

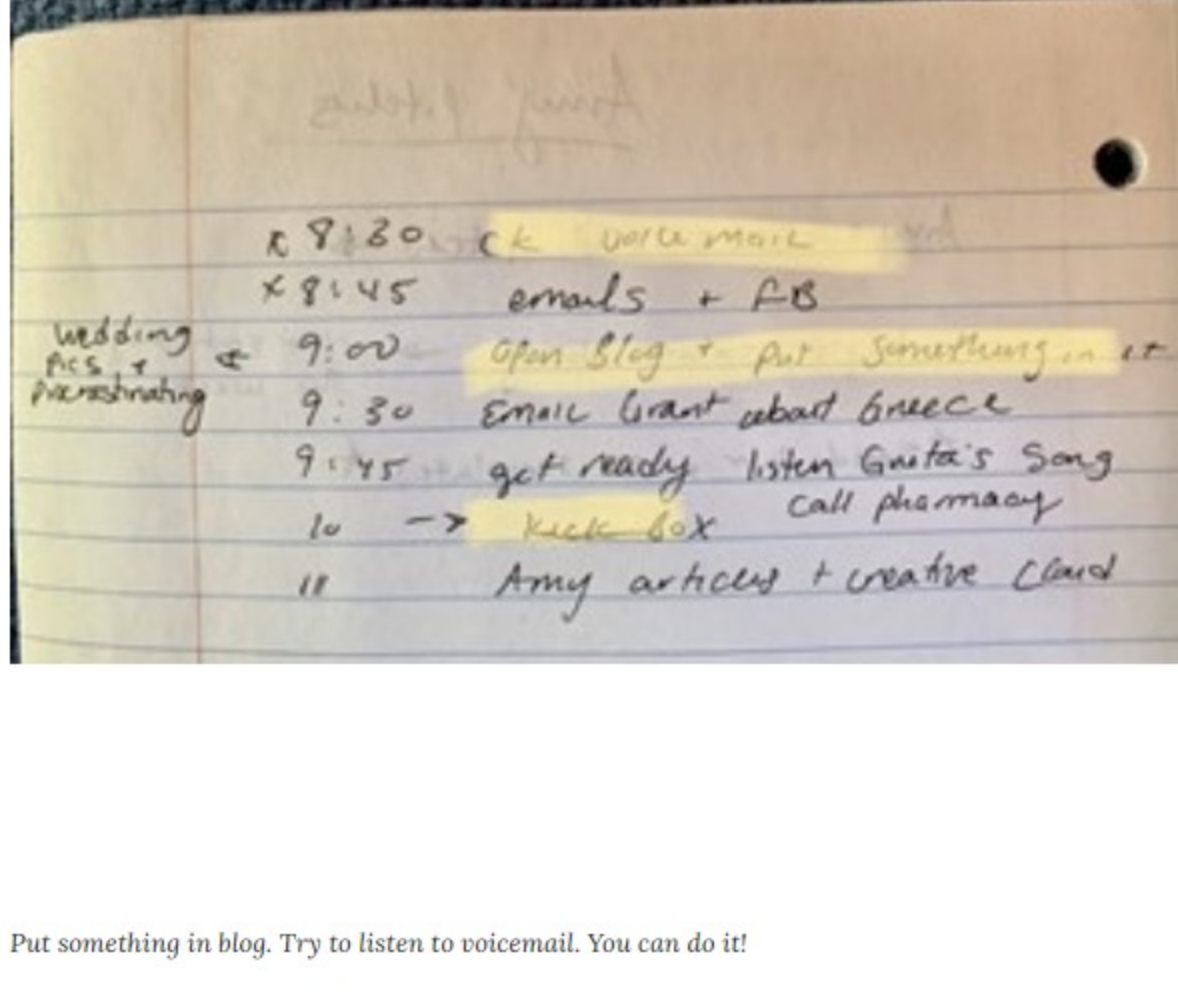
To Do: Put Brain Together

by Annie Crawford | Dec 7, 2021 | CNF, Issue Twenty Four

CURRENT ISSUE

I don't know what to write so day after day, month after month, I make to-do lists. Errands for my wife, soups I'd like to eat, credit card companies to call.

With a small X checking off accomplished tasks, my lists remain upbeat and optimistic.



Put something in blog. Try to listen to voicemail. You can do it!

Of course, I know what to write, but each day, four hundred possible futures explode into being and then die on the vine. Partially written pitches languish in my email drafts. A fan blows full-time on the filing cabinet of my mind.

In the midst of mental chaos, to-do lists tether me.

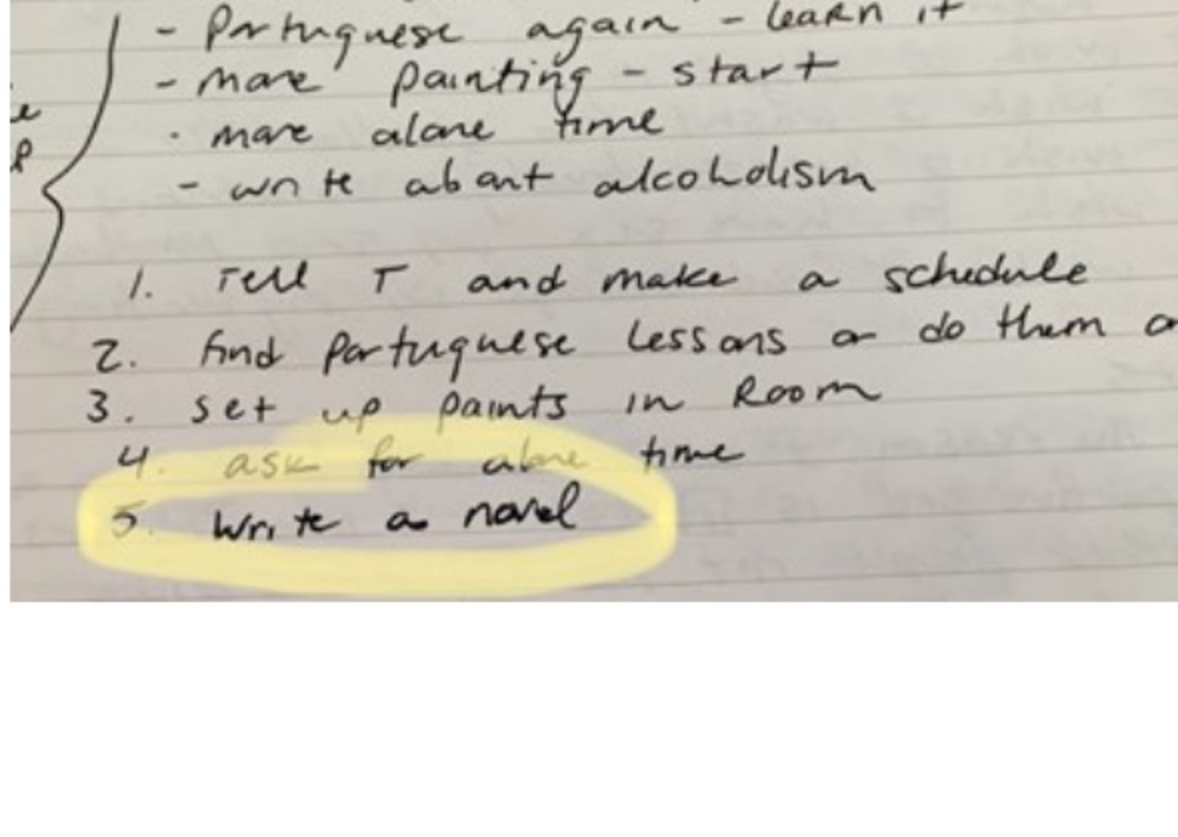
1. Return sweater
2. Get groceries
3. Call plumber

Things I can accomplish. Things that provide purpose. People need groceries to survive!

After a successful run of to-do-ing, my courage bolsters, and a foothold of self restores. In a hopeful state, I'll write my 'Dream It And You Can Accomplish It' list.

Pen flying over a random notebook page, I think, 'I dream it, I'll grind 'til I own it, I'll learn Portuguese while I'm at it!' And pick up home renovation! Who's with me?!

In all my DIAYCAI lists, 'write a novel,' must be featured. Surely a three-word task would be easy to tick off the list. But this deceptively simple sentence is fraught with creative despair. As any rigorously honest DIAYCAI lister knows, 'write a novel' begets its own sub-galaxy of daily word counts, writing schedules, and goals that, inevitably, can't be met. The DIAYCAI falls to the wayside, inertia settles back, and the cycle of mundane to-do lists begin again.



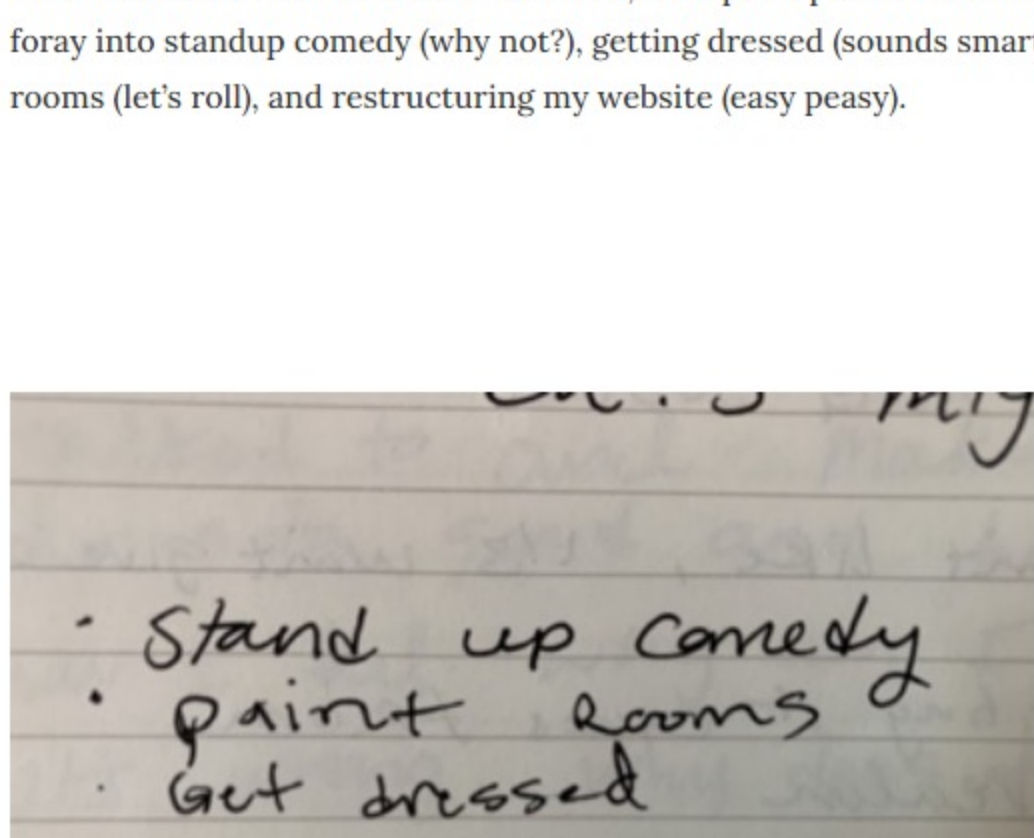
What would I do if I weren't crazy? Write a novel. Learn Portuguese. Make dinner!

Mostly unrelatedly, we joined a kickboxing gym. The smack of the gloves against the bag is so satisfying. A shin kick to victory. If only tackling my writing career were so easy. Three minute high intensity spurts, the nine stations to the finish line clearly lined out, an instructor pushing me on.

One pajama-suited outing from the house, I wandered into a sparsely-populated boutique. Just some precious, neutral-toned items for sale and a succulent nodding at the whimsy of all that retail space for one plant, one book, and a hammered necklace of spoons.

After surreptitiously reading Rae Dunn's *In Pursuit of Inspiration* in the empty shop, it became clear I need to be slightly different than I am to do the things that float in my head. I marched out, clear with the knowledge that watercolor paints would resolve my life. A new desk chair and overalls would likely also help.

I shuffled home and wrote a brilliant new, four-point plan for life encompassing a foray into standup comedy (why not?), getting dressed (sounds smart!), painting rooms (let's roll), and restructuring my website (easy peasy).



Step 3: Get dressed. Step 1: Launch a standup comedy career.

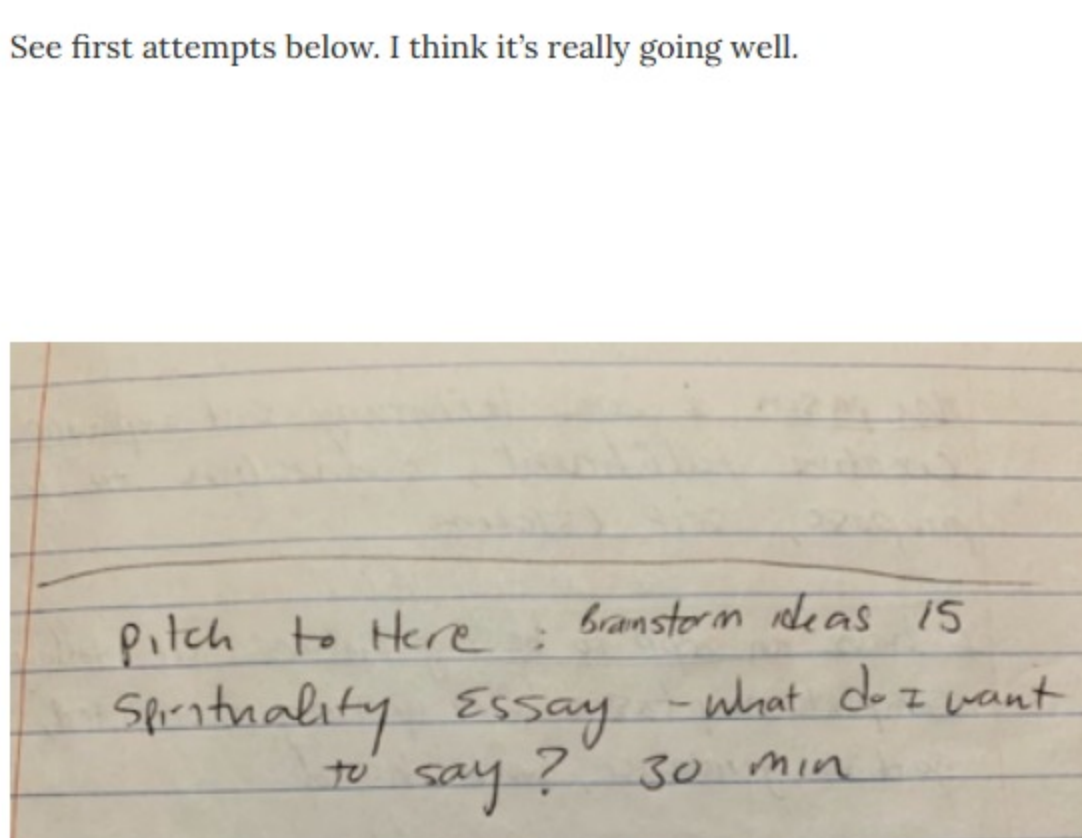
Despondency descended when it became clear that—days later—I was still in pajamas. If I couldn't manage step three of my four-point plan, how would I ever invigorate my writing career?

Then it struck me. I didn't need overalls or watercolor paints to be the writer I dreamed. I simply hadn't seen the forest for the trees. In journals under beds and unlabeled garbage bags, hidden in oddly-named Google Docs, and scattered throughout Scrivener, were acres of essays and unfinished chapters. Disorganization, not me, was the real trouble. My career was ripe for the picking. The solution?

I needed a list on how to get unstuck. NOW was the time to redouble my efforts and write the Re-Launch Your Writing Life List. Fresh with energy, I created a comprehensive five-point plan to tackle the loose ends of my writing life.

1. Cross-reference all past DIAYCAI lists and journals of yore. Color code and file. Easy!
2. Organize the slog of half-formed essays stored on my laptop. How? TBD!
3. Submit all essays to top-tier publications. Forthwith!
4. Open Scrivener, restructure novel. Go girl!
5. Find meaning and worth in efforts. No prob!

See first attempts below. I think it's really going well.



What do I want to say? Why, the essay has practically written itself!

Finally, for strategy, I find it helpful to keep half-finished lists—those as-of-yet not color-coded or filed works in progress—floating about my workspace and on the floor by my nightstand. It's restful to climb into bed with loose lists at my feet. I will wake up tomorrow, ready to tackle each item, Portuguese learned by lunchtime.

Who's with me?



Annie Crawford

Annie Crawford is a full-time writer with work in Oakland Magazine, Thrillist, The Week, and The Bold Italic. Please see more clips at annielcrawford.com.