruit of morning pages. So is hope. As we take our hand to the page, we take our hand to our life. We are not victims, abandoned by a capricious deity to fend for ourselves. There is, we come to

sense, a benevolent Something that receives what we write and acts upon it. Our clarity seems to trigger charity on our behalf.

We live in an interactive universe. The changes and shifts that we make in our inner consciousness are reflected by changes and shifts in our outer world. As we move to a larger and more satisfying identity, we do it first on the page and then in our lives. Before we know it, we are living at a deeper level.

What the pages say may surprise us. I realized with shock that I absolutely love my teaching job. Facing this fact, I found my feelings of gratitude zoomed upward. “Why, I am very lucky,” I thought. “I love my work and I love my students. Maybe I should consider teaching more?”

Negative feelings as well as positive feelings come to light. “I don’t think Laurie really listens to me.” Or, “I need to either quit working overtime or start getting paid for it.” Morning pages teach us self-respect and we learn to expect—and receive—respect from others. Almost imperceptibly, our lives become gentler and more fruitful.

Morning pages tell us when we are overspending our time or our energy. They tutor us in the art of self-investment, channeling our energies and our finances along lines that are personally rewarding. When we are bingeing, physically or fiscally, the pages help to put us on track.

“Julia, I started writing the pages and within a month I stopped gambling. A month after that, I stopped drinking,” Bill, a novelist, told me. “I still do pages. In fact, I carry my journal with me.”

Many people describe morning pages as a sort of homecoming. It is a recovery process in the sense that we re-cover the distance we have traveled away from our authentic self.

“I hadn’t painted in twenty years,” Crawford, a painter, tells me. “I had put everything and everyone in front of my art. When I started working with the pages, my own dreams began to resurface. I saw that I would never be truly

happy unless I allowed myself to paint. With the pages egging me on, I began painting—at first a little and then a lot. Now I am a full-time painter and very grateful.”

“Morning pages were my lifeline,” reports Walter, a writer. Before pages, he wrote short comic monologues, but always yearned to try something more ambitious. “Since starting pages, I have written and published two novels. I would never have been a novelist without the pages.”

“Yes, thank you for the pages,” Anne, Walter’s wife, chimes in. “We had been hovering on the brink of divorce. He was so miserable and there seemed to be nothing that I could do to help him. My husband is now so much happier!”

For some people, the pages are a means of resuscitating a long-forgotten dream. For others, the pages are an opportunity to dream a brand-new dream, one that they never held before.

Morning pages bring our hopes, dreams, fears, and confusions into focus. They point us toward areas that need attention. While some people may use the pages to face an addiction, others may find the pages leading them toward dreams they had never articulated. As we come into focus, our size and shape are often surprisingly large.

What we love may surprise us. A discouraged fiction writer took to doing morning pages and was led into writing about architecture—something she deeply enjoys. A poet took to the pages and found himself drawn to writing memoir. A novelist took to the pages and unblocked a flow of writing that took her in an entirely new direction. She switched from third person to first person. An actress tried the pages and found herself writing a one-woman show.

A teacher at a high-powered music conservatory requires all of her students to do morning pages. “If they are truly going to be artists, then they need some tools to ground them in an artist’s life,” she says.

Morning pages will ground us in any life we have—and with morning pages, that life will improve. We are far more colorful, far more creative, and far more charismatic than we know. As we feel the power of morning pages, we come to feel our own considerable power. We are each of us in touch with the infinite.

TOOL TWO: THE ARTIST'S DATE

THERE IS A SECOND TOOL that is essential to a creative awakening. That tool is a weekly artist's date, a festive solo undertaking to explore something that excites or interests us. Unlike the morning pages, which are work, the artist's date is play—and that makes it much harder for people to do.

Ours is a Calvinist society. We have a work ethic and we understand the idea of “working” on our creativity. We speak of, but do not really understand, the notion of “the play of ideas.” That word “play” is pivotal. Creativity comes forward by being coaxed, not bludgeoned.

When I am teaching a twelve-week class, it takes only a little time before most of the class are writing their morning pages seven days out of seven. What is much more difficult is for me to cajole or convince the class that there can really be a benefit in the weekly artist's date. How can “play” help them work, they want to know.

Here is how. With the morning pages, we are sending. We are notifying the Universe of our likes and dislikes. We are, if you will, telegraphing. With the artist's date, we set our dial to receive. We are receptive to inflow, no longer concerned with outflow. To execute an artist's date, we must be open-minded, and that open mind is available to inspiration.

It works like this. It is a bright, sunny Sunday afternoon and I have roused myself from my apartment's cozy comfort to take my artist's date. I leave the Upper West Side and travel to Murray Hill. My destination is a bookstore, The Complete Traveller. The store is a treasure trove of explorer's lore. Some books are new and crisp. Others are old and musty, long out of print. Scanning the shelves, I find myself drawn to the section on ocean voyages. A battered book on Magellan comes to hand. Without thinking about it, I buy the book on impulse. I dawdle a little longer, looking at maps of the Isle of Wight, another interest. Leaving the store, I do not think anything much has happened. I do not realize that I am carrying out with me the entryway to a

decade's worth of music. I do not know it then—not consciously—but I will be writing music about Magellan.

The inspiration we receive on an artist's date isn't always so linear. We do not always come away from our expeditions with a new sense of creative direction. We do, however, come away with a new sense of well-being and connection. Many students report that they feel the benign touch of synchronicity on their artist's date. Others, many others, report that they experience a heightened sense of conscious contact.

Claire, a clothing designer, lives in New York and favors trips to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "I go to the Asian wing," she tells me. "There is a sense of timelessness there amid the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. I may go in agitated, but I come out tranquil. Something—or Somebody—seems to speak to me there."

For Glenn, another New Yorker, it is the American Museum of Natural History that speaks to his soul. A painter, he has often found his imagination fired by the dioramas, tableaux of animals in their natural habitat. "One of my favorite paintings came straight from the dioramas," he tells me. "I've been going to see the same exhibits for thirty years. They never get old to me."

Arthur is a gallery owner. Often his artist's dates are explorations into rival galleries. Any sense of competition soon fades as he becomes immersed in the art and not the commerce. "I love what I do," he tells me. "My artist dates always give me inspiration as to how I can do it better."

Not all artist's dates are highbrow. Victoria, a young actress, got a massage for an artist's date. "I knew I had to meet with a very important director the next day, and I was very tense about it. Sometime during the course of my massage, I remembered that I loved acting and that I was faced with an exciting opportunity more than a test."

Artist's dates often reveal our inner longings. Laura takes herself to fabric stores, where she browses through rack after rack of brocade and lace. "The wardrobe I use in my job as a kindergarten teacher is what you might call

‘sensible.’ I dream of the hoop skirts from *The King and I*.”

Roy is an academic with a secret passion for exotic automobiles. He drove three and a half hours to attend a show of Ralph Lauren’s car collection. “I can dream, can’t I?” He laughs. When he turned sixty, his grown children gifted him with a vintage Mercedes. He claims that driving it is always an artist’s date.

The dreams of our artist’s dates have a peculiar way of turning into reality. Sophy, a teacher of gifted students, began her Francophile dreams with a trip to a small French bistro. A week later she was at a French movie with English subtitles, and a week after that she attended an exhibition on Matisse. Soon afterward she took a course in French cooking and began boning up on her high school French with the Pimsleur audio disks. The last I heard, she had rented an apartment in Paris and was planning to spend the month of July there.

It pays to think of the artist’s date as one half “artist” and one half “date.” We are out to woo our own consciousness. We plan and execute enticing adventures. Our excursions may have a romantic overtone as we treat ourselves the way we wish a lover would treat us. Veronica, a retired high school principal, reports to me that she goes to the theater solo once a week. “I thought it would be lonely and I would feel strange. I found it surprisingly comfortable and I now prefer it to going to the theater with a date.”

I am often asked if artist’s dates must really be undertaken solo and the answer to that is yes. (We are not alone. We are with our own creative consciousness.) This makes us catnip to others, but we must resist the temptation to take them with us no matter how they plead. Why this rigidity? Because when we are with a significant other, our consciousness is constantly monitoring their consciousness. We go to a movie and ask ourselves, “Are they enjoying this as much as I am?” Rather than focusing on our own inner world, we are focused outward. We are attending not to self but to other.

“At first I found artist dates very difficult,” Maggie, the mother of five, confesses. “I felt so guilty about claiming time for myself. After a few dates, I began to feel differently. I began to see that taking time for myself was really

cherishing myself and my creativity. My attitude shifted. Now I felt like that hair-color ad. You know the one: 'Because you're worth it.' ”

Artist's dates do convince us of our worth. Many students report that it is during an artist's date that they strongly sense the presence of a loving Higher Power. No matter what we call it, there is indeed a benevolent Something or Somebody that makes itself known to us when we take time out to make contact with our inner adventurer. When we dare to take an artist's date, we reach out creator to Creator, artist to Artist. One need only observe the natural world to see that God revels in adventure: cliffs, jungles, waterfalls, deserts, mountains, seas! When we take our weekly adventure, we put ourselves in the presence of the Great Adventurer, the Lord who invented Kilimanjaro and Vesuvius. As we are outward bound, we sense an inward grace. Such contact is almost automatic.

“I decided to take a drive for my artist's date,” Susan, a literary agent, recounts. “I turned onto a country road and before long I was in a tunnel of green. ‘Something made all this,’ I caught myself thinking—and I would have said I was an atheist or at best an agnostic.”

Some people deliberately take spiritual artist's dates. They visit a great cathedral, marveling at the high vaulted ceiling and the stained glass.

“I went to St. John the Divine,” Judith, a concert pianist, relates. “I decided the church was truly well named. I did feel something divine as I was standing in that vast space. My heart soared up. Whether that was God or me myself, I don't know, but I enjoyed the sensation and I often think back to that moment when I meditate.”

Like morning pages, artist's dates are an active form of meditation. Going into a children's bookstore, Alex, a contractor, felt himself entering an altered state. “I let myself browse the way I think a kid would browse. I looked at lots of books on dinosaurs and a couple on trucks. I guess ‘big’ fills me with wonder. Maybe that's why I build things.”

Artist's dates do give us a sense of the bigness of the world. Jane, a

costume designer, takes her artist's dates in the medieval section of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "I look at armor and I think, 'People really wore that.' It makes the past so much more real. You could say that I simply connect to my own tradition. For centuries people have had clothiers. I am not so different from someone sewing by candlelight."

Jane is not alone in using her artist's date to find common ground. Gene, a painter, divides his artist's dates between contemporary galleries and museums. "It is astounding to me how a painting from three centuries ago can feel absolutely contemporary while some of the contemporary work that I see feels already dated. The one thing that always strikes me is that someone stood in front of an easel, just as I do. And someone painted stroke after brushstroke, just as I do. Painting is a solitary act, but I belong, if you will, to a communion of painters. We are all together in our solitude."

Artist's dates teach us how to cherish and enjoy solitude rather than fear and avoid it. As we pause to take in the beauty of the world, we take in our own beauty as well. "I started to actively like myself on artist's dates," reports David, an actor. "I liked the adventure of them and I liked the notion of myself as an adventurer. For some time, I had been feeling too small. With artist's dates, I began to feel just a little heroic to myself again. It reminded me of how I felt when I first started acting, like I was just a little bit larger than life."

"For me the world underwent a huge metamorphosis," says Gail, a sculptor. "I was turning agoraphobic in the name of my art. My world had shrunk to me and my studio. I felt at home with a lump of clay but the outer world felt hostile to me. I was becoming quite a recluse. Artist's dates challenged my notion that the world was a hostile place."

Many students report that the world feels more benevolent to them as a result of artist's dates. Jean, an animal portrait painter, undertook teaching her dogs to hunt. Every weekend she drove with her dogs to a game preserve, where she felt a sense of enchantment in the wild marsh grasses and overarching skies. "I was painting nature, but I had almost forgotten how to simply enjoy nature." She laughs. "I have to say I think my paintings have improved with my temperament."

Jean is not alone in noting that artist's dates sweeten her moods. For many students artist's dates bring a heightened sense of well-being. It is as if the act of self-nurturance that artist's dates require brings to us a new sense that the universe itself is a nurturing place. It is as if we commit to our care only to find that the world co-commits.

"I decided to take my first dance class in twenty years," Janet, a nurse, reveals, "but I was afraid. I went to breakfast at my normal diner and was seated at the counter next to a woman who taught beginner's dance. She was very nice, and when I told her that I was coming back she suggested I start with her. She even offered me my first class for free."

It isn't unusual for the universe to support our desires with some helpful synchronicity. Mark had a lively interest in Africa, which he decided to explore in his artist's dates. He began with a meal at an Ethiopian restaurant. On the bulletin board at the restaurant, he noticed a sign advertising African dance. "Why not?" he told himself, and took down the number. "Although I think I am a klutz, I actually loved the class," he recalls. "But what I really loved was the drumming. I struck up a conversation with the drummer, who said he offered private lessons. I am now in week six of drum lessons and I am loving it." As a teenager, Mark had fooled around with a drum kit. Drumming again, he felt like a teenager, young and full of vigor.

Artist's dates often lead us to make peace with our past. Gabriella, a caterer, had ridden hunter jumpers as a young girl. Now in her early forties, she hadn't ridden in more than twenty years. "I thought I would just ride once," she tells me. "But I rode once and it was so wonderful that I realized I wanted to ride always. I started taking weekly lessons, then I leased a wonderful horse. I am sorry for all the missed years, but when I am riding, I forget about those years. All that exists is me and the horse. I feel like I am turning back into the girl I once was."

A renewed sense of youthful exuberance is a frequent fruit of artist's dates. In seeking what it is we would like to do, we often consult a youthful part of our self, something that might be called our "inner explorer." This part of our self is an optimist and an amateur in the best sense of the word.

Pam, a social worker, discovered in her morning pages that she yearned to try filmmaking. For an artist's date, she went to a one-day workshop on independent filmmaking. "I was so frightened," she remembers. "I don't know what I expected, but everyone was very nice and very encouraging. No one laughed at my idea for a short film, and by day's end what seemed like a pipe dream began to seem quite doable. I just had to be willing to be a beginner."

Mavis went swimming for an artist's date and liked it so much she joined an athletic club so she could swim all the time. "You know how it is when you are in the water." She laughs. "You feel so slim and sexy!" If she keeps up her swimming, Mavis may actually end up slim and sexy—and not just when she's in the pool.

It is not uncommon for an artist's date to be the seed of a larger good unfolding. The artist's date trains us to take risks on our own behalf. Those risks may start out very small—going to a film—and end up far bigger: going to film school. When we explore an interest, we become more interesting to ourselves. When we see that it is possible to risk, we soon see that all risk can be broken down into small "doable" dates with ourselves.

"I didn't have to become brave enough to go to film school," explains Pam. "I just needed to become brave enough to go to day one of film school. Then I needed to become brave enough to go to day two. A day at a time, I was quite brave enough, although when I looked at the prospect as a whole it made me quake in my boots."

"I had artists on a pedestal," Vincent, a high school teacher, remarks. "I thought of them as superhuman beings for whom making art was easy. I never thought of artists as being fearful, or stumbling or trying. When I began taking artist's dates, I was fearful, but because I had promised myself that I would try to take them anyway, I muddled through. Somewhere in there it occurred to me that maybe all artists had fears and muddled through. The breakthrough for me was a poetry reading where the featured poet was visibly nervous yet performed anyhow. The very next week, I read one of my own poems at the open mike. I thought, 'If he can do it, I can do it.' And I did."

Artist's dates give us a feeling of accomplishment. They add to the richness of our lives by giving us a sense of adventure and largesse. Many blocked artists suffer from a sense of martyrdom. They are often workaholics who have forgotten how to play. The artist's date is enforced play.

"My mother had a poem taped above the kitchen sink," remembers Christian, a music producer. "It was a poem against workaholism. It went, 'If your nose is down to the grindstone rough / And you hold it down there long enough / Soon you will say there's no such thing / As brooks that babble and birds that sing / Three things will all your world compose / Just you, the grindstone, and your darned old nose.'"

Despite his mother's warning, Christian grew up to be a workaholic. "I got all of my self-esteem from the amount of work that I did. If you asked me how I was doing, I told you what I was working on. Artist's dates were murder for me because they meant I was actually supposed to take a little time off. I did them over my dead body, but I did do them. What a difference they made!"

For the workaholics among us, a strong inducement to taking artist's dates is the positive impact they frequently have on productivity. It is as though when we allow the slightest bit of positive inflow, we are rewarded by an increase in our creative outflow.

"I was grappling with a rewrite on a novel," says Alice. "It was really a case of my struggling uphill every day. I felt stale and was afraid that my prose showed it. I went to my desk each day like I was going to the mine. I told myself I had a deadline on the rewrite and that I was much too busy working to take an artist date. Unfortunately, I shared this opinion with a writer who used *Artist's Way* tools in her own work. She said, 'Oh. If you're on a deadline you should actually be doubling your artist dates.' She assured me that extra artist dates were the key to her own productivity—and so I tried them. I was astonished by what happened. I seemed to be flooded with new and workable ideas. My prose reacted like it had gone to a spa!"

When we think of art as an image-using system, we begin to get the idea. If we acknowledge that we are ourselves an ecosystem—let us say a small pond—we can begin to see how the making of art can deplete our system unless we are careful to keep up a fresh inflow.

Cornelius is a young composer who also ascribes to the double artist's date theory. "I made my New Year's resolution to do two artist dates a week. I figured I was working on two projects, a musical and an opera, and that each project deserved its own booster."

Artist's dates increase our productivity by decreasing our tendency to stalling through personal soap opera and dramatics. It is difficult to work when we are feeling sorry for ourselves and it is difficult to feel sorry for ourselves when we are taking artist's dates. For many artists, it is learned behavior to be constructive rather than destructive. Rather than indulge in self-dramatization, we can put healthy drama into our lives through a habit of small adventures.

"I was chronically depressed and I made sure you knew it," admits Edward, a substitute teacher who dreamed of a songwriting career. "I always had a tale of woe and it always got in the way of my actually making music. I needed to find a new roommate. I needed to find a new job. My excuses for not working on my art were endless, and I really didn't see how some enforced play was going to help me at all. 'Just do it,' my Artist's Way friends would tell me. 'You don't have to understand it for it to work.' My first artist's date was a flea market. All I did, it seemed to me, was stare at tables full of junk—then I went home and sat down at the piano for the first time in months. I started noodling and before I knew what I was doing, I wrote a song."

Edward has been doing artist's dates for six months now. He has also written a dozen songs. With morning pages and artist's dates in place, he has made a beginning on positive work habits. "I was in the habit of not working and now I am almost in the habit of working," he says. "I do get to the piano a few times a week. I am not as productive as I'd like to be, but I am a lot more productive than I was."

Artist's dates teach us how to initiate, execute, and have closure on events.

We plan the artist's date ahead of time. We anticipate our excursion and experience whatever resistance rears its head. Very often our resistance seems reasonable. "Why can't I take Fred with me?" we ask. Or, "I really should work late on Wednesday, and the movie probably isn't that good anyway." When we tell ourselves no, Fred can't tag along, and that we will see the movie as planned, we learn an important lesson in productivity, namely, that our mood doesn't matter and that excuses not to work will always surface and even sound astonishingly plausible. Learning to not wriggle out of our artist's dates teaches us to not wriggle out of our other commitments to ourselves.

"I did it! I did it!" we may want to crow after we have successfully completed a planned artist's date. This is the reward of closure, a sense of well-being and accomplishment. Many artists have difficulty with finishing a piece of work. They start work but cannot seem to bring it to completion. Artist's dates teach us the joys of commitment and closure.

James traces his master's in poetry to his history with artist's dates. "I began with open mikes, then I progressed to more formal readings. I began to feel comfortable in the world of academe. I stopped defining my work as 'street smart' and started to see that it might be just plain smart. When other poets reached out to me, I allowed them to persuade me to undertake a master's degree. I was intimidated at first, but I found all my experience with open mikes and readings really helped me. I went from being a 'street poet' to a poet, period."

Many of us undergo a sizable shift in identity as a result of artist's dates. We may, like James, learn to view ourselves differently. Or we may, indeed, become quite different. "I lived in New York but I was actually frightened by the city," confesses Hannah, a transplanted midwesterner. "My family thought I was living this glamorous big-city life, but I really had a very short leash. I went to my job and home to my studio apartment. The rest of the city was terra incognita. Artist dates changed all that. I started one date at a time, one area at a time, to explore Manhattan. I went to the garment district. Then I went to the plant district. I went to Chinatown. Then I went to Little Italy. I taught myself the subway system. I took one of those open-topped tourist buses. After six months, Brooklyn stopped seeming like such a foreign country. I even took myself to a Greek neighborhood out in Queens." There is a tell-tale pride in Hannah's voice as she recounts her adventures. While she

didn't exactly shift from an introvert to an extrovert, she did shift from a timid person to a braver one.

Timothy's shift was quite different from Hannah's. An extrovert to begin with, he was well used to hopping frantically from adventure to adventure. "My friends used to call me the Energizer Bunny," he jokes. "I was like a hyperactive child, bouncing from activity to activity, crowd to crowd. For me what was different about the artist date was that I was supposed to do it alone. This was surprisingly tough for me. I found my artist dates made me more reflective. As a result, I began to be able, for the first time, to stay home alone by myself and enjoy some solitude. Solitude had frightened me before."

Whether we are introverted or extroverted, artist's dates make us more comfortable with ourselves. For Hannah, they were the end to her painful seclusion. For Timothy, they marked a stopping to his frantic, adrenaline-driven life.

Andrew, a corporate lawyer, discovered a life outside of his job. "I had begun to feel that I was a dull person. What I didn't realize was that I had enthusiasms and interests but I tamped them down. Once I began to follow up on my interests, those interests became stronger—and I became more interesting to myself."

Anyone meeting Andrew today would never think of him as a dull man. He is mid-stride on writing a mystery novel. He leads a lively life of museum shows and concerts. He is a frequent theatergoer and an avid attendee at literary evenings. His habit of artist's dates has become for him a way of life.

The great acting coach Michael Chekhov advised his students, "If you want to work on your art, work on your life."

The world is a rich and variable place, simply "throbbing with life," in Henry Miller's phrase. As we allow ourselves to taste its many fruits, our own work becomes more rich and more varied. As we nurture our own roots, we become more fruitful.

Week One

Recovering a Sense of Safety

This week initiates your creative recovery. You may feel both giddy and defiant, hopeful and skeptical. The readings, tasks, and exercises aim at allowing you to establish a sense of safety, which will enable you to explore your creativity with less fear.

1

Set your alarm to wake up a half-hour earlier than usual every morning; get up and do three pages of longhand, stream-of-consciousness morning writing. Do not reread these pages or allow anyone else to read them. Ideally, stick them in a large manila envelope, or hide them somewhere. Welcome to the morning pages. They will change you.

List below a few creative affirmations from Week One that have particular significance for you. Also below, copy any “blurts” from your morning pages—those negative statements about yourself and your life that tend to crop up in each day’s morning pages. Convert these blurts into positive affirmations.

Tasks



An affirmation is a strong, positive statement that something is already so.

SHAKTI GAWAIN

2

Take yourself on an artist's date. You will do this every week for the duration of the course. A sample artist's date: Take five dollars and go to your local dollar store. Buy silly things like gold stick-on stars, tiny dinosaurs, some postcards, sparkly sequins, glue, kid's scissors, crayons. You might give yourself a gold star on your envelope each day you write. Just for fun. Record your experiences below.

Go confidently in the direction of your dreams! Live the life you've imagined. As you simplify your life, the laws of the universe will be simple.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

3

Time Travel: Describe below three old enemies of your creative self-worth. Please be as specific as possible in doing this exercise. Your historic monsters are the building blocks of your core negative beliefs. (Yes, rotten Sister Ann Rita from fifth grade does count, and the rotten thing she said to you does matter. Put her in.) This is your monster hall of fame. More monsters will come to you as you work through your recovery. It is always necessary to acknowledge creative injuries and grieve them. Otherwise, they become creative scar tissue and block your growth.

Make your own recovery the first priority in your life.

ROBIN NORWOOD

Time Travel: Select and write out one horror story from your monster hall of fame. You do not need to write long or much, but do jot down whatever details come back to you—the room you were in, the way people looked at you, the way you felt, what people said or didn't say when you told about it. Include whatever rankles you about the incident: "And then I remember she gave me this real fakey smile and patted my head... ."

You may find it cathartic to draw a sketch of your old monster or to clip out an image that evokes the incident for you. Draw a cartoon trashing your monster, or at least draw a nice red X through it.

Below, write a letter to the editor in your defense. Write this letter in the voice of your wounded artist child: "To whom it may concern: Sister Ann Rita is a jerk and has pig eyes and I can too spell!" For added fun, copy this letter onto nice stationery and mail it to yourself.

6

Time Travel: Below, list three old champions of your creative self-worth. This is your hall of champions, those who wish you and your creativity well. Also record (be specific) encouraging words they've said to you. Even if you disbelieve a compliment, record it. It may well be true.

If you are stuck for compliments, go back through your time-travel log and look for positive memories. When, where, and why did you feel good about yourself ? Who gave you affirmation?

Additionally, you may wish to write the compliment out and decorate it. Post it near where you do your morning pages or on the dashboard of your car. I put mine on the chassis of my computer to cheer me as I write.

Every time we say Let there be! in any form, something happens.

STELLA TERRILL MANN

Time Travel: Select and write out one happy piece of encouragement below. Describe why this vote of confidence meant so much to you. Once you are done, write a thank-you letter to the person who gave you this encouragement—even if it was you. Mail it to yourself or to the long-lost mentor.

Imaginary Lives: If you had five other lives to lead, what would you do in each of them? I would be a pilot, a cowhand, a physicist, a psychic, a monk. You might be a scuba diver, a cop, a writer of children's books, a football player, a belly dancer, a painter, a performance artist, a history teacher, a healer, a coach, a scientist, a doctor, a Peace Corps worker, a psychologist, a fisherman, a minister, an auto mechanic, a carpenter, a sculptor, a lawyer, a painter, a computer hacker, a soap-opera star, a country singer, a rock-and-roll drummer. Whatever occurs to you, jot it down. Do not overthink this exercise.

The point of these lives is to have fun in them—more fun than you might be having in this one. Look over your list and select one. Then do it this week. For instance, if you put down “country singer,” can you pick up a guitar? If you dream of being a cowhand, what about some horseback riding? Jot down some notes below on how this felt.

9

In working with affirmations and blurts, very often injuries and monsters swim back to us. Write about them below as they occur to you. Next, work with each blurt individually. Turn each negative into an affirmative positive.

Undoubtedly, we become what we envisage.

CLAUDE M. BRISTOL

Take your artist for a walk, just the two of you. A brisk twenty-minute walk can dramatically alter consciousness. Below, record reflections you made on this walk.

You will do check-ins every week. If you are running your creative week Sunday to Sunday, do your check-ins each Saturday. Remember that this recovery is *yours*. What you think is important, and it will become increasingly interesting to you as you progress. It's best to answer by hand and allow about twenty minutes to respond. The purpose of check-ins is to give you a journal of your creative journey. It is my hope that you will later share the tools with others and in doing so find your own notes invaluable: "Yes, I was mad in Week Four. I loved Week Five... ."

1. How many days this week did you do your morning pages? Seven out of seven, we always hope. How was the experience for you?
2. Did you do your artist's date this week? Yes, of course, we always hope. And yet artist's dates can be remarkably difficult to allow yourself. What did you do? How did it feel?
3. Were there any other issues this week that you consider significant for your recovery? Describe them.

Check-In



Week Two

Recovering a Sense of Identity

This week addresses self-definition as a major component of creative recovery. You may find yourself drawing new boundaries and staking out new territories as your personal needs, desires, and interests announce themselves. These tasks are aimed at moving you into your personal identity, a self-defined you.

1

Affirmative Reading: Every day, morning and night, get quiet and focused and read the Basic Principles to yourself. (See page xi.) Record any attitudinal shifts. Can you see yourself setting aside any skepticism yet?

Tasks



2

Where does your time go? List your five major activities this week. How much time did you give to each one? Which were what you wanted to do and which were shoulds? How much of your time is spent helping others and ignoring your own desires? Have any of your blocked friends triggered doubts in you?

Draw a circle below. Inside this circle, place topics you need to protect. Place the names of those you find to be supportive. Outside the circle, place the names of those you must be self-protective around just now. Use this map to support your autonomy. Add names to the inner and outer spheres as appropriate: “Oh! Derek is somebody I shouldn’t talk to about this right now.”

3

List twenty things you enjoy doing (rock climbing, roller-skating, baking pies, making soup, making love, making love again, riding a bike, riding a horse, playing catch, shooting baskets, going for a run, reading poetry, and so forth). When was the last time you let yourself do these things? Next to each entry, place a date. Don't be surprised if it's been years for some of your favorites. That will change. This list is an excellent resource for artist's dates.

4

From the preceding list, write down two favorite things that you've avoided that could be this week's goals. These goals can be small: buy one roll of film and shoot it. Remember, we are trying to win you some autonomy with your time. Look for windows of time just for you, and use them in small creative acts. Get to the record store at lunch hour, even if only for fifteen minutes. Stop looking for big blocks of time when you will be free. Find small bits of time instead. Record below what you did and how you managed to fit it into your schedule.

Dip back into Week One and read the affirmations. Note which ones cause the most reaction. Often the one that sounds the most ridiculous is the most significant. Write three chosen affirmations five times each day after your morning pages; be sure to include the affirmations you made yourself from your blurts.

Return to the list of imaginary lives from last week. List five more lives below. Now write down plans for doing bits and pieces of these lives in the one you are living now. If you have listed a dancer's life, do you let yourself go dancing? If you have listed a monk's life, are you ever allowed to go on a retreat? If you are a scuba diver, is there an aquarium shop you can visit? A day at the lake you could schedule?

Life Pie: Draw a circle below. Divide it into six pieces of pie. Label one piece “spirituality,” another “exercise,” another “play,” and so on with “work,” “friends,” and “romance/adventure.” Place a dot in each slice at the degree to which you are fulfilled in that area (outer rim indicates great; inner circle, not so great). Connect the dots. This will show you where you are lopsided.

As you begin the course, it is not uncommon for your life pie to look like a tarantula. As recovery progresses, your tarantula may become a mandala. Working with this tool, you will notice that there are areas of your life that feel impoverished and on which you spend little or no time. Use the time tidbits you are finding to alter this.

If your spiritual life is minimal, even a five-minute pit stop into a synagogue or cathedral can restore a sense of wonder. Many of us find that five minutes of drum music can put us in touch with our spiritual core. For others, it’s a trip to a greenhouse. The point is that even the slightest attention to our impoverished areas can nurture them. List three ways to make your circle less lopsided.

I shut my eyes in order to see.

PAUL GAUGUIN

Ten Tiny Changes: List ten changes you'd like to make for yourself, from the significant to the small or vice versa ("get new sheets so I have another set, go to China, paint my kitchen, dump my bitchy friend Alice"). Do it this way:

I would like to _____.

I would like to _____.

As the morning pages nudge us increasingly into the present, where we pay attention to our current lives, a small shift like a newly painted kitchen can yield a luxuriously large sense of self-care.

Select one small item from the list of ten changes and make it a goal for this week. At week's end, describe your results below.

1. How many days this week did you do your morning pages? (We're hoping seven, remember.) How was the experience for you? How did the morning pages work for you? Describe them (for example, "They felt so stupid. I'd write all these itty-bitty disconnected things that didn't seem to have anything to do with one another or with anything"). Remember, if you *are* writing morning pages, they are working for you. What were you surprised to find yourself writing about? Answer this question in full on your check-in page. This will be a weekly self-scan of your moods, not your progress. Don't worry if your pages are whiny and trite. Sometimes that's the very best thing for you.

2. Did you do your artist's date this week? Remember that artist's dates are a necessary frivolity. What did you do? How did it feel?

3. Were there any other issues this week that you consider significant for your recovery? Describe them.

Check-In



Week Three

Recovering a Sense of Power

This week may find you dealing with unaccustomed bursts of energy and sharp peaks of anger, joy, and grief. You are coming into your power as the illusory hold of your previously accepted limits is shaken. You will be asked to consciously experiment with spiritual open-mindedness.

1

Describe your childhood bedroom. If you wish, you may sketch this room. What was your favorite thing about it? What's your favorite thing about your bedroom right now? Nothing? Well, get something you like in there—maybe something from that old childhood bedroom.

Tasks



There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening, that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost.

MARTHA GRAHAM

2

Describe five traits you liked in yourself as a child. Next, write a little bit about why each one appeals to you.

Whenever I have to choose between two evils, I always like to try the one I haven't tried before.

MAE WEST

3

List five childhood accomplishments (got straight A's in seventh grade, trained the dog, punched out the class bully, short-sheeted the priest's bed). Reflect below on your memories of those experiences of success.

And a treat: List five favorite childhood foods. Buy yourself one of them this week. Yes, Jell-O with bananas is okay.

Habits: Take a look at your habits. Many of them may interfere with your self-nurturing and cause shame. Some of the oddest things are self-destructive. Do you have a habit of watching TV you don't like? Do you have a habit of hanging out with a really boring friend and just killing time (there's an expression!)? Some rotten habits are obvious, overt (drinking too much, smoking, eating instead of writing). List three obvious rotten habits. What's the payoff in continuing them?

Some rotten habits are more subtle (no time to exercise, little time to pray, always helping others, not getting any self-nurturing, hanging out with people who belittle your dreams). List three of your subtle foes. What use do these forms of sabotage have? Be specific.

Make a list of friends who nurture you—that's *nurture* (give you a sense of your own competency and possibility), not *enable* (give you the message that you will never get it straight without their help). There is a big difference between being helped and being treated as though we are helpless. Describe which of these friends' traits, particularly, serve you well.

6

Call a friend who treats you like a really good and bright person who can accomplish things. Part of your recovery is reaching out for support. This support will be critical as you undertake new risks.

Inner Compass: Each of us has an inner compass. This is an instinct that points us toward health. It warns us when we are on dangerous ground, and it tells us when something is safe and good for us. Morning pages are one way to contact it. So are some other artist-brain activities—painting, driving, walking, scrubbing, running. This week, take an hour to follow your inner compass by doing an artist-brain activity and *listening* to what insights bubble up. Record them below.

Creative work is play. It is free speculation using the materials of one's chosen form.

STEPHEN
NACHMANOVITCH

List five people you admire whom you would feel safe praising publicly. Now list five people you secretly admire. What traits do these people have that you can cultivate further in yourself ?

Creativity is ... seeing something that doesn't exist already. You need to find out how you can bring it into being and that way be a playmate with God.

MICHELE SHEA

List five people who are dead whom you wish you had met while they were alive. Now list five people who are dead whom you'd like to hang out with for a while in eternity. What traits do you find in these people that you can look for in your friends?

Compare the two sets of lists. Take a look at what you really like and really admire—and a look at what you think you should like and admire. Your shoulds might tell you to admire Edison, while your heart belongs to Houdini. Go with the Houdini side of you for a while.

1. How many days this week did you do your morning pages? How was the experience for you? If you skipped a day, why did you skip it?
2. Did you do your artist's date this week? (Yes, yes, and it was *awful*.) What did you do? How did it feel?
3. Did you experience any synchronicity this week? What was it?
4. Were there any other issues this week that you consider significant for your recovery? Describe them.

Check-In



Week Four

Recovering a Sense of Integrity

This week may find you grappling with changing self-definition. The tasks are designed to catapult you into productive introspection and integration of new self-awareness. This may be both very difficult and extremely exciting for you.

1

Environment: Describe your ideal environment. Town? Country? Swanky? Cozy? One paragraph. One image, drawn or clipped, that conveys this. What's your favorite season? Why? Go through some magazines and find an image of this. Or draw it. Place it near your working area.

Tasks



When the soul wishes to experience something she throws an image of the experience out before her and enters into her own image.

MEISTER ECKHART

Time Travel: Describe yourself at eighty. What did you do after fifty that you enjoyed? Be very specific. Now write a letter from you at eighty to you at your current age. What would you tell yourself? What interests would you urge yourself to pursue? What dreams would you encourage?

Time Travel: Remember yourself at eight. What did you like to do? What were your favorite things? Now write a letter from you at eight to you at your current age. What would you tell yourself?

Environment: Look at your house. Is there any room that you could make into a secret, private space for yourself? Convert the TV room? Buy a screen or hang a sheet and cordon off a section of some other room? This is your dream area. It should be decorated for fun and not as an office. All you really need is a chair or pillow, something to write on, some kind of little altar area for flowers and candles. This is to help you center on the fact that creativity is a spiritual, not an ego, issue. Describe your new private space below.

Use your life pie (from Week Two) to review your growth. Has that nasty tarantula changed shape yet? Haven't you been more active, less rigid, more expressive? Be careful not to expect too much too soon. That's "raising the jumps." Growth must have time to solidify into health. One day at a time, you are building the habit patterns of a healthy artist. Easy does do it. List below ongoing self-nurturing toys you could buy your artist: books on tape, magazine subscriptions, theater tickets, a bowling ball.

6

Write your own artist's prayer. (See pages 207-208 of *The Artist's Way*.) Use it every day for a week.

I learned that the real creator was my inner Self, the Shakti... . That desire to do something is God inside talking through us.

MICHELE SHEA

An extended artist's date: Plan a small vacation for yourself. (One weekend day. Get ready to execute it.) Below, describe what you did on this artist's date.

Open your closet. Choose one low-self-worth outfit (you know the one) to hand down to a friend or donate to a charity. Make space for the new. Describe this outfit and how disposing of it made you feel.

9

Look at one situation in your life that you feel you should change but haven't yet. What is the payoff for you in staying stuck?

If you break your reading deprivation (see pages 87-89 of *The Artist's Way*), write about how you did it. In a tantrum? A slipup? A binge? How do you feel about it? Why?

1. How many days this week did you do your morning pages? (Tantrums often show up as skipping the morning pages.) How was the experience for you?
2. Did you do your artist's date this week? (Does your artist get to do more than rent a movie?) What did you do? How did it feel?
3. Did you experience any synchronicity this week? What was it?
4. Were there any other issues this week that you consider significant for your recovery? Describe them.

Check-In



Week Five

Recovering a Sense of Possibility

This week you are being asked to examine your payoffs in remaining stuck. You will explore how you curtail your own possibilities by placing limits on the good you can receive. You will examine the cost of settling for appearing good instead of being authentic. You may find yourself thinking about radical changes, no longer ruling out your growth by making others the cause of your constriction.

The following tasks explore and expand your relationship to the source.

1

The reason I can't really believe in a *supportive* God is ...

List five grievances. (God can take it.)

Tasks



Starting an Image File: If I had either faith or money I would try ...

List five desires. For the next week, be alert for images of these desires. When you spot them, clip them, buy them, photograph them, draw them, *collect them somehow*. With these images, begin a file of dreams that speak to you. Add to it continually for the duration of the course. Paste a couple of especially powerful images here and describe their pull for you.

3

One more time, list five imaginary lives. Have they changed? Are you doing more parts of them? You may want to add images of these lives to your image file.

If I were twenty and had money ...

List five adventures. Again, add images of these to your visual image file.

If I were sixty-five and had money ...

List and describe five postponed pleasures. And again, collect these images. This is a very potent tool.

6

Ten ways I am mean to myself are ...

Just as making the positive explicit helps allow it into our lives, making the negative explicit helps us exorcise it.

Ten items I would like to own that I don't are ...

And again, you may want to collect these images. In order to boost sales, experts in sales motivation often teach rookie salespeople to post images of what they would like to own. It works.

To accept the responsibility of being a child of God is to accept the best that life has to offer you.

STELLA TERRILL MANN

Honestly, my favorite creative block is ...

TV, overreading, friends, work, rescuing others, overexercise. You name it.
Whether you can draw or not, please cartoon yourself indulging in it.

My payoff for staying blocked is ...

This you may want to explore in your morning pages.

The person I blame for being blocked is ...

Again, use your pages to mull over this.

1. How many days this week did you do your morning pages? Are you starting to like them—at all? How was the experience for you? Have you discovered the page-and-a-half “truth point” yet? Many of us find that pay dirt in our writing occurs after a page and a half of vamping.

2. Did you do your artist’s date this week? Have you had the experience of hearing answers during this leisure time? What did you do for your date? How did it feel? Have you taken an artist’s date yet that really felt adventurous?

3. Did you experience any synchronicity this week? What was it? Try inaugurating a conversation on synchronicity with your friends.

4. Were there any other issues this week that you consider significant for your recovery? Describe them.

Check-In



Week Six

Recovering a Sense of Abundance

This week you tackle a major creative block—money. You are asked to really look at your own ideas about God, money, and creative abundance. The essays will explore the ways in which your attitudes limit abundance and luxury in your current life. You will be introduced to counting, a block-busting tool for clarity and right use of funds.

This week may feel volatile.

1

Natural Abundance: Pick five flowers or leaves. You may want to press these between wax paper and save them in this book. If you did this in kindergarten, that's fine. Some of the best creative play is done there. Let yourself do it again and record below how this whimsical activity influenced your thinking on the creative process.

Tasks



As an artist, it is central to be unsatisfied! This isn't greed, though it might be appetite.

LAWRENCE CALCAGNO

Natural Abundance: Find five pretty or interesting rocks. I enjoy this exercise particularly because rocks can be carried in pockets, fingered in business meetings. They can be small, constant reminders of our creative consciousness.

2

Creation: Bake something. (If you have a sugar problem, make a fruit salad.) Creativity does not have to always involve capital-A art. Very often, the act of cooking something can help you cook something up in another creative mode. (When I am stymied as a writer, I make soups and pies.) Reflect below on how this simple creative act of cooking influenced your relationship to larger art projects you are working on.

Clearing: Throw out or give away five ratty pieces of clothing.

3

Reread the Basic Principles. (See page xi.) Do this once daily. Read an artist's prayer—yours from Week Four, or mine on pages 207-208 of *The Artist's Way*. Do this once daily. Copy below the sentences from these pages that feel particularly relevant to you.

Communication: Send postcards to five friends. This is not a goody-two-shoes exercise. Send them to people you would *love* to hear from.

Clearing: Map out below a few changes in your home environment that would give you more physical and emotional space. Make them.

Acceptance: Any new flow in your life? Below, practice saying yes to freebies.

6

Prosperity: Any changes in your financial situation or your perspective on it? Any new—even crazy—ideas about what you would love doing? Pull images around this and add to your image file. Paste a few of them here.

1. How many days this week did you do your morning pages? (Have you used them yet to think about creative luxury for yourself ?) How was the experience for you?
2. Did you do your artist's date this week? (Have you considered allowing yourself two?) What did you do? How did it feel?
3. Did you experience any synchronicity this week? What was it?
4. Were there any other issues this week that you consider significant for your recovery? Describe them.

Check-In



Week Seven

Recovering a Sense of Connection

We turn this week to the practice of right attitudes for creativity. The emphasis is on your receptive as well as active skills. The essays, exercises, and tasks aim at excavating areas of genuine creative interest as you connect with your personal angels.

1

Make this sentence a mantra: *Treating myself like a precious object will make me strong.* Watercolor or crayon or calligraph this sentence below. You may also wish to do so on a blank sheet and post it where you will see it daily. We tend to think being hard on ourselves will make us strong. But it is cherishing ourselves that gives us strength.

Tasks



Trust in yourself. Your perceptions are often far more accurate than you are willing to believe.

CLAUDIA BLACK

Give yourself time out to listen to one side of an album, just for joy. You may want to doodle in the space provided here as you listen, allowing yourself to draw the shapes, emotions, thoughts you hear in the music. Notice how just twenty minutes can refresh you. Learn to take these mini artist's dates to break stress and allow insight.

3

Take yourself into a sacred space—a church, synagogue, library, grove of trees—and allow yourself to savor the silence and healing solitude. Each of us has a personal idea of what sacred space is. For me, a large clock store or a great aquarium store can engender a sense of timeless wonder. Experiment and record a few of your reflections on these activities below.

Create one wonderful smell in your house—with soup, incense, fir branches, candles—whatever. Note below how this infuses your day in terms of creativity.

Wear your favorite item of clothing for no special occasion.

Collage: Collect a stack of at least ten magazines, which you will allow yourself to freely dismember. Setting a twenty-minute time limit for yourself, tear (literally) through the magazines, collecting any images that reflect your life or interests. Think of this collage as a form of pictorial autobiography. Include your past, present, future, and your dreams. It is okay to include images you simply like. Keep pulling until you have a good stack of images (at least twenty). Now take a sheet of newspaper, a stapler, or some tape or glue, and arrange your images in a way that pleases you. (This is one of my students' favorite exercises.) Describe your collage below.

When you start a painting, it is somewhat outside you. At the conclusion, you seem to move inside the painting.

FERNANDO BOTERO

Buy yourself one wonderful pair of socks, one wonderful pair of gloves
—one wonderfully comforting, self-loving something.

6

Quickly list five favorite films. Do you see any common denominators among them? Are they romances, adventures, period pieces, political dramas, family epics, thrillers? Do you see traces of your cinematic themes in your collage?

When an inner situation is not made conscious, it appears outside as fate.

C. G. JUNG

Name your favorite topics to read about: comparative religion, movies, ESP, physics, rags-to-riches, betrayal, love triangles, scientific breakthroughs, sports ... Are these topics in your collage? How do they appear in the collage?

Give your collage a place of honor. Even a secret place of honor is all right—in your closet, in a drawer, anywhere that is yours. You may want to do a new one every few months, or collage more thoroughly a dream you are trying to accomplish.

Check-In



1. How many days this week did you do your morning pages? Have you allowed yourself to daydream a few creative risks? Are you coddling your artist child with childhood loves?

2. Did you do your artist's date this week? Did you use it to take any risks? What did you do? How did it feel?

3. Did you experience any synchronicity this week? What was it?

4. Were there any other issues this week that you consider significant for your recovery? Describe them.

Week Eight

Recovering a Sense of Strength

This week tackles another major creative block: time. You will explore the ways in which you have used your perception of time to preclude taking creative risks. You will identify immediate and practical changes you can make in your current life. You will excavate the early conditioning that may have encouraged you to settle for far less than you desire creatively.

1

Goal Search: You may find the following exercise difficult. Allow yourself to do it anyway. If multiple dreams occur to you, do the exercise for each one of them. The simple act of imagining a dream in concrete detail helps us to bring it into reality. Think of your goal search as a preliminary architect's drawing for the life you would wish to have.

Tasks



Your desire is your prayer. Picture the fulfillment of your desire now and feel its reality and you will experience the joy of the answered prayer.

DR. JOSEPH MURPHY

The Steps

1. Name your dream. That's right. Write it down. "In a perfect world, I would secretly love to be a ____."

2. Name one concrete goal that signals to you its accomplishment. On your emotional compass, this goal signifies true north. (For example, two women may want to be actresses. They share that dream. For one, an article in *People* magazine is the concrete goal. To her, glamour is the emotional center for her dream; glamour is true north. For the second

woman, the concrete goal is a good review in a Broadway play. To her, respect as a creative artist is the emotional center of her dream; respect is true north. Actress One might be happy as a soap star. Actress Two would need stage work to fulfill her dream. On the surface, both seem to desire the same thing.)

3. In a perfect world, where would you like to be in five years in relation to your dream and true north?

4. In the world we inhabit now, what action can you take, this year, to move you closer? Describe this action in detail below.

5. What action can you take this month? This week? This day? Right now?

6. List your dream (for example, to be a famous film director). List its true north (respect and higher consciousness, mass communication.) Select a role model (Walt Disney, Ron Howard, Michael Powell). Make an action plan. Five years. Three years. One year. One month. One week. Now. Choose an action. *Reading this book is an action.*

New Childhood: What might you have been if you'd had perfect nurturing? Write a page of this fantasy childhood. What were you given? Can you reparent yourself in that direction now?

Color Schemes: Pick a color and write a quick few sentences describing yourself in the first person. (“I am silver, high-tech and ethereal, the color of dreams and accomplishment, the color of half-light and in between. I feel serene.” Or, “I am red. I am passion, sunset, anger, blood, wine and roses, armies, murder, lust, and apples.”) What is your favorite color? What do you have that is that color? What about an entire room? This is your life and your house.

List five things you are not allowed to do: kill your boss, scream in church, go outside naked, make a scene, quit your job. Now do that thing on paper. Write it, draw it, paint it, act it out, collage it. Now put some music on and dance it.

Style Search: List twenty things you like to do. (Perhaps the same twenty you listed before, perhaps not.) Answer these questions for each item.

Does it cost money, or is it free?

Expensive or cheap?

Alone or with somebody?

Job-related?

Physical risk?

Fast-paced or slow?

Mind, body, or spiritual?

6

Ideal Day: Plan a perfect day in your life as it is now constituted, using the information gleaned from the previous exercises.

Ideal Ideal Day: Plan a perfect day in your life as you *wish* it were constituted. There are no restrictions. Allow yourself to be and to have whatever your heart desires. Your ideal environment, job, home, circle of friends, intimate relationship, stature in your art form—your wildest dreams.

Choose one festive aspect from your Ideal day. Allow yourself to live it. You may not be able to move to Rome yet, but even in a still-grungy apartment you can enjoy a homemade cappuccino and a croissant.

1. How many days this week did you do your morning pages? (Have you been very tempted to abandon them?) How was the experience for you?
2. Did you do your artist's date this week? (Have you been allowing workaholism or other commitments to sabotage this practice?) What did you do? How did it feel?
3. Did you experience any synchronicity this week? What was it?
4. Were there any other issues this week that you consider significant for your recovery? Describe them.

Check-In



Week Nine

Recovering a Sense of Compassion

This week finds us facing the internal blocks to creativity. It may be tempting to abandon ship at this point. Don't! We will explore and acknowledge the emotional difficulties that beset us in the past as we made creative efforts. We will undertake healing the shame of past failures. We will gain in compassion as we reparent the frightened artist child who yearns for creative accomplishment. We will learn tools to dismantle emotional blocks and support renewed risk.

1

Read your morning pages! This process is best undertaken with two colored markers, one to highlight insights and another to highlight actions needed. Do not judge your pages or yourself. This is very important. Yes, they will be boring. Yes, they may be painful. Consider them a map. Take them as information, not an indictment.

Take Stock: Whom have you consistently been complaining about? What have you procrastinated on? What blessedly have you allowed yourself to change or accept? Write about these things below.

Take Heart: Many of us notice an alarming tendency toward black-and-white thinking: “He’s terrible. He’s wonderful. I love him. I hate him. It’s a great job. It’s a terrible job,” and so forth. Don’t be thrown by this.

Acknowledge: The pages have allowed us to vent without self-destruction, to plan without interference, to complain without an audience, to dream without restriction, to know our own minds. Give yourself credit for undertaking them. Give them credit for the changes and growth they have fostered.

Tasks



Be really whole And all things will come to you.

LAO-TZU

2

Visualizing: You have already done work with naming your goal and identifying true north. The following exercise asks you to fully imagine having your goal accomplished. Please spend enough time to fill in the juicy details that would really make the experience wonderful for you.

Name your goal: I am _____.

In the present tense, describe yourself doing it at the height of your powers!
This is your ideal scene.

Read this aloud to yourself.

Post this above your work area.

Read this aloud, daily!

For the next week collect actual pictures of yourself and combine them with magazine images to collage your ideal scene described above. Remember, seeing is believing, and the added visual cue of your real self in your ideal scene can make it far more real.

Learning is movement from moment to moment.

J. KRISHNAMURTI

3

Priorities: List for yourself your creative goals for the year. List for yourself your creative goals for the month. List for yourself your creative goals for the week.

Creative U-Turns: All of us have taken creative U-turns. Name one of yours. Name three more. Name the one that just kills you.

Forgive yourself. Forgive yourself for all failures of nerve, timing, and initiative. Devise a personalized list of affirmations to help you do better in the future.

Very gently, *very gently*, consider whether any aborted, abandoned, savaged, or sabotaged brainchildren can be rescued. Remember, you are not alone. All of us have taken creative U-turns.

Choose one creative U-turn. Retrieve it. Mend it.

Do not take a creative U-turn now. Instead, notice your resistance. Morning pages seeming difficult? Stupid? Pointless? Too obvious? Do them anyway.

What creative dreams are lurching toward possibility? Admit that they frighten you.

Choose an artist's totem. It might be a doll, a stuffed animal, a carved figurine, or a wind-up toy. The point is to choose something you immediately feel a protective fondness toward. Give your totem a place of honor and then honor it by not beating up on your artist child.

1. How many days this week did you do your morning pages? Regarding your U-turns, have you allowed yourself a shift toward compassion, at least on the page?

2. Did you do your artist's date this week? Have you kept the emphasis on fun? What did you do? How did it feel?

3. Did you experience any synchronicity this week? What was it?
4. Were there any other issues this week that you consider significant for your recovery? Describe them.

Check-In



We learn to do something by doing it. There is no other way.

JOHN HOLT (EDUCATOR)

Week Ten

Recovering a Sense of Self-Protection

*This week we explore the perils that can ambush us on our creative path.
Because creativity is a spiritual issue, many of the perils are spiritual.
With this week's tasks, we search out the toxic patterns we cling to
that block our creative flow.*

1

The Deadlies: Take a piece of paper and cut seven small strips from it. On each strip write one of the following words: “alcohol,” “drugs,” “sex,” “work,” “money,” “food,” “family/ friends.” Fold these strips of paper and place them in an envelope. We call these folded slips “the deadlies.” You’ll see why in a minute. Now draw one of the deadlies from the envelope and write five ways in which it has had a negative impact on your life. (If the one you choose seems difficult or inapplicable to you, consider this resistance.) You will do this seven times, each time putting back the previous slip of paper so that you are always drawing from seven possible choices. Yes, you may repeatedly draw the same deadly. Yes, this is significant. Very often, it is the last impact on the final list of an annoying “Oh no, not again” that yields a break, through denial, into clarity.

Tasks



He who knows others is wise; he who knows himself is enlightened.

LAO-TZU

I will tell you what I have learned myself. For me, a long five or six mile walk helps. And one must go alone and every day.

BRENDA UELAND

Touchstones: Make a quick list of things you love, happiness touchstones for you. River rocks worn smooth, willow trees, cornflowers, chicory, real Italian bread, homemade vegetable soup, the BoDeans' music, black beans and rice, the smell of new-mown grass, blue velvet (the cloth and the song), Aunt Minnie's crumb pie ...

You may want to copy them on a blank sheet of paper and post it where it can console you and remind you of your own personal touchstones. You may want to draw one of the items on your list—or acquire it. If you love blue velvet, get a remnant and use it as a runner on a sideboard or dresser, or tack it to the wall and mount images on it. Play a little.

3

The Awful Truth: Answer the following questions.

Tell the truth. What habit do you have that gets in the way of your creativity?

Tell the truth. What do you think might be a problem? It is.

What do you plan to do about the habit or problem?

What is your payoff in holding on to this block?

If you can't figure out your payoff, ask a trusted friend.

Tell the truth. Which friends make you doubt yourself ? (The self-doubt is yours already, but they trigger it.)

Tell the truth. Which friends believe in you and your talent? (The talent is yours, but they make you feel it.)

What is the payoff in keeping your destructive friends? If the answer is "I like them," the next question is "Why?"

Which destructive habits do your destructive friends share with your destructive self ?

Which constructive habits do your constructive friends share with your constructive self ?

How often—even before we began— have we declared a task “impossible”? And how often have we construed a picture of ourselves as being inadequate? ... A great deal depends upon the thought patterns we choose and on the persistence with which we affirm them.

PIERO FERRUCCI

Setting a Bottom Line: Working with your answers to the questions on page 133, try setting a bottom line for yourself. Begin with five of your most painful behaviors. You can always add more later.

- If you notice that your evenings are typically gobbled up by your boss's extra assignments, then a rule must come into play: No work after six.
- If you wake at six and could write for an hour if you were not interrupted to look for socks and make breakfast and do ironing, the rule might be: No interrupting Mommy before seven A.M.
- If you are working too many jobs and too many hours, you may need to look at your billing. Are you pricing yourself appropriately? Do some footwork. What are others in your field receiving? Raise your prices and lower your workload.

Bottom Line

1. I will no longer work weekends.
2. I will no longer bring work along with me on social occasions.
3. I will no longer place my work before my creative commitments. (No more canceling piano lessons or drawing class because of a sudden new deadline from my boss the workaholic.)
4. I will no longer postpone lovemaking to do late-night reading for work.
5. I will no longer accept business calls at home after six.

It's a funny thing about life; if you refuse to accept anything but the best, you very often get

it.

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

Cherishing:

1. List five small victories.
2. List three nurturing actions you took for your artist.
3. List three actions you could take to comfort your artist.
4. Make three nice promises to yourself. Keep them.
5. Do one lovely thing for yourself *each* day this week.

Check-In



1. How many days this week did you do your morning pages? Has reading your pages changed your writing? Are you still allowing yourself to write them freely?
2. Did you do your artist's date this week? Let yourself do an extra one. What did you do? How did it feel?
3. Did you experience any synchronicity this week? What was it?
4. Were there any other issues this week that you consider significant for your recovery? Describe them.

Week Eleven

Recovering a Sense of Autonomy

This week we focus on our artistic autonomy. We examine the ongoing ways in which we must nurture and accept ourselves as artists.

We explore the behaviors that can strengthen our spiritual base and therefore our creative power. We take a special look at the ways in which success must be handled in order that we not sabotage our freedom.

1

Write down the following headings with space for lists below each of them: Health, Possessions, Leisure, Relationships, Creativity, Career, and Spirituality. With no thought as to practicality, list five wishes in each area. All right, it's a lot. Let yourself dream a little here.

Tasks



Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes it visible. The moon develops creativity as chemicals develop photographic images.

NORMA JEAN HARRIS

Tape your own voice reading the Basic Principles (see page xi). Choose a favorite essay from this book and tape that as well. Use this tape for meditation.

Working with the Honest Changes section in Week Four of *The Artist's Way*, inventory for yourself the ways you have changed since beginning your recovery.

Write out, in longhand, your artist's prayer from Week Four. Place it in your wallet.

3

List five ways you will change as you continue.

List five ways you plan to nurture yourself in the next six months: courses you will take, supplies you will allow yourself, artist's dates, and vacations just for you.

Below, plan one week's nurturing for yourself. This means one concrete, loving action every single day for one week: please binge!

6

Once more, reexamine your God concept. Does your belief system limit or support your creative expansion? Are you open-minded about altering your concept of God?

Write and mail an encouraging letter to your inner artist. This sounds silly and feels very, very good to receive. Remember that your artist is a child and loves praise and encouragement and festive plans.

List ten examples of personal synchronicity that support the possibility of a nurturing creative force.

Check-In



1. How many days this week did you do your morning pages? How was the experience for you? Have you recommended morning pages to anyone else? Why?
2. Did you do your artist's date this week? (Have you considered scheduling an entire artist's day? Whew!) What did you do? How did it feel?
3. Did you experience any synchronicity this week? What was it?
4. Were there any other issues this week that you consider significant for your recovery? Describe them.

Week Twelve

Recovering a Sense of Faith

In this final week, we acknowledge the inherently mysterious spiritual heart of creativity. We address the fact that creativity requires receptivity and profound trust—capacities we have developed through our work in this course. We set our creative aims and take a special look at last-minute sabotage. We renew our commitment to the use of the tools.

1

Write down any resistance, angers, and fears you have about going on from here. We all have them.

2

Take a look at your current areas of procrastination. What are the payoffs in your waiting? Locate the hidden fears.

3

Sneak a peek at Week One, Core Negative Beliefs, on page 30 of *The Artist's Way*. Laugh. Yes, the nasty critters are still there. Note your progress. Read yourself the affirmations on pages 36 and 37. Write some affirmations about your continued creativity as you end the course.

Mend any mending.

Use your God jar. Start with your fear list from this week's Task One. When worried, remind yourself it's in the jar—"God's got it." Then take the next action. Describe this process below.

Select a God jar. A what? A jar, a box, a vase, a container. Something to put your fears, your resentments, your hopes, your dreams, your worries into.

Now check *how*: Honestly, what would you most like to create? What oddball paths would you open-mindedly dare to try? What appearances are you willing to shed to pursue your dreams?

Repot any pinched and languishing plants.

6

List five people to whom you can talk about your dreams and with whom you feel supported to dream and then plan.

Reread *The Artist's Way*. Share it with a friend. Remember that the miracle is one artist sharing with another. Trust God. Trust yourself.

Good luck and God bless you!

Check-In



1. How many days this week did you do your morning pages? Have you accepted them yet as a permanent spiritual practice? How was the experience for you?
2. Did you do your artist's date this week? Will you allow yourself these on a permanent basis as well? What did you do? How did it feel?
3. Did you experience any synchronicity this week? What was it?
4. Were there any other issues this week that you consider significant for your recovery? Describe them.

As a recovering creative, you now have put many hours into your recovery over these three months, changing rapidly as you grew. For your recovery to continue, you require a commitment to further creative plans. The contract on the following page will help you accomplish them.

CREATIVITY CONTRACT

My name is _____. I am a recovering creative person. To further my growth and my joy, I now commit myself to the following self-nurturing plans:

Morning pages have been an important part of my self-nurturing and self-discovery. I, _____, hereby commit myself to continuing to work with them for the next ninety days.

Artist's dates have been integral to my growth in self-love and my deepening joy in living. I, _____, am willing to commit to another ninety days of weekly artist's dates for self-care.

In the course of following *The Artist's Way* and healing my artist within, I have discovered that I have a number of creative interests. While I hope to develop many of them, my specific commitment for the next ninety days is to allow myself to more fully explore _____.

My concrete commitment to a plan of action is a critical part of nurturing my artist. For the next ninety days, my self-nurturing creative action plan is: _____.

I have chosen _____ as my creative colleague and _____ as my creative backup. I am committed to a weekly phone check-in.

I have made the above commitments and will begin my new commitment on _____.

(signature)

(date)

CREATIVE CLUSTERS GUIDE

WHEN *THE ARTIST'S WAY* was first published, I expressed a wish for Artist's Way groups to spring into being. I envisioned them as peer-run circles—"creative clusters"—where people would serve one another as believing mirrors, uniting with the common aim of creative unblocking. It was my vision that such circles would be free of charge, that anyone could assemble one, using the book as a guide and a text. Many such peer-run circles did form and many more are forming still. Such artist-to-artist, heart-to-heart help and support is the heart of *The Artist's Way* and *The Vein of Gold*.

Not surprisingly, many therapists, community colleges, wellness centers, universities, and teachers soon began running facilitated Artist's Way groups, for which they charged a fee. The Artist's Way groups were led rather than simply convened. To the degree to which they adhered to the spiritual principles of creative recovery and introduced people to the use of the tools, they were—and are—valuable. Any group that starts with such a leader should, however, rapidly become autonomous, "graduating" to a peer-run, nonprofit status.

There are no "accredited" Artist's Way teachers. I chose not to franchise the Artist's Way but to offer it as a gift, free of charge. It is my belief that creative recovery at its best is a nonhierarchical, peer-run, collective process. In this it differs from the academic and therapeutic models. Any professional using the Artist's Way should realize that autonomous, peer-run creative clusters must remain the eventual goal. Facilitated groups can serve as a sort of bridge to this end.

In my years of teaching and traveling, I have frequently encountered excellent results from peer-group clusters. On occasion, I have encountered situations where the Artist's Way has been unduly modified. Whenever there is a misplaced emphasis on intellectual "analysis" or therapeutic "processing," there is the risk of undermining creative unfolding. Very often, what could be interpreted as "neurosis" or a deep-seated problem is simply creative resistance.

The Artist's Way and *The Vein of Gold* and all my other "teaching" books are experiential books. They are intended to teach people to process and transform life through acts of creativity. Both books and *all* creative clusters

should be practiced through creative action, not through theory. As an artist, I know this. *The Artist's Way* and other books are the distillate of thirty years of artistic practice.

It is my belief and my experience as a teacher that all of us are healthy enough to practice creativity. It is not a dangerous endeavor requiring trained facilitators. It is our human birthright and something we can do gently and collectively. Creativity is like breathing—pointers may help, but *we do the process ourselves*. Creative clusters, where we gather as peers to develop our strength, are best regarded as tribal gatherings, where creative beings raise, celebrate, and actualize the creative power that runs through us all.

GUIDELINES

1. *Use a Twelve-Week Process with a Weekly Gathering of Two to Three Hours.* The morning pages and artist's dates are required of everyone in the group, including facilitators. The exercises are done in order in the group, with everyone, including the facilitator, answering the questions and then sharing the answers in clusters of four, one chapter per week. Do not share your morning pages with the group or anyone else. Do not reread your morning pages until later in the course, if you are required to do so by your facilitator or your own inner guidance.

2. *Avoid Self-Appointed Gurus.* If there is any emissary, it is the work itself, as a collective composed of all who take the course, at home or otherwise. Each person is equally a part of the collective, no one more than another. While there may be "teachers," facilitators who are relied on during the twelve-week period to guide others down the path, such facilitators need to be prepared to share their own material and take their own creative risks. This is a dialectic rather than a monologue, an egalitarian group process rather than a hierarchical one.

3. *Listen.* We each get what we need from the group process by sharing our own material and by listening to others. We do not need to comment on another person's sharing in order to help that person. We

must refrain from trying to “fix” someone else. Each group devises a cooperative creative “song” of artistic recovery. Each group’s song is unique to that group—like that of a pod or family of whales, initiating and echoing to establish their position. When listening, go around the circle without commenting unduly on what is heard. The circle, as a shape, is very important. We are intended to witness, not control, one another. When sharing exercises, clusters of four within the larger groups are important: five tends to become unwieldy in terms of time constraints; three doesn’t allow for enough contrasting experience. Obviously, not all groups can be divided into equal fours. Just try to do so whenever you can.

4. *Respect One Another.* Be certain that respect and compassion are afforded equally to every member. Each person must be able to speak his own wounds and dreams. No one is to be “fixed” by another member of the group. This is a deep and powerful internal process. There is no one right way to do this. Love is important. Be kind to yourself. Be kind to one another.

5. *Expect Change in the Group Makeup.* Many people will—some will not—fulfill the twelve-week process. There is often a rebellious or fallow period after the twelve weeks, with people returning to the disciplines later. When they do, they continue to find the process unfolding within them a year, a few years, or many years later. Many groups have a tendency to drive apart at eight to ten weeks (creative U-turns) because of the feelings of loss associated with the group’s ending. Face the truth as a group; it may help you stay together.

6. *Be Autonomous.* You cannot control your own process, let alone anyone else’s. Know that you will feel rebellious occasionally, that you won’t want to do all of your morning pages and exercises at times in the twelve weeks. Relapse is okay. You cannot do this process perfectly, so relax, be kind to yourself, and hold on to your hat. Even when you feel nothing is happening, you will be changing at great velocity. This change is a deepening into your own intuition, your own creative self. The structure of the course is about safely getting across the bridge into new realms of creative spiritual awareness.

7. *Be Self-Loving.* If the facilitator feels somehow “wrong” to you, change clusters or start your own. Continually seek your own inner guidance rather than outer guidance. You are seeking to form an artist-to-artist relationship with the Great Creator. Keep gurus at bay. You have

your own answers within you.

A Word to Therapists, Teachers, Writing Instructors, and Other Artist's Way Group Leaders. Thank you for the wonderful work you do. While I know that many of you are using *The Artist's Way* to run groups, I hope and expect that you will go on to explore your own interests using *The Artist's Way* for your process also. I encourage you to follow your own creative vision, to strive for your own true north. You will find that the facilitation process continues your own growth experience.

I cannot state emphatically enough that the *Artist's Way* fame and path should not be used in ways that differ substantially from the *Artist's Way* techniques as spelled out in the book. I have tested the tools for a decade and a half in order to find them roadworthy. I ask that you refrain from presenting yourselves publicly as *Artist's Way* “experts,” though you may use the book within your practice. I ask that you remember that the wisdom of *The Artist's Way* is a collective, nonhierarchical experience. I have heard of abuses of this principle, such as a group leader's requiring the morning pages to be read in the group. This is not in the spirit of the book. Facilitated groups should “graduate” into free, peer-run clusters.

A Word to Therapeutic Clients. Please remember that the book itself remains the primary source of the *Artist's Way* teachings, and that it is your interpretation, and your work with the book and its tools, that are central to you in your recovery. I remind you that the work is your own, not just something done under the influence of a magic teacher. Please “own” your recovery as your recovery.

Thank You. I am delighted *The Artist's Way* is used in the many contexts in which it is (such as colleges and universities, by therapists, by peer-run clusters). I again offer the reminder that the *Artist's Way* is intended to be used in keeping with the spirit of the book as written. There is always the book itself to refer to. This is an individual's journey that may be facilitated by the group process. If you cannot find or start a group, consider you and the book to constitute one!

Pass It On. To those forming a peer-run cluster, you do not need to make the *Artist's Way* a moneymaking venture, for me or for you. If you follow the spiritual practice of tithing, I recommend buying the book and passing it on.



To order call 1-800-788-6262 or visit www.penguin.com

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Julia Cameron has been an active artist for more than thirty years. She is the author of twenty-four books, fiction and nonfiction, including *The Artist's Way*, *Walking in This World*, *The Vein of Gold*, *The Right to Write*, and *The Sound of Paper*, her bestselling works on the creative process. A novelist, playwright, songwriter, and poet, she has multiple credits in theater, film, and television.