

Praise for Julia Cameron and *The Artist's Way*

‘The queen of change’

THE NEW YORK TIMES

‘So inspiring’

REESE WITHERSPOON

‘Without *The Artist's Way*, there would have been no *Eat, Pray, Love*’

ELIZABETH GILBERT

‘Cameron’s morning pages have shaped the lives of millions’

GUARDIAN

‘Cameron wants you to have a serious think about what you really want from your life’

THE TIMES

‘I picked this book up for the first time when I was twenty-one years old. It completely changed my life’

KERRY WASHINGTON

‘The morning pages have become a household name, a shorthand for unlocking your creative potential’

VOGUE

‘If you have always wanted to pursue a creative dream, have always wanted to play and create with words or paints, this book will gently get you started and help you learn all kinds of paying-attention techniques’

ANNE LAMOTT

‘I absolutely love this book ... It’s a really good starting point to discover what lights you up’

EMMA GANNON

‘This is a book that addresses a delicate and complex subject. For those who will use it, it is a valuable tool to get in touch with their own creativity’

MARTIN SCORSESE

‘Cameron is simply encouraging her readers to be a bit more open, more patient and kinder to themselves’

NEW YORKER

‘This book has been revolutionary in my creative life. It’s a must-read for every artist’

ITO AGHAYERE

‘I love it. A practical, spiritual, nurturing book. I wish I’d found it sooner’

RUSSELL BRAND

'*The Artist's Way* is great ... the moment I [followed] that, that's when [the music] started to flow'

ED O'BRIEN

'*The Artist's Way* is my favourite book'

PRECIOUS LEE

'I found my way to writing through *The Artist's Way* ... Being introduced to that book, over twenty years ago, really changed my life'

BILLY PORTER

'It's a great tool for any type of creative person. I've given away so many copies'

TAYARI JONES

'A classic that never loses its power'

AMANDA DE CADENET

WRITE FOR LIFE

ALSO BY JULIA CAMERON
AND AVAILABLE FROM SOUVENIR

The Artist's Way
The Artist's Way Workbook
Seeking Wisdom
The Listening Path
Floor Sample
Vein of Gold

WRITE FOR LIFE

A Toolkit for Writers

JULIA CAMERON



SOUVENIR
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To Julianna McCarthy, for her poetry, prayers,
and passion

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CONTENTS

How to Use This Book	1
WEEK ONE:	
Priming the Pump	3
WEEK TWO:	
Begin Where You Are	33
WEEK THREE:	
Trust Your Process	69
WEEK FOUR:	
Resist Your Resistance	107
WEEK FIVE:	
Dismantle Your Perfectionist	135
WEEK SIX:	
Celebrate Your Achievement	163
Index	183

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Write for Life is a six-week program for anyone working on a writing project, from the first-time writer to the seasoned one. This book is an invitation to begin, stick with, and finish your project. Consider it a companion on your journey from conception to completion. These pages compile the tips and tricks I myself have relied on to write more than forty books—including this one. It is my hope that this book will serve you as both a guide over the next six weeks, and a handbook to be returned to as you continue writing, well beyond the next six weeks. This book will get you in motion, keep you in motion, and serve as a reference as you finish your draft and move into the revision phase.

It is the act of writing that makes us writers. If you have a desire to write, that desire is worth listening to—and acting upon. I have been a full-time writer for more than fifty years, writing books, poetry, music, plays, movies, and novels. This is my love letter to writing, and to writers, sharing the tools I have used—and that anyone can use—to write for life.

WEEK ONE

PRIMING THE PUMP



There are several basic tools that serve as a bedrock for productive writing. With these tools in place, it is possible to set the stage for longevity as a writer. This week, you will prime the pump—readying yourself for the long-term commitment between writer and writing project. By committing to these tools and examining your approach to your writing, you will set in motion a healthy, sustainable process that will carry you through the next six weeks—and beyond.

INTRODUCTION

I love to write. I'm seventy-three years old, and I have been writing full-time since I was eighteen. That's fifty-five years—a long-running romance.

I *love* to write. Pen to the page, I find clarity and order.

I love to write, and so I do it daily. Right now I am sitting in my library, in my big leather writing chair, and I am, yes, writing. My little dog Lily, a Westie, sprawls at my feet. “Good dog, Lily,” I croon. But Lily is not a good dog. She is a very naughty dog, and chief among her misdeeds is a fondness for pens. Lily is a writer's dog, I joke. I settle in to write and Lily settles in to steal my pen. I move my hand across the page, and whenever I stop, Lily pounces. She grabs my pen and scampers off, only to emerge minutes later with a disemboweled pen and a jaunty black mustache.

“Lily, I'm trying to write,” I scold her, but the game

of “get the pen” gives her great pleasure. She jumps on my lap, landing squarely on my notebook. She grabs my pen and scampers away. So now I am writing with pen number two. What I want to write about is writing itself.

I’ll start with a flora and fauna report: my roses are blooming, scarlet and white. Songbirds carol from the junipers. Underfoot, quick-witted gray lizards scoot clear of the path. Lily darts in pursuit. It is only early May, but Santa Fe is enjoying an early summer. Today’s day is hot and hazy. The mountains are blurred. Walking with Lily, I am quickly thirsty. When cars pass us on our dirt road, clouds of dust linger in the air. I pause and wait for the dust to settle before pressing on. Our walks are a daily discipline I set for myself. On the days when our walks are aborted—too much wind or rain—Lily grows restless, pacing the Saltillo tiles of my adobe house. “Lily,” I tell her, “we’ll go tomorrow.”

When nightfall comes, Lily settles down. Last night’s three-quarter moon cleared the mountains as a silvery disc. Tonight the moon will be near full and its glow will grace the garden, an inviting light to write by, and so I write.

Writing, like walking, is a daily discipline. Like Lily, I grow restless if the routine is skipped. And so now I take pen to page, writing the details of my day, knowing that writing leads to writing. For six months now, I have been between books. Officially not writing, except for my Morning Pages. I have found myself writing cards and letters to my far-flung friends. Inspired by my example, many of them have written me back, our cards crossing in the mail.

“We live so far apart,” my friend Jennifer had taken to moaning. I carefully selected the cards I sent to her—photographic images of New Mexico winging their way to Florida. I sent a picture of our cathedral, of a ristra—a string of red chili peppers, of a cactus flower in bloom.

Jennifer would be delighted by the photos and my terse, card-sized notes. She no longer complains of our separation. The written word and pictures soothe her psyche as no amount of telephone chat can.

Sitting at my dining room table, I write out my notecards. I am provoked to write with great specificity. A card with roses to Laura finds me reporting on my own roses. A card with an owl, and I am telling my mentor, poet Julianna McCarthy, how very much I appreciate her wisdom. My daughter, Domenica, a horse lover, received a card of ponies and a note inquiring her progress with the young horse she is schooling. Each note tells the recipient they are cherished. I have taken the time to write. Out at a cafe, I enjoy a soy chai latte. I write to my colleague Emma Lively, knowing her preference for a fancy cappuccino.

“I got your card,” Laura reports a quick three days later. Her card features rambling roses—tall like Laura herself. “It was beautiful,” she continues. Seated again at my dining room table, I send her a card of delphiniums. I remember that she likes blue.

“You are beloved,” our cards say, and seeing is believing. We hoard our handwritten notes. My daughter reports her cards are strung on yarn, gracing her bookshelf. “They’re so happy,” she says.

And writing is happy. A potent mood changer, writing tutors us in joy. Putting pen to page, we cherish our lives. We matter, our writing declares. Taking the time and effort to describe our moods, we find those moods lightening. Paying attention, we soothe the anxious part of ourselves that wonders, “What about me?” No longer orphans, we are beloved, and writing to our friend tells them they are beloved. Writing “rights” things between us. The distances common to modern life are diminished. We close the gap of good intentions.

I *love* to write. Writing is powerful. It is an act of

*Writing is the only thing
that when I do it, I don't
feel I should be doing
something else.*

—GLORIA STEINEM

bravery. As we write, we tell ourselves the truth about how we are—and how we feel. We give the universe our coordinates: “I am precisely here.” We give the universe permission to act on our behalf. When we write, we experience synchronicity. Our “luck” improves. Writing is a spiritual path. With each word, we take another step forward. Writing has wisdom in it. It takes courage to see ourselves and our world more clearly. Writing is a commitment to honesty. On the page, in black and white, we see the variables we are dealing with. Writing is a lifeline. I *love* to write.

TOOLS IN PLACE: MORNING PAGES AND ARTIST DATES

As a writer, I credit my daily practice of Morning Pages with giving me the willingness to start where I am. What precisely are Morning Pages? They are three daily pages of longhand morning writing that is strictly stream of consciousness.

The pages clear my head and prioritize my day. I think of them as a potent form of meditation. There is no wrong way to do the pages. You simply keep your hand moving across the page, writing down anything and everything that occurs to you. It is as though you are sending the universe a telegram: “This is what I like, this is what I don’t like”—implicit in this, “Please help me.” If the pages are meditation, they are also a potent form of prayer.

When I began writing Morning Pages, I needed prayer. I had washed up in the tiny mountain town of Taos, New Mexico, having gone there to sort out my brilliant career. I had written a movie for Jon Voight, and its reception had gone from “brilliant” to radio silence. Discouraged, I had rented a little adobe house at the end of a little dirt road. It was lonely there, and I took up the practice of Morning

Pages to keep myself company. Every day, before my daughter woke up, I would rise and go to the long pine table that faced a large window that held a view of Taos Mountain. Faithfully, I would record the mountain's mood: foggy . . . clear . . . scattered clouds near the summit . . .

"What should I do about my movie?" I would daily ask the pages.

The answer would come back, "Do nothing about your movie. Just write."

And so I would write, about nothing in particular, just daily meanderings. Three daily pages gave me a sense of purpose. It was a manageable amount. The first page and a half were easy. The second page and a half, harder, contained pay dirt: hunches, intuition, insights. The pages were habit forming. They coaxed, cajoled, and tempted me into self-revelation. I became intimate with myself. The pages were a dare; a place where I risked being my authentic self. I wrote—and I loved writing.

One morning, after I finished my pages, I was startled to have a character stroll into view. The character was a woman named Johnny, a plein-air painter who executed a magnificent painting at the end of my pen. Johnny wasn't a movie character. She was—and this startled me—the lead character for a novel. The opening scene rushed through my hand. My mind played catch-up. "You don't have to write movies, you can write books." The onslaught of freedom was heady. I was no longer trapped as a screenwriter. I was liberated, set free. I owed my freedom to the Morning Pages. They had opened an unsuspected inner door. I was grateful to them, and so I kept my daily practice of pages intact, writing my three pages before turning my hand to Johnny and her adventures.

I wrote from summer into fall. Johnny painted the changing foliage. When winter came, she set down her

paintbrush. She had fallen in love. Happy, she began painting still lifes: a basket of apples, a pair of pears. If Johnny was happy, her newly found lover served as a muse. I myself was lonely. No lover hovered close at hand. I found myself missing my New York life, chock-full of people and opportunities. One gray morning when the mountain was blocked from view, I wrote “The End.” Later that same day, I packed my car for the long drive back to Greenwich Village.

Back in New York after the long drive cross-country, I settled my daughter, Domenica, back into school and I began a practice of long, solo walks, praying for inspiration as to what to write next. A movie? A book? I kept up my practice of Morning Pages, hoping for a clue. Without realizing it, I was establishing a lifelong pattern: first, Morning Pages. Next, a prayerful walk. The cobblestone streets of the West Village became familiar to me. So did the human scale of brownstone houses, shops, and cafes. Then, one afternoon as I walked, I heard a clear directive: “Teach. You must teach.”

I had my marching orders, “teach,” and I couldn’t wriggle out of them. I asked the heavens, “Please, teach what? And where?” My walks expanded and so did my thinking. I would teach what I called “creative unblocking.” I would assign my students my own regime—Morning Pages and walks. I would assign them exploratory adventures, like my visit to a bird store, where I befriended an African gray parrot. “Artist Dates,” I dubbed these festive, solo expeditions. They filled the well. Taken alone, without dogs or phones or friends, Artist Dates were an exercise in play. It took courage to venture out into the world, on a mission of “just doing something fun.” I encouraged my students to go outside of their comfort zone—trying their hand at festive outings that were new to them. “What would entice your inner eight-year-old?” I would ask. “Try that.”

*All I need is a sheet of paper
and something to write
with, and then I can turn
the world upside down.*

—FRIEDRICH
NIETZSCHE

I was offered a slot to teach at the New York Feminist Art Institute, which I had never heard of. My first class was to convene on Thursday. Nervous, I found myself excited to share. We met on Spring Street, in a large, airy room with tall windows.

My students were eager learners. Taking to Morning Pages, Artist Dates, and walks, they reported breakthroughs. Janet, a flame-haired blocked director, began directing again. Susan, a blocked writer, began a novel. For everyone, the pages directed the next step. Small steps led to larger ones. The risk of writing daily pages became the risk of making daily art. I found myself thrilled and gratified by my students' achievements. To my surprise, I liked teaching. I liked it very much. My classroom became my laboratory.

A class at a time, I would introduce my students to healing techniques. I would teach and I would learn. Teaching unblocking, I would myself enjoy the freedom of being unblocked. It wasn't a case of teaching instead of writing—it was a case of teaching *releasing* writing. I wrote class notes, which in time evolved into the essays of *The Artist's Way*.

Keeping myself to my practice, I found myself continuing to have breakthroughs. I wrote a new movie at the pages' urging. They pointed out I wasn't trapped in my new identity as a novelist—or a teacher. No, the pages insisted I was simply a writer, and writers simply wrote. I have followed this advice ever since, writing in multiple genres as the pages urged me. I wrote plays, movies, poems, songs—even a crime novel. I wrote them all for the sheer love of writing.

I am often asked if I still do Morning Pages, four decades later. The answer is yes. Upon awakening, I tread to the kitchen, open the refrigerator, and take out last night's coffee pot, filled with this morning's icy brew. Next, I retreat to a living room couch. "Here I am," I write. I set

pen to page and record my morning's mood. Nothing is too petty to be described. I write for three pages, jotting down the details of my life. Detail by detail, I record my life. Detail by detail, I am urged to action. Unlike conventional meditation, which lulls the practitioner into calm, Morning Pages spark the practitioner into action. Pages bring up risks: some small, some large. The first time they broach a risk, we may think, "I can't do that." The next time, we may say, "I don't think I can do that." But when the pages persist, we hear ourselves say, "Oh, alright, I'll try it." And, trying it, we find the risk was doable. We have dared to expand. Over time, we learn to resist our own resistance. We cooperate when risks are suggested. Pages tutor us in courage. They change the trajectory of our lives to one of daring. My pages are a telegram to the universe. I know from years of morning writing that these telegrams do not go unanswered. Since I began the practice of Morning Pages, I have published more than forty books.

WALKING TO CREATIVE HEALTH

The day is blue and white: blue skies, white fluffy clouds. The mountain's flank is folded like purple velvet. My little dog is eager for a walk. She sets out on her expedition, trotting briskly. I hurry to keep up. Today is a good day for writing: my walk will prime the pump. Putting one foot in front of the other, a step at a time, I will pray for guidance. I will ask for the inspiration to write what needs to be written. I will hear a hunch, and I will follow where it leads.

In 1938, Brenda Ueland published a book, *If You Want to Write*. It details the care and maintenance of the writer as a creative artist. It is shrewd, personal, and pragmatic. She advocates walking, believing, as I do, that inspiration comes to a body in motion. She wrote, "Think of yourself

as an incandescent power illuminated and perhaps forever talked to by God and his messengers. Since you are like no other being ever created since the beginning of time, you are incomparable.”

Ueland believed, as I do, that originality springs from authenticity, and authenticity springs from inspiration from our prayer for it. She believed in listening for guidance from higher realms. Walking, we clear our channels. We hear our guidance clearly and without the friction of our daily circumstances. As we pray “Please guide me,” we are, in fact, guided. Ideas come to us, and later, as we put them to the page, we have a comforting sense of validity.

Ueland argues that using our creative powers makes us healthy. She writes, “Why should we all use our creative power? Because there is nothing that makes people so generous, joyful, lively, bold and compassionate, so indifferent to fighting and the accumulation of objects and money.”

Spiritual teacher Sonia Choquette agrees with Ueland that writing brings health. She believes we strengthen our soul whenever we write out our truth. “Behind every word lies power,” she writes, “whether you believe it or not.”

I say, believe it. As we write out our hopes, dreams, and desires, we trigger the universe to act on our behalf. We are, indeed, as Ueland states, “forever talked to by God and his messengers.”

Inspiration comes to us as we walk. Novelist John Nichols, of *The Milagro Beanfield War* fame, walks daily. So do I, and so does Natalie Goldberg. Ueland has this to say about that: “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.”

Emma Lively, writer and composer, walks daily. As she walks, she daydreams. She experiences hunches, inklings,

If you want to change the world, pick up your pen and write.

—MARTIN LUTHER

and inspiration. Coming home, she sets her hand to the page, writing out melodies and scenes for her musicals. Lively believes what Ueland wrote: “Imagination needs noodling; long, inefficient happy idling; dawdling and puttering . . .”

I head out for my own walk, crisscrossing the mountain roads of Santa Fe as majestic hawks swoop above and dancer-like deer cross my path down below. Arriving home, pen to page, I write my first thought, and a second follows. Leaning into my ideas, I find my thoughts coming easily. I credit this to my walk. Unkinking my body, I have unkinked my mind.

THE DAILY QUOTA

Let me say it again: Morning Pages are three pages of longhand writing on eight and a half by eleven-inch paper. The first page and a half come easily. The second page and a half are more difficult, but contain pay dirt. Writing pages daily yields results. Now, I want to mention another equally valid regime: a daily quota of writing on your project.

As with Morning Pages, the first page and a half are easy, the second page and a half more difficult. The trick here is to write a set number of pages on your project, every day. I say three if you are writing a play or a movie, two if you are writing prose, which is more dense. Setting the bar low, at three pages or two, guarantees that you will be able to accomplish it. As your daily pages mount up, so will your self-esteem. Restless? Feeling you could do more? Resist the temptation. Slow and steady wins the day. Use the mantra “easy does it,” reminding yourself that it means “easy accomplishes it.” Your slow pace is actually fast. Ninety pages of a movie in a month, sixty pages of prose. Write daily, and feel the thrill of accomplishment. Take pride in your progress.

Take pride, too, in your creative upkeep. Writing daily, you are drawing heavily and steadily on your inner well. Take care to restock that well by a practice of regular Artist Dates. What are they again? An Artist Date is a solo, festive expedition to do something fun, something that enchants or interests you. Self-elected fun, an Artist Date refills your inner well. You have used images and ideas by writing. You replace images and ideas by Artist Dates. As a rule of thumb, one Artist Date weekly is sufficient. But if you feel your writing becoming more difficult and thin, then a second weekly date is the remedy.

As with Morning Pages, regularity is the key. As you meet your low and doable quota, your pride in your authorship will grow. Your identity as a working writer will become more secure. A feeling of faith and satisfaction will replace anxiety about your project. By keeping the bar low, your imagination will meet the daily challenge. Your flow of ideas will keep pace with your outflow.

“Julia, you’re so productive,” I am often told—sometimes with a touch of scolding. The unspoken question is, “How?”

“The key to productivity is regularity,” I reply. And so I keep to my routine of Morning Pages, Artist Dates, and walks, and to my regime of hitting my daily quota. This book is being written slowly and steadily. The even pace promotes an even caliber of writing. A day at a time, I practice what I preach.

WHO CAN WRITE?

We have a mythology that tells us that writers—real writers—are an elite few. I’d like to challenge that mythology. It’s my belief that all of us can write. It’s just that so many of us are afraid to put pen to page. Fearful of being judged, fearful of looking foolish, we hang back.

“I’d love to write, but . . .” begins our litany of excuses.

*If you wish to be a writer,
write.*

—EPICTETUS

“I’d love to write, but I have nothing to say.” “I’d love to write, but I don’t have the discipline.” “I’d love to write, but I can’t spell, can’t punctuate . . .” “I’d love to write, but . . .”

But nothing. Just as we all can speak, we all can put words to the page. Some of us know this fact, and call ourselves writers. Others of us fear this fact. To them, the spoken word is one thing, and the written word another. Afraid to put their thoughts to the page, they freeze up. There is a way around this phenomenon, and that is the practice of Morning Pages.

Three pages of longhand writing that is not *really* writing, the pages teach us to move past our inner critic, that voice which tells us, “You can’t write, not really.”

Yes, we really can write, and the pages give us practice. The pages are for our eyes only. They are a safe place to vent, to dare, to dream, and, yes, to write.

“Julia, I wrote Morning Pages and they made me a novelist,” one practitioner told me. I’m not surprised. The pages unlock an inner door. Stepping through that door, we live our dreams. And many of us dream of being a writer.

“Julia, I always wanted to be a writer, and now I am one. I did Morning Pages and dared to write a book. This afternoon I did the photo shoot for the cover.”

“Julia, I’m seventy years old and I just finished my first play.”

Accolades like these come to me often. Writing Morning Pages frees the writer within. “I’d love to be a writer but . . .” is transformed to “I think I might be a writer and . . .” Our negative mythology around writing begins to fade in the face of our experience. “I may be a writer” starts to dissolve our skepticism. Morning Pages assure us that our emerging identity is valid. They witness our transformation from non-writer to writer. We begin to realize that writing, the act of writing, is what makes us

Start writing, no matter what. The water does not flow until the faucet is turned on.

—LOUIS L'AMOUR

a writer. Far from being an elite tribe from which we are excluded, writers are a generous tribe to which we now belong. The obstacles which loomed so large are now diminished. Non-spelling gives way to spellcheck. Punctuation yields to *The Elements of Style*.

“I think I may be a writer,” we tell ourselves, at first tentatively, then with gathering strength. As our negative mythology fades away, we recognize our new identity. Our joy in putting pen to page supersedes our fear. Yes, we love to write.

PROTECTING YOUR INNER ARTIST

For the better part of three decades, we have heard talk of our “inner child”—so much talk, we’re sick of it. Our inner child, we have been told, must be protected from wounding—or, once wounded, must be allowed to heal. So now I find myself adding one more voice to the chorus: protect your inner child, known for our purposes here as your inner writer.

Make no mistake: our inner writer *is* an inner youngster—a tender, vulnerable youngster. The part of us that creates is easily wounded, hurt by too much attention of the wrong kind. Vulnerable, open to feedback, it is also open to criticism. A careless critical arrow can pierce its heart. As we write, we have two separate and distinct personas: our inner writer and our inner adult. It falls to the latter to protect and defend the former. Insofar as it’s possible, our adult creates a safe environment. There are several ways this is accomplished. Not surprisingly, the first is Morning Pages.

It is our adult self which makes the commitment and summons the discipline to write Morning Pages. That said, the pages are a safe arena for our writer to vent, to dream, to dare. Wounded by unjust criticism, our writer takes to the pages to complain and grieve. Writing out

our pain, the writer feels seen and heard. Our adult self swings into action, soothing the wounded writer. Although it may not be sent, we write a letter to the editor in our own defense.

Pages give us a safety net. With pages in place, our writer finds resiliency. No matter what damning damage is leveled our way, pages tell us we will survive to write another day. They tell us we are strong enough not only to survive but to prevail. As we write out our grievances, we miniaturize them. We draw them to scale. Balanced against our commitment to write daily, they are small potatoes.

Our adult self chooses for our writer safe companions, those with generosity enough to applaud our work. Our adult self selects a posse of believing mirrors, those large enough to take us in and large enough to reflect back to us our strength and possibility. This is where our adult flexes its muscles of discernment. There is no room here for the jealous or the petty. Those are enemies to our writer, and our adult self sees them clearly for the foes that they are. The adult self is alert for snipers, those people who can't resist taking a potshot born out of envy and fear. I say "fear" because our writer can appear threatening. We may experience ourselves as small and vulnerable, but appear to the world at large as intimidating. Our candor, a great gift to the world, may loom as a threat. Snipers may try to take us down a notch, and this is where our adult musters our defense.

"You have a right to your opinion, a right to express yourself," our adult may weigh in in our defense. Defended, our writer rallies.

"I do have rights," it tells us, and the attack of the sniper is dismantled.

"You need a treat," our adult may advise us. Here we heed the advice, "Treating yourself like a precious object will make you strong." Spoiling yourself a little, devising

festive adventures for your writer to enjoy, is one more layer of defense. We play, and experience the play of ideas. Your adult self caters to your inner youngster. An Artist Date builds strength. And so we see that our adult has many stratagems for safeguarding our writer. Alert to foes, most especially bullies, our adult stands firm.

“I am big enough and strong enough to withstand hostility,” our writer comes to believe. Trusting our adult, our writer flourishes.

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

Virginia Woolf, that fine writer, stated her estimable opinion that in order to be a writer, one needed a room of one's own. Not wanting to quibble, I found myself differing. After all, many would-be writers lacked the means to have a room of their own. And so I proposed that what Virginia meant was that writers require privacy. That was an opinion I could second.

If writers needed privacy, I could devise a way to give it to them: Morning Pages. Personal, private, for no eyes but their own, Morning Pages gave writers a safe place to vent, a safe place to dream, a safe place to dare. With no prying eyes, Morning Pages became a place where we could be authentically, truly ourselves.

Being truly ourselves is a prerequisite of good writing. We are the origin of our work. When we are authentic, we are original. Our resulting work is original. Our thoughts are clear, and clarity springs from privacy.

“A room of one's own” induces privacy, and so do Morning Pages. Taking pen to page upon awakening, we discover our thoughts and feelings. We write from an undefended place, as if we were alone in the solitude of our personal domain. Sequestered to ourself, our thoughts become far-ranging. We are free to ruminate on anything and everything. We become inspired.

*I am a writer perhaps
because I am not a talker.*

—GWENDOLYN BROOKS

Our inspiration is the fruit of our solitude. Left to our own devices, we discover a wealth of thoughts. We pursue inklings and ideas. We chase our mind with curiosity: What next?

Morning Pages open an inner portal. They put us in touch with a flow of creativity and insight that might otherwise elude us. As if we had closed a door, separating us from other concerns, the Morning Pages give us detachment. We are removed from the agendas of others. We strike out on our own path.

A room of one's own may be a luxury we can't afford, while a journal is affordable by all. As the pages mount up, so, too, does our autonomy. And that is what Virginia Woolf was driving at.

WRITING STATIONS

I'm sitting in my library, a large, square room with mountain views. I am seated in a large leather chair—my writing chair. The foursquare room lends itself to clear and logical thinking. It is for me a “writing station,” a place where I am comfortable taking pen to page. All told, I have four writing stations in my house, each one unique in character. I migrate room to room, matching my mood to the station's character. The library station is for plain-spoken prose, the kind I am writing now. When I want to focus on clarity and service, I come to this room. My prose becomes straightforward: I say what I mean and I mean what I say. The writing done here is workmanlike, easily understood. I typically use this station in the afternoon, when I am brisk and awake.

A second writing station is the couch in my exercise room. It's not a comfortable couch, and so I use it to jot myself brief notes. I walk on my treadmill, get an idea, take to the couch, and write my idea out. I may interrupt my writing to make a phone call. This writing station

favors terse communiqués. Unlike the library, which is comfortable, this station is for dashed-off notes, quick, before the couch causes a backache. I use this station for writing that can't wait. Not for here are long meandering passages; no, those are best saved for more comfortable surroundings, which brings us to writing station number three.

The loveseat in my living room is comfortable. It faces a large, square window framing my piñon tree and the mountains beyond. A squat lamp sits by its side, casting a warm glow. The writing that happens here is warm and expansive, more imaginative than the work done in the library. I can sit easily here for several hours. Writing long-hand, I fill page after page. One thought leads to the next. My comfortable station lends itself to ease. I write here almost without effort. The window holds daylight, then twilight, then night. I write of many moods, each one welcomed by my station. My writing is fluid, thought leading to thought as I free-associate idea to idea. Of all my writing stations, this one is my favorite. Time speeds past. This station makes writing deeply pleasurable. I need to rouse myself to go to writing station four.

My house is shaped like a giant horseshoe. Writing station four is cradled in its arms: an outdoor, fresh air station where poetry resides. This station is a pair of chairs facing onto a courtyard and a garden. When I sit here, I write flora and fauna reports, spotting a large cottontail nibbling on the greenery. And what is this? A sly lizard scooting across the flagstones. Inspiration comes, as M. C. Richards says, "through the window of irrelevance." I catch sight of a songbird trilling in the plum tree. Out of the corner of my eye, topics suggest themselves. My writing here speaks of nature. I am enchanted by a passing butterfly. A hummingbird pays a visit. I record it all.

Stations one to four each serve a purpose. Their variety keeps boredom at bay. I am productive and creative

moving spot to spot, station to station. My writing takes many forms, and each locale calls writing forth. I *love* to write.

GROUNDING

The day is gray and chill. The sky is overcast, and still more large clouds loom on the horizon. Rain is in the offing. It's a good day to be tucked indoors. Without my daily walk, I am restless, and the little dog is restless too. The house is crowded with prayerful intentions. I take to the page, and put my prayers in writing. "Please guide me," I write, and then I listen.

Spiritual teachers tell us that it is important for us to be "in the now." In the precise present, we can find a sense of tranquility. Centered in the moment that we are in, we are able to hear spiritual guidance. There are few ways of centering ourselves better than writing.

A friend of mine is a newcomer to Morning Pages. "Julia," he called to tell me, "the pages make me feel so clear."

My friend had tried other forms of meditation only to abandon them because his thoughts felt scattered. A writer by trade, he had undertaken the Morning Pages reluctantly. "I already write," he told me.

"Just try them," I urged. And so, my friend undertook the pages against his better judgment. To his surprise, doing Morning Pages made his other "real" writing flow more easily.

"The pages prioritize your day," I explained. "They keep you grounded because they keep you from being swept up in other people's agendas."

I recently gave a talk at a large bookstore. The venue was jammed with seekers. Faced with a large audience, I couldn't resist teaching the value of Morning Pages. When I finished my talk, a man approached me.

“I want to thank you for a quarter century of Morning Pages,” he said. “In all that time I’ve missed only one day, and that was the day I had quadruple bypass surgery.”

Faced with such a testimonial, I basked for a moment in the man’s spiritual energy. He was relaxed and happy, although eager to share his report. Clearly he felt the pages had served him well.

“I used to do pages,” another participant told me, “and listening to you, I feel I should do pages again. They made a tremendous difference in my life. I undertook a memoir at their urging. I self-published it, and now it’s been picked up by a press. They’re interested in my second book, they tell me, but I am stymied. Do you think pages would be a help?”

“Yes, I do. Pages are always a help.”

Natalie Goldberg, a Zen Buddhist, practices mindfulness. She puts her pen to the page and records her precise surroundings and mood. She calls this “writing practice,” and she cautions practitioners not to let themselves be “thrown away” by what they discover. She herself has stuck resolutely to the page, detailing her turbulent emotions during a yearlong battle with leukemia. Victorious, finally, over her cancer, she writes of her jubilant relief. Her writing has served to anchor her. Of course it has. Writing is grounding.

I recently met a young woman named Fiona. She rushed to my side in a bookstore. “I just want to thank you,” she said. “I did Morning Pages and the pages nudged me to write a book. This afternoon I did a photo shoot for the book’s cover. I feel that without Morning Pages, I would never have dared to write a book. Thank you so much.”

Morning Pages, as Fiona discovered, ground us. Grounded, we are led—one step at a time—to take risks. The pages serve as a witness and confidante. The events of our life may not be as turbulent and troublesome

as Natalie's cancer, but all the circumstances of our lives deserve metabolizing, and that is what the pages do.

As we embrace the practice of putting pen to page, we embrace our many moods. Accepting our moods, we become intimate with ourself and with our Higher Power. We experience a spiritual connection, and that connection brings us grounding—and peace.

EXPANSION

A dozen fat pink roses grace my living room coffee table. The blooms are gigantic, and bursting with beauty. Their scent wafts softly on the air. The roses are four days old and holding. Every time I pass the table, I dip my head to take in their aroma. The roses smell sweet, heavy, and dusty. They are an aphrodisiac. I breathe them in, and, enchanted, I take to the page and gladly write of the spell they cast. I daydream of a rose garden stretching for miles. My bouquet unlocks an inner door for inspiration.

Inspiration comes of working every day.

—CHARLES
BAUDELAIRE

Our writing mythology tells us that we need to go to Paris—or perhaps Morocco—to get inspired, but this is not the case. We can become inspired by our daily lives. As we write Morning Pages, we connect to the many details—like the roses—that spell inspiration and expansion. Writing our daily pages, we find ourselves interested by the flow of our own lives. Many small details capture our attention. We do not need high drama or foreign locale high stakes. A bouquet of roses, or lilies, or even daisies, can turn the gears of inspiration.

“Julia, my life is boring,” we may say before we begin pages, but our lives are not boring, as we soon learn. As a rule, it takes but a few weeks to become fascinated with our own daily progression, as artists and indeed as people. Morning Pages coax us into greater creativity. They are a profound exercise in risk-taking. Each day, as we risk putting our thoughts on the page, is an act of daring.

The pages, in turn, invite more daring. We realize that we are not trapped in lackluster lives. We have many small “choice points” where we can choose to either expand or contract. Expansion is the order of the day.

“What should I do next?” we ask in our pages, and the answers may often surprise us. I had been writing pages for fifteen years when they suggested I would “soon be writing radiant songs.” Raised to believe myself nonmusical, coming from a highly musical family, I brushed aside the suggestion, saying to myself, “Surely if I were musical, I would know it by now.” But in response to my repeated questioning, “What shall I do next?” the pages repeated themselves: “You will be writing radiant songs.”

I was visiting a girlfriend in Boulder, Colorado, and I told her about the pages’ suggestion, and my deeply held skepticism that I was not musical. She listened patiently, and then suggested that I go sit by a mountain creek and meditate. I found a large boulder near the creek and listened to the rippling water. Suddenly, I “heard” both lyrics and music. I ran up the mountain to my friend, and said, “Listen to this! I think it’s a song!” It *was* a song, a radiant song. The pages had nudged me to expand.

When I travel to teach, I hear many similar stories. People will say, “Julia, the pages urged me to write a book, and here it is.” Or, “The pages urged me to start a radio show, or enter my art in a juried show.” Always, the risks urged by the pages seem at first to be impossible, too expansive, but after their repeated suggestions, the risks seem smaller somehow, more doable. A page at a time, a step at a time, we expand. Practitioners progress from exclaiming, “Oh, I couldn’t do that!” to “Maybe I could try,” and, finally, to “I can’t believe it; I’ve done it!”

Writing Morning Pages, my friend Ed, like Elizabeth Gilbert, discovered a hunger for all things Italian. At first he thought, “I’m too old to learn a foreign language,” but then he began studying “beginner’s Italian.” After a

few months, he had a working knowledge of everyday Italian. He could order food and ask directions. An avid bicyclist, he noted a notice at his bike shop of an Italian bicycle tour. Setting aside his reservations—again, “I’m too old”—he phoned the number on the card. He learned that there were many bikers in his age bracket. And so, dubious but excited, he signed up for the tour. His Morning Pages assured him he was taking a risk that would bring him great pleasure. He had moved from the sidelines into a stream of adventure. His “boring” life was now filled with excitement.

Yes, Morning Pages had lured him into an expanded life. Ed’s story is familiar to me. Student after student has testified that the consistent use of Morning Pages is a portable and reliable source of expansion. They dare on the page, then they dare in life.

Like my roses, my pages dare me to dream.

WRITING AS A SPIRITUAL PATH

Although we tend to think of writing in secular terms, it is actually a spiritual path. We can consciously invite spiritual guidance. A simple prayer is relevant: “Okay, God, you take care of the quality, I’ll take care of the quantity.” When I was first told this prayer, I thought it was far-fetched. I had trouble believing that the spirit of the universe could take an interest in my prose. But as I retired from my ego’s need to be a brilliant author, my writing became more clear. No longer aimed at being impressive and brilliant, it aimed instead to be forthright. I came to believe that “creator” was another word for “artist.” I trusted the Great Artist—in the words of Dylan Thomas, “the force that through the green fuse drives the flower.” I tried to think of myself like a flower, mysteriously blooming. I tried to be humbly obedient. I came to believe that honesty and authenticity could capture my reader’s faith.

Writing Morning Pages is like sending a telegram to the universe. We give our precise coordinates: here, and how, I am. The universe, in response, acts on our behalf. Although we may not call it that, we have sent a prayer. Implicit in each day's pages is the request "Please help me," and the universe does.

Writing pages, we dare to mention our dreams. The universe acts on those dreams, giving us what we need, if not what we want. At their root, Morning Pages are a prayer—a prayer of petition. We ask the universe for our dreams, wants, and needs, and the universe complies with our requests. We are met more than halfway by a benevolent something that we may hesitate to call God.

Although we may be reluctant to name it, spirituality is afoot. Our pages symbolize our willingness to talk to—and hear from—God. Writing pages, we swing open an inner door. In our imagination, we read an inscription: "This is the way to a faith that works."

Morning Pages, too, "work." As we clarify on the page our yearnings, those yearnings begin to be met. As one practitioner told me, "I'm a Jew and an atheist, hardly your target audience, but pages work for me."

What do we mean by "pages work"? What we are talking about is nothing less than a spiritual awakening. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life shifts. Where before, the world was forbidding, it comes now to be benevolent. We meet with ease situations that used to baffle us. Over time, we recognize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Are these extravagant promises? I don't think so. They are being fulfilled among us, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They always materialize as we do the work of writing pages.

Whether we conceive of pages as putting us in touch with a benevolent something, or we think that pages are

themselves that something, matters little. What counts is the daily practice: a form of meditation as well as prayer.

Morning Pages are a two-way street. We “send” and then we “receive.” Ideas come to us—thoughts, intuition, inklings. We are guided and led, led forward carefully and well. I recently heard from a man who has been doing Morning Pages for twenty-two years. He is an atheist, and pages themselves are his higher power. He has written thirteen movies, leading me to tell him, “You don’t believe in God, but God clearly believes in you.” Increased productivity is a common fruit of Morning Pages. As we work with the pages, we become more bold, taking risks as the pages urge, moving from project to project without excruciating pauses in between. As we learn to doubt our doubts, we expand, becoming larger and braver. Pages give us a safety net. Our risks, once seeming too large, become smaller. After all, the pages catch us if we fall. They partner us. Like circus acrobats, we are expertly “caught.” When used in conjunction with Artist Dates, Morning Pages promote synchronicity. We are increasingly in the right place at the right time. Our “luck” improves as we come to count on it. Morning Pages yield a spiritual path. We become more surefooted as we write. We speak to the universe, and it answers.

Writing is prayer.

—FRANZ KAFKA

When we begin writing with where we are and how we feel in our Morning Pages, we are actually formulating a prayer. We are sending a telegram to the universe that says, “This is my precise place and these are my precise feelings. Can you help me?” As we delineate our position, we are sending an SOS. We are saying exactly what we feel, and that is an invitation to the universe to intervene on our behalf. Writing on our creative projects later in the day, the same philosophy applies.

Ours is a secular time, and we often fail to realize the power and potency of the written word as prayer. Putting pen to the page, listening for inspiration, we are uttering

the perennial artist's prayer, "Please help me." It matters less sometimes what we write than that we write at all. Our words lead us to authenticity, just as authenticity leads us to our words. As we describe our state with specificity, we are given the gift of humility, and from humility, great art is born. Consider the Mona Lisa: the precise rendering of an enigmatic smile. Writing carefully, we, too, render the enigma that is the human condition. Great art is born from the prayer, "Please help me render what I see and what I hear."

My secular friends are astonished, and even offended by my use of prayer in writing. "Prayer works," I tell them, and, "As a working writer, I use anything that works."

"But Julia," they exclaim, "Isn't that cheating?" They make writing sound like a circus trick that must be mastered.

Once upon a time, I tell them, everyone prayed. The inspiration for art routinely was ascribed to a higher power. In these modern times, we are reluctant to name God as our collaborator—and yet that is the experience of artists through the ages. As Brahms remarked, "Straight-away the ideas flow into me, directly from God." As William Blake remarked, "Not I, but the holy spirit does the work."

Artists of the ages have spoken of the divine origin of "their" ideas. Composers in particular speak of the "muse" in music. But all artists experience the spark of the divine. When we write humbly, we invite a flow of ideas not commonly our own. Listening to the thread of inspiration that leads us from one idea to the next, we often experience a sense of awe. It is as though we are fitting together a celestial puzzle, and as we place each thought on the page, we begin to see the form of what wants to be born. The experience of such inspiration is essentially an experience of grace. Divine ideas enter our thoughts. We take them *down*, but they lift us *up*.

Writing a poem, I often experience wonder as the final line twists into view. Some of my finest writing comes as a sort of celestial joke. I find myself thinking, “Oh! That’s what they were up to!” By “they,” I mean what I call “higher forces.” As I write, I find myself guided.

In days of yore, artists routinely cited celestial inspiration filling their work. In modern times, we speak less freely of the divine, yet its inspiration remains real, if only we open our hearts to it. As we ask the universe to lead us, we are led carefully and well. Many an artist, in a candid moment, will speak of the surprise that comes to them in their art. The brilliant landscape painter Jamie Kirkland says, “My paintings never turn out like they are in my head. Instead, they surprise me.”

TASKS

1. Morning Pages: Every morning, set your alarm thirty minutes early and write, longhand, three eight and a half by eleven-inch pages about anything and everything that comes to mind. I always say I would never stand between anyone and their morning coffee, but try to get to the page as quickly as possible—don’t spend forty-five minutes brewing the perfect cup. The faster you get to the page, the better the pages will work for you. Avoid the phone, computer, and email until you have finished your pages. They will act as windshield wipers, clearing away what stands between you and your day.
2. Artist Date: Once a week, block out approximately two hours to take your inner writer on a solo adventure. It need not be expensive; the point is that you are spending one-on-one time with your artist to do something festive and out of the ordinary. This is a tool of expansion. Used in conjunction

with Morning Pages, you will find yourself in a flow of happy coincidences and good luck—which I like to call synchronicity. The Artist Date appears to take time, but it gives back energy and inspiration. Allow yourself to promise this date to your inner writer—and keep it.

3. Walks: Twice a week, or more often if you'd like to, take yourself on a solo, phone-free, dog-free, friend-free, twenty-minute walk. You may wish to walk out with a question—it is likely you will return with an answer. Walks will help you to metabolize this process, as well as provide inspiration and clarity in your writing.
4. The Daily Quota: Choose a low, doable daily quota for your writing project. (For screenplays, I usually suggest three pages a day; for prose, two.) Choose a quota that is low enough that it feels easily within reach on a daily basis. In addition to writing your Morning Pages, you will hit your daily quota on your writing project every day.
5. Writing Stations: Choose a few locations in your house or in your neighborhood where you can write. It may be a favorite chair or corner of a table; it may be your home office; it may be a nearby coffee shop. The important point is that you find these locations comfortable and enticing to write.

CHECK IN

1. How many days did you do your Morning Pages this week? Are you able to get to them quickly and do them without interruption or distraction?
2. Did you take your Artist Date? What was it? How was it? Did you experience synchronicity, optimism, or a sense of a benevolent higher power? All three?

3. Did you take your walks? Are you able to do them alone and without distraction? Did you try walking out with a question and seeing if you returned home with an answer?
4. Did you hit your daily quota? How many pages are you into your project? Do you feel a sense of excitement as you watch your page count building?