

### **Praise for** *The Artist's Way Toolkit*

"Cameron is a seasoned artist, knocking home in this book what she so generously gave to us years ago but now with thirty years depth of practice. I love that it's called a TOOLKIT, imagining necessary nails, screwdriver, and hammer to build a good life. I applaud Julia. A must-have for anyone who understands the importance of the basics—we might wander off, but we return. Where else is there to go?"

—Natalie Goldberg, author of *Writing Down the Bones*

### **Praise for** *Write for Life*

"In this luminous new book, Julia Cameron whisks you so effortlessly along a six-week writing adventure that you will barely notice you have written the first draft of a book until she deposits you back on your doorstep. *Write for Life* is the gust of wind you've been waiting for." —Mirabai Starr

"A boon to those struggling to get started. Aspiring writers will appreciate the solid advice." —*Publishers Weekly*

### **Praise for** *Seeking Wisdom*

"Bring your whole self to the journey of this book and you will touch the eternal link between creativity and spirituality. This book will help you come alive." —Mark Nepo

"I promise you will come away from reading her new book, as I did, with renewed creative zest and energy, as well as insight into your own spiritual possibilities as a creative person. Get this book; it holds magical wisdom and genuine truth." —Judy Collins

“A must-read for those who struggle finding a connection with a Higher Power, and creatives who want a more-robust experience of their art. If you’re an artist—and we’re all artists—who wants a more dynamic creative experience, you want to purchase and use this book today.” —*New York Journal of Books*

**Praise for** *The Listening Path*

“Cameron delivers an accessible, insightful addition to her *The Artist’s Way* workbooks . . . Cameron’s fans will love this straightforward program.” —*Publishers Weekly*

“Longtime creativity expert Cameron turns to the essential art of listening. Cameron writes beautifully and sincerely. . . . A much-needed primer on opening ourselves to listening to others at a time when that is so badly needed.” —*Booklist* (starred review)

**Praise for** *The Artist’s Way*

“Without *The Artist’s Way*, there would have been no *Eat, Pray, Love*.” —Elizabeth Gilbert

“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; and that, after all, is what being an artist is all about. It’s about learning to pay attention.” —Anne Lamott

“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

THE  
ARTIST'S WAY  
TOOLKIT

## ALSO BY JULIA CAMERON

### BOOKS IN THE ARTIST'S WAY SERIES

*The Artist's Way*  
*It's Never Too Late to Begin Again* (with Emma Lively)  
*The Artist's Way for Parents* (with Emma Lively)  
*Walking in This World*  
*Finding Water*  
*The Complete Artist's Way*  
*The Artist's Way Workbook*  
*The Artist's Way Every Day*  
*The Artist's Way Morning Pages Journal*  
*The Artist's Date Book* (illustrated by Elizabeth Cameron)  
*Inspirations: Meditations from The Artist's Way*  
*The Listening Path*  
*Seeking Wisdom*  
*Write for Life*  
*Living the Artist's Way*

### OTHER BOOKS ON CREATIVITY

*The Prosperous Heart* (with Emma Lively)  
*Prosperity Every Day*  
*The Writing Diet*  
*The Right to Write*  
*The Sound of Paper*  
*The Vein of Gold*

*How to Avoid Making Art (or Anything Else You Enjoy)* (illustrated by Elizabeth Cameron)  
*Supplies: A Troubleshooting Guide for Creative Difficulties*  
*The Writer's Life: Insights from The Right to Write*  
*The Artist's Way at Work* (with Mark Bryan and Catherine Allen)  
*Money Drunk/Money Sober* (with Mark Bryan)  
*The Creative Life*  
*The Miracle of Morning Pages*  
*The Miracle of the Artist Date*  
*The Artist Date Book*

### PRAYER BOOKS

*Answered Prayers*  
*Heart Steps*  
*Blessings*  
*Transitions*  
*Prayers to the Great Creator*

### BOOKS ON SPIRITUALITY

*Safe Journey*  
*Prayers from a Nonbeliever*  
*Letters to a Young Artist*  
*God Is No Laughing Matter*  
*God Is Dog Spelled Backwards*  
(illustrated by Elizabeth Cameron)

*Faith and Will*

*Life Lessons*

MEMOIR

*Floor Sample: A Creative Memoir*

FICTION

*Mozart's Ghost*

*Popcorn: Hollywood Stories*

*The Dark Room*

PLAYS

*Public Lives*

*The Animal in the Trees*

*Four Roses*

*Love in the DMZ*

*Avalon* (a musical)

*The Medium at Large* (a musical)

*Magellan* (a musical)

POETRY

*Prayers for Little Ones*

*Prayers for the Nature Spirits*

*The Quiet Animal*

*The Earth* (also an album with Tim  
Wheater)

FEATURE FILM

*God's Will* (as writer-director)

# THE ARTIST'S WAY TOOLKIT

How to Use the Creative Practices



JULIA CAMERON



SOUVENIR  
PRESS

First published in Great Britain in 2025 by  
Souvenir Press,  
an imprint of Profile Books Ltd  
29 Cloth Fair  
London  
EC1A 7JQ

*www.souvenirpress.co.uk*

First published in the United States by St. Martin's Essentials,  
an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group

Copyright © Julia Cameron, 2024

Designed by Steven Seighman

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above,  
no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or introduced into a  
retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic,  
mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written  
permission of both the copyright owner and the publisher of this book.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 80522 203 3  
eISBN 978 1 80522 204 0



*This book is dedicated to Joel Fotinos and Emma Lively,  
two longtime users of the tools*



# CONTENTS



INTRODUCTION .....	1
1. Morning Pages.....	3
COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS.....	21
2. Artist Dates .....	28
COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS.....	48
3. Walks .....	54
COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS.....	63
4. Guidance.....	68
COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS.....	86
5. The Artist's Way Fundamental Ideas.....	92
BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE ARTIST'S WAY (FROM <i>THE ARTIST'S WAY</i> ) ...	92
THE ARTIST'S WAY CONTRACT .....	93
THE ARTIST'S WAY AFFIRMATIONS.....	94
THE ARTIST'S WAY PRAYER.....	96
THE LANGUAGE OF THE ARTIST'S WAY: KEY WORDS & PHRASES .....	97

6. Twelve-Week Checklist.....	98
7. Creating a Creative Cluster .....	111
8. Fifty-Two Artist Dates .....	114
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	119
APPENDIX I: 20 Inspirational Artist's Way Quotes .....	121
APPENDIX II: Poetry by Julia.....	125
APPENDIX III: Overview of Books in the Creative Kingdom .....	139

## INTRODUCTION



It's a sunny, sparkling Sunday in Santa Fe, an ideal day for using the four essential Artist's Way tools you will find in this handbook. The tools are presented in the order of their appearance in my life. Used together, they yield a surefooted path to creative recovery.

It's early morning, and the sun glints off the snowy mountain peaks. There is wind in the piñon tree. I am happy this morning to be presenting the first tool, one that I practice daily: Morning Pages. Pages are the best-known tool of *The Artist's Way*. They require our alert attention. I head to the kitchen, where I retrieve a carafe of iced coffee from the refrigerator. Pouring myself a glass, I settle in to write.

"Good morning," I announce on the page. "It is a bright, even festive, day." I'm in a good mood, excited to be sharing my morning practice—but not to share too much, for pages are private. I write longhand, for three pages, detailing the day at hand. I have plans for my day, and I put those plans in writing. Chief among them is an expedition to a metaphysical card shop, The Ark.

This will be my use of the second essential tool, an Artist Date. It is a

two-part tool; one part artist, and one part date. Undertaken solo, once a week, it is intended to “woo” my creative consciousness—and I find that it does so. In the shadowy recesses of the store, the brightly colored cards enchant and interest me. After browsing for an hour, I scoop up a handful. I’ll be writing to my far-flung friends.

Now it is time for the third tool: a walk. I find myself setting out briskly. I have only twenty minutes allotted, and so I want to make the most of it. Passing a grove of juniper trees, I encounter a bold posse of ravens. They strut ahead of me, unintimidated by my presence. I reach the end of my dirt road, and circle back toward home. Now the ravens take to the sky, flapping their mighty wings as they lead the way. They will land in my piñon tree, staring in the windows of my adobe house. Once home, I settle in to write the fourth tool: guidance.

“What do I need to say?” I ask the page.

“Tell your readers guidance is available to everyone, not limited to an elite few.”

And so, I write that guidance is for everyone—a normal, spiritual practice. At day’s end, I find myself ready to begin. The handbook that follows will detail the tools carefully and thoroughly, using many stories to demonstrate their points.

So now, read ahead, and find your questions answered.

## MORNING PAGES



The moderator's voice was low and sonorous—a good radio voice. He was set to interview me, but he had something to tell me first.

“I’ve done my Morning Pages for twenty-three years, and I’ve written thirteen feature films,” he reported happily, clearly proud and impressed by his own output. I was proud and impressed as well, but his happy report came as no surprise to me. Morning Pages lead to productivity. Perhaps not to thirteen feature films, but to other dreams fulfilled.

So what exactly are Morning Pages? And can anybody undertake them?

Morning Pages are for anyone and everyone, declared artist or not. They are a bedrock creativity tool that I have been assigning for more than three decades.

“Write three daily pages, longhand, first thing upon awakening,” I tell students. “Write about anything and everything that crosses your mind. Expect your pages to feel scattered as you jump from topic to topic, and accept your pages, as jumbled as they may seem. There’s no wrong way to do pages. Just write three sides of eight and a half by eleven-inch paper. If you can’t think of anything to write, write, ‘I can’t think of anything to write.’”

"But Julia, my pages sometimes feel negative," students are known to complain. They are afraid of putting negativity into the world.

"You're not perpetuating negativity, you're ventilating it," I explain gently. "You're making room in your mind for the positive."

Setting our negativity to the page, we find a creeping sense of optimism. We become more balanced, no longer thrown for a loop by life's vicissitudes. Pages miniaturize our troubles. In place of foreboding about the future, we metabolize it a page at a time. Picking up our cues and clues about the day at hand, we are gifted with early warnings of trouble ahead. As we learn to handle life a day at a time, we find we have powerful inner resources. We become nimble at avoiding difficulties. Increasingly, the world appears a benevolent place, no longer hostile or forbidding.

The fruits of Morning Pages are a feeling of buoyant optimism and a growing faith in our own resilience. Life is no longer overwhelming. Taken in daily bites, it becomes an adventure.

"Show your pages to no one," I warn students. "They are for your eyes only; completely private and personal." Offering guaranteed privacy, pages are a safe place to vent and to dream. They lay out a path for the day and protect practitioners from the dangers of codependency. With pages firmly in place, our days are no longer hijacked serving other people's agendas and not our own. Pages are a buffer, like the bumpers placed in children's bowling lanes to keep the ball from going into the gutter. Pages keep us centered. We no longer fall in the gutter. Now we happen to our days instead of our days happening to us. Make no mistake: pages are that powerful.

"But Julia! Must I do them in the morning? Why not evening pages? I'm a night owl."

Sorry to say, Morning Pages must be done in the morning. They lay out a golden track for the day. If you write evening pages, you find yourself reflecting on a day that has already happened and that you are powerless to change. Morning Pages are potent changers. Jungians tell us that we have

forty-five minutes upon awakening before our ego wakes up and our defense mechanisms are in place. This forty-five-minute window finds us authentic and vulnerable, ideal traits for effective Morning Pages. So write your pages in the morning, as close to awakening as possible. I wouldn't dream of standing between someone and their morning coffee; just don't spend forty-five minutes brewing the perfect cup. You may wish to do as I do, and make coffee the night before, refrigerating it overnight. My iced coffee is a delicious wake-up drink.

"Julia, you sound like a fanatic—iced coffee and thirty years of pages!" If I sound like a fanatic, so be it. I like my iced coffee and I like my pages. Pages point me in the direction of my next jump. "What shall I do next?" I ask them. I depend on the pages for guidance. More on guidance later.

Done daily, pages become routine. A potent form of prayer and meditation, they awaken a connection with the divine. As we go within, exploring our own psyches, we are led not only to self-knowledge, but to a source of wisdom that feels higher or other than our own native intellect. Although I think of pages as a secular tool, they are in fact filled with grace. Writing pages, we contact the spark of our own divinity. We find ourselves led carefully and correctly. When I teach a twelve-week course, I see a profound physical alteration in my students. I have come to realize that enlightenment is a literal term. As they work with pages, students release tension. Their expressions soften. Lighter-hearted, they quite literally look enlightened. "Julia, you make them sound too good to be true," I am sometimes told. I reply, "Pages *are* too good to be true." I think of pages as being like a tiny whisk broom that you poke into all corners of your life, sweeping debris to the center of your consciousness where it can be dealt with. There is no arena of your life too petty or too personal to be addressed. Pages can be a tough-love friend, bringing up troubles and issues over and over until they are dealt with.

"Julia, I was drunk in the outback."

"Julia, I lost one hundred pounds."

"Julia, I ended my bad marriage."

Pages give us the courage to make needed changes. I call this "spiritual chiropractic." We change in the direction we—as individuals—need to change. Deftly, accurately, pages balance us spiritually. Milquetoasts learn to speak up. Loudmouths learn to hush, and keep their own counsel.

"You seem different somehow," students report being told. "Did you get a facelift?" Cosmetic surgery set to one side, the pages are a potent instrument of healing. As we learn to face life one day, one page at a time, we are rendered more relaxed, and that relaxation shows in our faces—and in our body language. No longer braced defensively to face a hostile world, arms crossed in self-protection, we now greet the world with open arms. No longer anticipating animosity, we now strive to be a friend among friends.

The shift in our energy is palpable. Others sense it and respond to it gladly. *We* are what has changed, yet the whole world seems to have altered. As our pages render us more honest with ourselves, we deal more honestly with others. Sensing our authenticity, others respond in kind. Conversations deepen. Friendships become more firm. We are more fully human, and our relationships reflect this fact. It is a paradox of Morning Pages that as we work on encountering ourselves, we become able to more fully encounter others. As we become more intimate with ourselves, we are given the gift of intimacy with others. Alert to our own moods and thoughts, we become alert to the moods and thoughts of others. Becoming more empathetic, we meet others more fully. Our pages are a doorway to others, as well as to ourselves. We find ourselves—and others—more lovable.

Students often report, "Julia, I think I fell in love . . . with myself." Pages are an exercise in self-appreciation. All parts of ourselves are welcome in pages. The positive and the seemingly negative both have their place. Such radical self-acceptance tutors us to our true nature. Students report, "I learned more in my first few weeks of pages than I learned in all my years of therapy." We



learn more because in pages we are vulnerable. Guaranteed privacy, we dare to admit our true feelings and thoughts. We are often a surprise to ourselves. “Why, I didn’t know I felt that way,” students often exclaim.

Knowing that pages are for our eyes only dismantles the defenses in play with even the most gifted therapists. Daring to tell ourselves the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, we become authentically ourselves. Our moods and our motives become known to us. Lurking angers and resentments are flushed to the surface where we can deal with them effectively. Our hidden thoughts and feelings become visible to us, perhaps for the first time. As days of pages mount to weeks, we come to know ourselves. And this self-knowledge comes to us as a relief. We become comfortable in our own skins. We are peeling back the layers of the self, revealing more and more of our core.

“Julia, you make pages sound like a panacea,” I am sometimes told.

“I think that’s an accurate description,” I reply. With more than thirty years’ experience in the effectiveness of pages, I say with confidence that pages aid us in all arenas of our lives, from romance to finance.

\*      \*      \*

Victoria undertook Morning Pages with skepticism. A beautiful young woman, she had attracted—and endured—a string of abusive boyfriends. “Julia, I’m at my wit’s end,” she told me.

“Do pages,” I advised her.

“I don’t see what pages can do to improve my love life,” she wailed.

“Just try them,” I urged.

Victoria did try them, and after a month she reported back. “I’m treating myself better, and I’ve started dating a nice guy. He treats me better, too.”

Before her Morning Pages, Victoria had deemed “nice guys” dull. With pages in place, she found herself appreciating her new beau.

"He's thoughtful," Victoria characterized her new fellow. She found herself enjoying his thoughtfulness. The pages tutored her in accepting "nice." Freed from anxiety and drama, Victoria discovered herself responding to romance.

"Just say yes," her pages dictated, anticipating a proposal. The proposal came, and Victoria did say yes. As I write this, she is ten years into a happy marriage. She credits her pages.

\* \* \*

David undertook pages as a chronic under-earner. A talented man, a gifted photographer, he had all the skills necessary for solvency, and yet he found himself habitually broke. Writing his pages, David discovered a pattern of financial masochism.

"I over-worked and under-billed," he describes the pattern. "I was addicted to being a good guy—good to everyone but myself." With pages in place, David discovered self-worth. Although it felt foreign to him at first, for the first time, he billed for his services appropriately. At the pages' urging, he invoiced accurately for his time and labor. To his surprise, his clients accepted his new prices. Where before he had been a bargain, now he was charging what the market bore.

"I wrote in my pages that I sold myself short," he recalls. There the pattern was, in black and white. If the problem was clear, the solution was also clear. "It was as if my pen had a mind of its own, writing out my new price—but my new prices were fair," David recalls ruefully. Sane and solvent for the first time, he finds in his life a new ease. No longer an under-earner, no longer a masochist, he finds himself with enough cash to afford a few treats—like the new camera that made of his work a pleasure.

\* \* \*

Victoria and David are dramatic examples of the changes that pages may bring. Their stories are dramatic, but not uncommon. Often pages accomplish in mere weeks what conventional therapy battles for years. It is as if our pen becomes a magic wand. Our writing “rights” things. As we accurately assess our lives, we find ourselves noting many choice points—places where we can break longstanding habits. Pages root out self-destructive patterns. We find ourselves victimized no longer. The events of our lives may be the same, but we respond to these events differently. First on the page, and then in life, we pause, take stock, and respond appropriately. Rather than passively accepting our “lot,” we set new boundaries. We are not reacting; rather, we are responding, and our responses point our lives in new and healthier directions.

There is a direct connection between our heart and our hand. Writing by hand, we forge a handmade life. Often, we are shown the simplest, most direct route out of our difficulties. Accustomed to listening to our head—to our intellect’s often complex and complicated concerns, we may at first find the wisdom of pages doubtful, even threatening. As our pages mount up, so, too, does our clarity. What began as a seemingly unsolvable problem yields over time to the language of the heart, in all its glorious simplicity. Our growing simplicity is a gateway for authenticity to enter our lives. As we become more and more honest with ourselves, we become more honest with others. They sense our committed vulnerability, and they may respond in kind. The complicated web of human relations is rendered trackable.

“To thine own self be true,” the Bard advised us, and pages are a surefire route to self-knowledge and self-acceptance. Remember: pages are private, for your eyes only. Sequestered from a prying world, we dare to record our true thoughts. Anchored in our newly found self-esteem, we risk taking risks. What at first seems too large or too daring is miniaturized by the pages into doable gambles. “I couldn’t” becomes “I did.” Pages are supportive. “Leap and the net will appear.” Pages are the net. They teach us our resiliency. Pages are

our before, during, and after friend. If we fall, they catch us. Voilà! We have lived to write another day.

With pages in place, we find ourselves partnered. Pages are supportive. They give us a sense of security. Friends can be capricious. Pages are not. All they require are pen, paper, and time. And a word here about time.

Pages take time, but they give us time in return. Pages lay out a track for our day, and as we move down that track, we gain velocity. We move jump to jump to jump, not pausing to ponder what our next jump could be. Instead, we know our jumps, and move through them with minimal resistance. We have left our dawdling on the page. There are no more “mental cigarette breaks” while we pause and ponder what’s next. We are not swept off our course by falling in with other people’s agendas. Such detours are costly, and, as we work with our pages, increasingly rare. A healthy selfishness is at play. We set new boundaries. Our days are no longer porous. What we allow—and what we no longer allow—becomes clear to us. We draw the line.

A day at a time, a page at a time, we are becoming more productive. Faced with time to kill, we become adroit at “grabbing it,” filling our empty moments with creativity. Twenty minutes no longer seems too short as we discover that twenty minutes is time enough to move ahead a notch on our projects. “Grabbing time” becomes a game we play with ourselves. How many previously lost moments are now found? We move forward with confidence. Grabbing time, we find ourselves grabbing ideas as well.

Morning Pages train us to move past our inner critic—that harsh, damning, negative voice that tells us that our ideas are stale, our prose hackneyed. Often, at the onset, our critic looms larger than life. Its booming pejoratives are deafening. Trained by our culture to believe the worst about ourselves, we find our critic’s diatribes very convincing—until Morning Pages intervene.

The mantra for Morning Pages states emphatically, “All parts of me are welcome here.” This phrase is a manifesto. When our critic condemns, we fire back a defensive volley. “Your pages are rough,” the critic opines. “Thank

you for sharing,” we answer, and happily. Faced with our happy-go-lucky attitude, our critic loses its domineering position as the truth.

We write pages daily, and daily we gain practice in facing down our critic. When the critic fires a negative round, we keep on writing. As we write on, our critic backs down. Discouraged by our levity, it no longer dominates our psyche. The critic, after all, is nothing but a bully, and like all bullies, it shrinks when confronted.

It’s important to note that shrinking our critic is a portable skill. When we shrink our critic in our pages, we shrink our critic in our lives. An actress, stepping onstage, hears the villainous hiss. Trained by her pages to step past it, she mentally notes, “Ah. There goes my critic. Thank you for sharing, but I have work to do.” And with that, she launches into her performance.

About to step forward, center stage, a stand-up comic hears, “You’re not funny.” Schooled by the pages to ignore his critic, he regales his audience to uproarious laughter. Both performers have learned from their pages how to miniaturize their critic. Despite intimidating negativity, they remain bold. Pages have rendered them bold.

Trained by our pages to trust our first thought, we find ourselves trusting our actions as well. We don’t waste valuable time second-guessing ourselves. Alert to grab time, we make efficient use of our moments. Our critic can no longer force us to a standstill. As we set aside our critic’s judgments, we find ourselves free to define ourselves in ever more positive terms. We learn to call things by their right names.

“I’m scared,” we say, naming our emotion accurately, if we find ourselves stalling on a project. We do not say, “I’m lazy. I’m out of ideas.” Having accurately admitted our fear, we are free to move forward. Pages have given us momentum. We do not procrastinate for long.

Waking to Morning Pages, we head into our days focused. We put our priorities in order, and we match our actions to our goals. Gone are the days of mindless waste. We catch ourselves when we take a detour, moving in a

direction that doesn't serve us. As we become more and more adroit at grabbing time, we find ourselves moving at surprising velocity toward our goals and dreams. Things that once seemed impossible—out of reach—are now well within our grasp. Pages have rendered us both bold and focused. They hold forward momentum, and our lives now take on a spirit of adventure.

\* \* \*

Victor undertook pages with skepticism. A writer by trade, he wrote for hire—and he only wrote for hire. His days of writing for the sheer joy of writing were behind him. Now he wrote for pay—or he didn't write at all. The idea of writing three pages daily, for fun and for free, appalled him.

"Write for free?" But Victor was miserable, and so he agreed to give pages a try. One week, two weeks, and then, on only his third week, he had a breakthrough. He admitted to himself—and then to me—that he actually enjoyed writing. What's more, he enjoyed the idea for a long-postponed novel, which he began in week four. He explains, "I told myself that I needed a sabbatical—time off—to write fiction. Now I find myself grabbing time, as you put it—twenty minutes here, fifteen minutes there. I'm squeezing my real writing in around my writing for hire." Victor's voice is happy. Each day he writes, he grows happier still. He explains, "I respect myself again. I'm a real writer." His pages pointed him in the direction of his dreams. He wrote, "If I didn't have to do it perfectly, I'd write a novel." Then he wrote, "There's no such thing as perfectly. I think I'll try a novel." And he did. Victor's "real writing" brought him self-esteem. The pages opened an inner door. Victor's story is not unique. It is a specialty of the pages to unlock our dreams. Victor learned that writing for hire brought him cash on the barrel-head, but not self-respect. Writing for the love of writing paid him far larger dividends. As I write this book, Victor is on his third novel—all written at the pages' urging.

\* \* \*

Caroline, a painter, was willing to experiment. Her work felt stale to her, and she didn't see a way out. But she was desperate. "I'm a portrait painter. I don't see what good writing will do me, but I'll give it a shot."

And she did give it a shot, although writing was not her long suit. She says, "Imagine my surprise that as I wrote pages, my paintings improved. Pages taught me to trust myself, and I found myself painting with greater confidence." Confidence led her to paint more boldly. She included details that had previously eluded her. Her portraits became much more sharply etched. Her backgrounds were painted with greater care. Word of mouth spread about her artistry, and her career took wings. She says, "It made no logical sense to me, writing translating to better painting. But the proof was in the pudding. Pages inspired me. There's no question. Pages taught me to trust myself."

\* \* \*

Success stories like Victor's and Caroline's are commonplace among pages' practitioners. Daily practice of pages trains users to take themselves seriously. As pages mount up, so does self-worth. Risks—the novel, the paintings—become dares that we pose for ourselves, dares that we take boldly. I need only take the roughest of surveys to learn of substantial gains. Author Elizabeth Gilbert offers this testimonial: "Without *The Artist's Way*, there would have been no *Eat, Pray, Love*." So many "risks" are undertaken with the pages' support. A noted actor makes a move into directing, more fulfilled as an artist because he took the risk. A Broadway dancer steps up to choreography, "which I owe to the pages," he testifies, his voice quavering with emotion and gratitude.

"Your book changed my life," is the grateful phrase I most often encounter.

"*You* changed your life," I counter, wanting the grateful recipient to own his accomplishments. I continue, "I gave you the tools, but you used them." It takes a beat for my words to sink in. Do I really mean them? Yes, I do. I am wary of being typecast as the magic teacher. Far better that my well-wishers learn to credit themselves. After all, Morning Pages are work, and it's work they have done. They have written daily, sometimes for years.

As one practitioner put it, "Julia, I want to thank you for a quarter century of Morning Pages." In all that time he had missed only one day—"The day I had quadruple bypass surgery."

"Do you still do Morning Pages?" I am often asked.

"Yes," I answer. "I do." It has been three decades of pages, and I "still" do them because they "still" work. And what do I mean by "work"? Pages set my life on course. They give me a reliable spiritual path. They warn me of troubles ahead, and they give me strategies to cope with those troubles. Pages iron out the kinks in my life. They put me in touch with a benevolent "Something" that intends me well. With pages in place, I am an optimist. Life is doable, a daily chunk at a time. Pages remain for me a great teacher. They tutor me on how to handle situations I once found baffling. In short, pages are my lifeline. I would no more try to do without them than I would try not breathing.

Are there days when I resent them? Yes, of course. There are days when I feel I am writing uphill. But I have learned through the years to simply keep on keeping on. The bad days will yield to the good.

Author and teacher Jacob Nordby puts it in plain English: "I tell my students that waking up to Morning Pages is like waking up to your best friend." For many of us, pages are, as Nordby puts it, a best friend. They bear witness to our lives, and, unlike our human friends, they cannot be alienated. They are steady. They do not blow hot and cold.

The steadiness of pages takes some getting used to. We are not accustomed to such support. As pages mount up, so, too, does our feeling of security. We come to trust pages, to find it a relief to have such a confidant. As



we confide to pages our secret thoughts, dreams, and desires, we experience a growing faith that all of our feelings are acceptable. In time, this leads us to radical self-acceptance. “All parts of me are welcome here” becomes a solid reality. It is a pledge we make to ourselves.

\* \* \*

Charlotte, a classical musician, began writing Morning Pages at the urging of her mentor. “Just try them,” she was told, and due to her respect for her mentor, she did. Pages led her in an unexpected direction. In them, she confessed her growing dissatisfaction with the world of classical music—a world she had embraced and succeeded in, but a world too narrow for her now. Writing pages, she confessed a guilty secret: she loved Broadway and Broadway music. As her pages piled up, so did her clarity. She realized she wanted not to play the music of deceased musical greats, but of her contemporaries, composers who were alive and well. From this realization came another: she yearned to write music, and not just play it. Feeling like she was stepping off a cliff, she put pen to page and wrote her first melody. It was Broadway music, alright. After the initial plunge, song after song poured from her pen. With the pages’ support, she was able to break the classical world’s taboo around liking Broadway, and leave the narrow world of classical music behind. Her mentor was shocked, but supportive of the direction pages had led her in. While she mourned the loss of a classical player, she welcomed the emergence of a talented young composer. Not all of Charlotte’s friends were so understanding. Classical musicians themselves, they viewed Charlotte’s abandoning their world as high treason. Charlotte was “slumming,” they felt. Wounded by their lack of support and understanding, Charlotte turned to the pages for solace. There, she found encouragement and strength. With the backing and support of pages, Charlotte stuck to her guns. As I write this, she has penned three musicals, and her current one is Broadway-bound.

Charlotte had dreamed as a child of being a composer, but the dream was long buried under years of classical training. It took the excavation of pages to bring the dream to life.

It is often the case that pages unearth a lost or forgotten dream. Dreams that we had come to deem too big for our britches, too good to be true, are revealed to be possible after all. A dose of courage—and a dab of support—comes to us through pages. Charlotte reports, “Before I tried composing, I would have told you I was a depressive. Composing, I find myself a sunny optimist.”

All too often, darkness besets a personality that harbors an unfulfilled dream. Pages point out the dream and outline the necessary steps toward its fulfillment. Even when the steps are many—and difficult—they are undertaken with a lightness of heart. Our joy at finally being on the right track brings with it a palpable relief.

Make no mistake about it: the intervention of pages can be quite dramatic.

\* \* \*

Claire was a troubled young woman. Her arms bore the jagged scars of a failed suicide attempt. Her family and friends worried, lest she try it again—and succeed. Claire herself worried. Her depression seemed to spiral ever deeper, and suicide seemed like a logical way out. Therapists, psychiatrists, school counselors, and ministers all tried their hand at helping Claire, but she struck them all as beyond help. Her family was at their wits' end, but decided to try one more time. This time, with a Jungian therapist recommended by a friend of a friend of a friend.

Claire's initial sessions went well. The therapist was empathetic and imaginative, more like a friend than a healthcare professional. All went well—until it didn't. One more time, Claire plunged into suicidal ideation. Once

again, she entertained thoughts of ending her young life. This is when the therapist introduced *The Artist's Way*. Claire was a talented young writer, and the therapist thought—hoped—that the practice of Morning Pages would appeal to her.

As luck would have it, it did. Claire took to the pages, and the pages took to her. A month into their practice, Claire felt her depression lifting. Two months in, she felt an unfamiliar feeling: optimism. At three months and counting, Claire announced her plans to continue pages beyond the twelve weeks *The Artist's Way* allotted. She was “hooked,” and her growing feelings of self-worth made suicide seem unlikely; a distant memory. Pages proved more than merely helpful. They were quite literally a lifesaver.

Cases like Claire's prove the effectiveness of pages. They are used in hospitals, treatment centers, and outpatient recovery programs. They are used in jails, in institutions, in universities and colleges. In short, they are used anywhere and everywhere where someone thinks they could help.

\*   \*   \*

Lorna teaches gifted teenagers. “They’re brilliant, but a handful,” she says ruefully. Burned out by the demands of her job, Lorna undertook *The Artist's Way*, attracted by its subtitle: *A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*. “I needed a spiritual path. I was completely tapped out,” she recalls. “My students, once a delight, had become a burden. I turned to *The Artist's Way* hoping to find my spirit refreshed. Within a few weeks of Morning Pages, I was feeling better. That’s when it occurred to me—if it worked for me, why not try it on my students. I made the first period of my teaching day into Morning Pages time. My students took to it like ducks to water. They loved the idea of ‘secret pages,’ as I called them. Their impact on the whole day was immense. I found my students better able to focus, better able to participate. As for me, I felt better able to teach. My class caught fire.”

Recalling her experiment, Lorna's face lights up. Always a pretty woman, she now looks like a true beauty. Morning Pages marked the difference. "What's different?" My fellow teachers ask me. I tell them I had a facelift." Lorna chuckles at her little joke.

When I teach a large group, the view from my place at the front of the room is startling. Beginning with the first class, faces are taut, arms are folded defensively. As the weeks go by, faces soften, often looking years younger. Arms are no longer skeptically crossed. Looser body language signals trust in the proceedings. "Vanity alone should make us undertake pages," I've been known to joke. But I am not kidding when I add, "Enlightenment is a literal term." Students' faces do lighten up as they pursue the work of pages.

Another visible sign of the pages at work is a shift in clothing. A class will typically start out drab—blacks and grays—and end up colorful as they become attracted to pastels and brights. Teaching, I find my mood brightens with the class. Humor overtakes solemnity. The class laughs aloud. I'm funny, I realize. There's much to feel lighthearted about.

\* \* \*

Bernice began class as a self-declared pessimist. A friend treated her to the class, and she accepted the gift rather than be rude. From the front of the room, Bernice looked the picture of dejection. Her face was somber. Her arms were crossed defensively. Her attitude shouted, "Show me. I know this class won't work."

But Bernice was obedient. She undertook Morning Pages as assigned. She resented the pages—a waste of time, she felt—but she did them. By the third week, she was hooked. She had to admit her bleak outlook was shifting. Her drab life was beginning to take on color as she explored new feelings of optimism. Week five found her dressed in pink—pink!—and experimenting with a new hairdo. Week six found her "fooling around"

with acrylic paints. As the weeks continued to unfold, so did a new identity: painter. Bernice loved to paint. Her paintings showed talent. They were colorful, and so was she.

\* \* \*

I'm writing in the room of my house I call the library. It is a large, square room lined with bookcases. In it I keep spare copies of my books and one large bookcase devoted to Morning Pages. The bookcase is tall—taller than I am—and its rows of shelves are filled with the pages of the last ten years, years I have spent living here in Santa Fe. In my pages, I trace my terror when my house was burglarized, my grief when Tiger Lily, my cocker spaniel, passed away, my joy when a play of mine received a good production. In short, the pages detail anything and everything that has crowded into my life.

Although I never go back and read them, I enjoy knowing that I could. That, say, Christmas, 2013, it snowed heavily, leaving me housebound and resentful—hardly a Christmas mood. Scant pages later, the snow had melted as we enjoyed a freakish warm spell—temperatures in the fifties. For years, I hoarded my pages, thinking, “If I ever write a memoir, I’ll need them.” Then I was assigned to write a memoir, and not once did I consult my past pages. It was as though the act of writing pages about my life had made that life indelible. The memoir, *Floor Sample*, seemed to write itself.

Morning Pages are not for writers only. They will work for anyone, in any walk of life. Ballerinas have told me that their balance improves. A judge told me he found himself wiser on the bench. An attorney reported that she found herself better able to think on her feet. A sculptor told me, happily, that he received images of upcoming sculptures as he wrote his daily pages.

“I get clear images of just what I’m intended to do next.”

Having said that pages aren’t for writers only, I should now note that they

may be particularly useful to writers. The daily practice of pages teaches us that we can write anywhere, anytime. The mythology that tells us that writers need special times, places, even pens, is dismantled. Because Morning Pages train us to write freely, they train us to write without attention to our moods.

"I don't feel like writing" becomes something to which we say, "So what?"

Writers who undertook the pages reluctantly—"More writing?"—soon report that all of their writing becomes easier. From pages, they learn to write without rewriting. They come to trust their first thoughts. Time that they previously spent writing and rewriting, trying to be brilliant, is now spent doing more writing, laying track. As they report, they write with ease, trusting the validity of what they write.

Are these extravagant claims? I don't think so. They are the distillate of my long years teaching. To my practiced eye, they are predictable. Wonderful? Yes. Commonplace? Also yes. Chances are, that having read thus far, you are convinced of the power of Morning Pages. They sound great—for other people. You're sure they would be good for you, except for just one thing: you would have to actually do them. You are wary of your capacity for such a commitment.

Stop! Don't pledge an eternity of pages. Instead, take a cue from Alcoholics Anonymous: do your pages one day at a time. Just as a lifetime without a drink seems unthinkable to an alcoholic, so does a lifetime of pages. And yet, a day at a time, a page at a time, Morning Pages, like sobriety, accumulate. Don't worry about having enough energy to write them ten years from now—or even tomorrow. Just write your pages today.

## COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS



### **1. Do Morning Pages really have to be done in the morning?**

The answer is yes. If you do the pages later in the day, you are reflecting on the day you've already had—and are powerless to change. Pages set our trajectory for the day. They keep us from being caught up in other people's agendas. Jungians tell us we have a forty-five-minute window upon awakening before our defenses are in place. Use that window to write pages.

### **2. What size paper do I use?**

I have found that eight and a half by eleven (or A4) is the ideal size for pages. Sometimes people want to use a smaller format, but I find that when they do, they miniaturize their thoughts. Using a larger-size paper, say, a legal pad, is daunting. So experience has shown that eight and a half by eleven is perfect.

### **3. Is it three sides or six sides?**

Morning Pages are three sides of eight and a half by eleven—inch paper: side, side, side. I don't want anyone trying to write six.

**4. Can I keep going after three pages?**

No. Writing more than three pages places you in danger of narcissism. The object of the pages is to move us into action, not into introspection.

**5. What if my handwriting is messy?**

If your handwriting is messy, slow down. That will make your writing more clear.

**6. What if I'm afraid someone in my house will read them?**

Ideally, we don't live with snoops, but if you feel you are, hide your pages, burn them, or shred them. I've had people lock their pages in their car, tuck the pages under the mattress, carry their pages with them throughout the day.

**7. Should I meditate before or after Morning Pages?**

Morning Pages are first things first, and I'll tell you why: with Morning Pages, we are moved to action. With meditation, we are not. If you take an issue into meditation, you may emerge twenty minutes later saying, "I don't need to do anything about this issue after all. I've 'meditated it away.'" Morning Pages, on the other hand, spark our creative action. If you take an issue into the pages, you may emerge thinking, "I damn well better do something about this." In other words, Morning Pages are a goad.

**8. What if I start thinking of a poem in the middle of Morning Pages?**

I wouldn't dream of standing between someone and their poetry. Simply write out the poem, and then return to Morning Pages.



**9. What if I start writing a to-do list in the middle of my Morning Pages?**

To-do lists are a common interrupter of Morning Pages. As with the poetry, simply write out your to-do list, and then return to the practice of pages.

**10. Can I have coffee first?**

I wouldn't dream of standing between someone and their cup of coffee. However, don't spend forty-five minutes brewing the perfect cup. You may want to do as I do, and brew your coffee the night before, placing it in a carafe in the refrigerator so that you can enjoy an iced coffee promptly upon awakening.

**11. Do they have to be written by hand?**

Yes. Morning Pages do have to be written by hand. There is a direct line from the heart to the hand, and what we are after is depth and authenticity. Hand-writing yields us that. If the pages are typed, we may be tempted to whiz past important points. In other words, typed pages give us speed, but they do not give us depth.

**12. What if they are negative?**

If your Morning Pages are negative, do not be frightened. You are not putting negativity into the world; rather, you are venting it and making room for the positive. Sometimes people who have done a great deal of "new age" work worry that their pages are negative, but this is not the case. Rather, they are airing their negatives and making way for future positives. I sometimes call Morning Pages "brain drain," as they siphon off our negatives.

**13. What if I can't think of anything to say?**

If you can't think of anything to say, say that: "I can't think of anything to say." Repeating this phrase until it provokes you to say something is a powerful technique.

**14. What do I do about my critic?**

Unfortunately, the critic may be a permanent part of your mind. Writing Morning Pages may provoke your critic into a flurry of negatives. When this happens, simply say to your critic, "Ah. Thank you for sharing," and keep right on writing. By this means, you are miniaturizing your critic. At the start, it may sound like the voice of doom. But as you work with it, its negativity will come to sound like a wee squeaky cartoon character—like the negative relative, habitually and perennially ill-spoken, ruining family picnics. I have found it often helps to name your critic. My critic, who has been with me for fifty-five years, is called Nigel. When Nigel says, "You're boring," I reply, "Nigel, thank you for sharing," and keep right on writing.

**15. How long do Morning Pages take?**

It varies from person to person. For everyone, they go more quickly if you go straight to them rather than allowing for interruption by checking your phone, checking your emails, taking a look at social media. Simply get up, and go to the page.

**16. Can I reread them?**

Yes, of course you can reread your Morning Pages, but this is something that should be done sparingly. When I teach a twelve-week course, I often ask students to wait nine weeks before they look at their pages. The desire to read pages sooner springs from our insecurity that we will say something important in our pages, and then forget it. In

my experience, this seldom happens. Rather, pages will bring up an important issue again and again until we deal with it. It helps to think of pages being like meditation. Just as you cannot replay a meditation, you should not try to replay your pages. Remember that they can be trusted to bring up important matters. And a word of caution about rereading pages: prepare yourself to be bored.

**17. Is it better to do them late than not at all?**

Yes, it is better to do pages late than not at all. But do not use this as permission to routinely do them late. Morning Pages work best when done in the morning. That is when they can best lay out a trajectory for the day. Remember that pages constitute a radical withdrawal from codependency. They keep us from being swept up in other people's agendas. They are like guardrails—they are best used early in the day, before we have a chance to slip offtrack.

**18. I have little kids—do I have to get up before them?**

Yes, unfortunately. What you are after is productive solitude. When I first did Morning Pages, I had a toddler. I had to get up before her, because once she was awake, she was tugging at my consciousness. Little kids are seductive. They want our full attention. We need to give our full attention to the page—which means getting up early.

**19. How can I get my husband to start doing them?**

Unfortunately, we cannot “get” anyone to do Morning Pages. Fortunately, however, pages are contagious, and our spouse may come to them of their own accord. The best policy is one of attraction, not promotion.

**20. What about dreams?**

Morning Pages are not intended to be a dream journal. You are being asked to write about your waking consciousness. If you record your

dreams in detail, you are taking away space from precious pages. Remember, Morning Pages are intended to be three pages, not two or one.

**21. How did you come up with this idea?**

The pages were born out of loneliness. I was living in Taos, New Mexico, in a tiny adobe house at the end of a tiny dirt road, and I yearned for companionship. I wanted a witness—someone to talk to about my daily concerns. I found that by writing daily pages, I felt less alone—more seen and heard. I would get up in the morning and go straight to my desk. It looked out onto Taos Mountain, and I would record the mountain's mood—and my own. I found I could write three pages before my daughter demanded my attention. Three pages were enough to siphon off any negativity, leaving me positive to face my day. And so, three pages became what I aimed for—and what I would later assign.

**22. Do you still do Morning Pages?**

Yes, I “still” do Morning Pages, because they still work. Over the years, I have come to rely upon them. They point me in the directions I need to go. Sometimes those directions seem to be unlikely, as when I was told to try writing music. But I did try, and discovered I was musical after all. I used to teach in Chicago, in a room with a low, Styrofoam ceiling. One day, I tapped the ceiling and discovered ten more feet of height. It's like that with Morning Pages: we think we are only so talented, but the pages tap the ceiling, and we discover our true height. Raised as the non-musical member of a highly musical family, I was shocked to discover, at the pages' urging, that I had musical talent after all.

**23. What is the difference between Morning Pages and journaling?**

Typically, when you journal, you set a topic. For example, “I'm going to write everything I feel about Fred,” or “I'm going to write everything

I feel about my mother.” You may go on at great length exploring the topic. With Morning Pages, you set no topic. With the pages, you skip topic to topic to topic. For example: “The car has a funny knock. I forgot to buy kitty litter. I didn’t call my sister back. I hated the way Fred treated me in the meeting yesterday, taking credit for my idea.” It’s as if you have a tiny whisk broom, which you poke into any and all corners of your thoughts, brushing the debris into the center of the room—the center of pages—where it can be dealt with.

**24. What if I am physically disabled and cannot write by hand? Is typing better than nothing?**

Yes.

**25. What do you mean the pages “expand” you?**

The pages train us to risk. First we risk in the pages, then we risk in our lives. Typically, when the pages broach a risk, like my writing music, the risk will seem too big. When the pages bring it up again, the risk will somehow seem smaller. Finally, when the pages refuse to drop the rock, we will exclaim, “Oh, all right, I’ll try it.” And in trying it, we expand.

**26. What do I do with them? Do I have to keep them?**

It’s up to you: save them or toss them. I had for years held on to my pages, believing that I would need them if I ever was assigned to write a memoir. But when I did finally write a memoir, I found I didn’t refer to pages. It was as though the act of writing them tutored me in what issues were important to mention. And so I say, save them or toss them, whichever seems best to you. If you have a worry about the pages being read after your demise, I have a joke: “Cremate the pages. Then worry about the body.”

## ARTIST DATES



If the first tool, Morning Pages, is work, the second tool, Artist Dates, is play, and may be harder to accomplish. What exactly is an Artist Date? It's a once-weekly solo expedition to do something that enchants or interests you. An Artist Date is intended to be frivolous; something lighthearted and gay. It's a small block of time—an hour or so—dedicated solely to enjoyment. It's done alone, with just you, yourself, for company. It's planned ahead of time—a date—and looked forward to, as would be a romantic date. If it sounds like fun, bear in mind that such fun—selfish, self-centered fun—is notoriously difficult to accomplish.

When I assign Morning Pages, classes take to them readily. The pages are “work,” and classes are ready to work on their creativity. When I assign Artist Dates, resistance sets in. Classes resist the idea of play. What does play have to do with working on their creativity, they demand to know. I tell them, “We have an expression—‘the play of ideas’—but we don’t realize it’s actually a prescription: play, and you will have ideas.”

Every time we make a piece of art, we are drawing on an inner well—or koi pond—a reservoir of images and ideas. Drawing on our koi pond, we “fish” for images, hooking them readily if our inner reservoir

is well-stocked. But what if it's not? If we have overfished our inner reservoir, images and ideas become elusive, hard to "hook." It's time to restock our pond, and the way to do that, put simply, is to take an Artist Date.

When we set out to play, we are no longer drawing on our inner reservoir. Instead, we are replenishing it. Whimsy restocks the well, and here, the lucky secret: our Artist Date needn't be directly connected to our projects. Our fun pays off, but seldom in a linear fashion. We may be working on project C, and receive enrichment in category Q.

I have a favorite Artist Date: visiting a pet store where they house a gigantic gray-and-white bunny named George. I am allowed to pet George, and when I do, feelings of well-being steal over me. These feelings will stay with me as I turn to my creative pursuit. George has nothing—and everything—to do with my project.

Remember that your Artist Date is a *date*—you are out to woo your inner artist. An Artist Date should be festive, even romantic—something you wouldn't ordinarily do. You might try a new restaurant, or take yourself to a movie, solo. Remember that your artist is youthful, and take yourself to a children's bookstore. *All About Big Cats*, *All About Bears*, *All About Spiders*—the very titles are fun, and a children's book contains just about the perfect amount of information to get your artist "going."

\* \* \*

Ned resisted Artist Dates, until he tried one. "It really cheered me up," he reported back to me. "I chose a children's bookstore, and chose a title, *All About Trains*. I learned steam engines to passenger trains. I'd always loved trains, but now I had learned more about them and loved them even more." Ned's enthusiasm didn't surprise me. Artist Dates are addictive. Try one or two, and you'll find yourself trying more.

\* \* \*

Clarice balked at the idea of the Artist Date. "I live alone. Isn't my whole life an Artist Date?"

"No," I explained to her. "An Artist Date is a special something consciously set aside from your ordinary life."

Clarice went to a doll store. She had always loved dolls, but considered them "childish." At the doll store, she found "dolls for grown-ups." She let herself buy one, relishing the finery that went with it. As I write, Clarice has acquired a second doll, and has the start of an enchanting hobby.

\* \* \*

When I began my practice of Artist Dates, I was living in Greenwich Village, a neighborhood that featured many specialty shops. One in particular enchanted me: a bird store. There, I fell in love with a petite African Grey, gentle enough that I could pet it or allow it to perch on my shoulder. There were many showier birds, but the modest African Grey held my heart. I took to stopping in to visit "my bird" on the way to PS 41 to pick up my daughter from school. I was heartsick on the day the little bird was sold. Then I forcefully imagined that its new owner loved it as much as I did.

Half a block from the bird store there was another store I favored: a children's toy store. Well-stocked with dolls and games, it was particularly well-stocked with stick horses. Bays, pintos, palominos—there was a stick horse to suit every fancy. No sooner would one horse be bought than another would take its place. I resisted my impulse to buy them all. After all, my daughter already had a stick horse—palomino and festive. I would have held out, not buying a horse, but then they got an Appaloosa. This was too much for me. I asked the price, and found I could afford it. My daughter would soon be the proud owner of two stick horses. Having paid cash on the barrelhead, I



trotted the Appaloosa pony from the store. My Artist Date was expensive, but expansive. My daughter loved her new pony. With two stick horses, she felt rich.

\* \* \*

Helen is a firm believer in Artist Dates. “They make me feel connected,” she says. “I’m a Pisces, so it’s no surprise my favorite date is an aquarium store.” Helen allots herself more than an hour to browse amid the tanks, learning the habits of the fish they contain. She always starts with the neon tetras: tiny, brightly colored fish that swim in schools, zipping from one end of the tank to the other. Next, she observes the swordtails, taking care not to stand too close to their tank because they are shy and prone to hiding if she looms large. Next is a stop at the angelfish, which she knows to be predatory—“Devilfish, they should be called,” she jokes. Floating serenely unless they are on the attack, they are murderous by temperament. Last but by no means least, Helen goes to a large corner booth that houses the ever-beautiful fantailed goldfish. Serene and tame, the goldfish float behind filmy veils, their caudal fins allowing them to play peekaboo, peering curiously at Helen who watches them, entranced, her face pressed to the glass.

“You want a kiss?” the clerk asked Helen on one of her visits, holding out a basket of Hershey’s Kisses.

“Yes, thank you, don’t mind if I do,” Helen replied.

“Say, you wouldn’t want to go to a movie with me, would you? At the Biograph, they’re playing *Blue Water, White Death*.” The clerk held out his basket while he waited for Helen’s reply.

“I heard that film was terrifying,” Helen protested. “But I guess I’m game if you are.”

“I’ll take that as a yes,” the clerk said, offering his Kisses. “Take a handful,” he coaxed. Helen scooped up a half dozen. Helen’s Artist Date became

a date, evolving over time into a courtship. She and the clerk found more in common than their shared passion for fish. But fish were the launching pad. And as Helen followed the teaching to “do something that enchanted or interested” her, she opened her psyche to the possibility of romance. Previously, she had seen herself as eternally single.

As Helen’s story illustrates, Artist Dates alter our self-image. We may have believed ourselves dull, only to find that as we explored an interest we became interesting—first to ourselves, and then to others. Artist Dates are a potent aphrodisiac. They raise our self-worth. As we treat ourselves well, others respond in kind. Helen had noticed the handsome clerk, but had doubted that he would notice her. Forgetting her self-consciousness as she studied the fish, she became interested in their habits, and changed one of her own by saying “yes” to the clerk’s invitation.

\* \* \*

Juliette was fascinated by beads. Her Artist Date took her from one bead store to another. A hole-in-the-wall shop with a single-word sign, BEADS, enticed her to explore its wares. The necklaces she found there were beautiful, but priced beyond her means. She spotted a blue-and-silver necklace that struck her as stunning. Knowing she was playing with fire, Juliette tried it on. The blue beads mirrored her own blue eyes. The silver beads made her complexion look porcelain. “It’s you,” the saleslady remarked.

“I can’t afford it,” Juliette confessed, admiring the way the beads rested just on her collarbone.

“But we have a layaway plan,” the saleslady volunteered. “You’d have three months to pay it off.”

“I really shouldn’t,” Juliette demurred.

“No, of course not,” the saleslady relented.

“But I will!” Juliette exclaimed, joy and passion mingling in her voice.

Her beautiful beads made her feel beautiful. For the next three months, she “visited” them, paying down their cost. When she finally took them home, she wore them with a plain black dress, marveling at how they improved her outfit. Passing a plate-glass window, Juliette paused and admired her new necklace. As she remarked, “I think I fell in love with myself then and there.” Her Artist Date was indeed half artist and half date. She had successfully wooed herself. Artist Dates alter our self-image. We find ourselves newly fascinating. As we treat ourselves to a festive occasion, we find that we have an impulse to treat ourselves better. Juliette wore her new necklace with pride, fussing with a new and sophisticated hairdo. She found herself altering her makeup as well. After all, her beautiful necklace convinced her that she herself was a beauty. Its artistry led her to express her own artistry.

\*   \*   \*

If Juliette’s necklace trumpeted the skill of its maker, Charlene’s Artist Date announced the skill of the Great Creator making things of beauty. And what was Charlene’s Artist Date? A visit to a botanical garden with a special section set aside for roses—all manner of roses. At the garden’s entryway, the blooms were white on bushes waist-high. Farther in, the colors intensified: pink, fuchsia, coral, orange, and finally regal red, blooming on long stems, shoulder-high. The garden was a delight, not only to the eye. The roses gave off a sweet and heavy aroma. “I was swept away!” Charlene recalls. “The garden was only a mile from my house. I’d gone years without exploring it. I might have gone on far longer, but for the assignment of an Artist Date.”

\*   \*   \*

Artist Dates come in every size and color. They are intensely personal. What enchants one person may leave another cold. Choose an Artist Date that