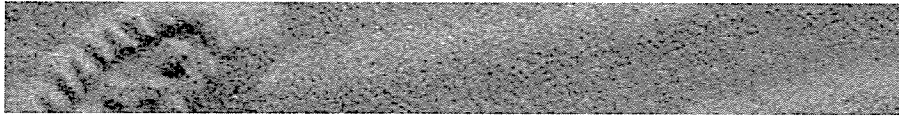


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...words...from some great local writers

True Inspiration: Just a Picture a Day...

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karen amster-young :: The Beach Chair Chronicles

**...weekly observations & discoveries from manhattan to the east end...**

Inspiration comes in many forms. As the summer winds down, I am looking at a beautiful sunrise and contemplating fall and all that comes with it. What makes people take on new projects, challenges and move forward in their lives – whether personally or professionally? What motivates someone to lose weight, end a bad relationship, start that novel, learn a new hobby, or reach out to an old friend? Around this time of year – perhaps even more than New Year’s — we all have “our lists” – a list of things we want to accomplish as we “head back to school” (not to mention the things we have to do). In fact, there is a growing movement, particularly among people in “mid-life” to compile what they are now calling Life Lists – a list of things, from simple to perhaps more daunting, that one wants to accomplish over a period of time. The New York Times wrote an entire feature article about it last week. According to the article, it could and should include anything and everything you want to do this year, next year, before you leave this earth – from eating a new vegetable to traveling to Africa. I like this new trend. I like the tangible, measurable, simplicity of it. It really works for someone like me who likes to cross things off a list (you know, the omnipresent To-Do list) in order to feel a sense of accomplishment; it took me thousands of dollars to realize that getting things done is better than weekly visits to a therapist to talk about what we should be doing. The Life List concept appeals to me – especially since it goes beyond things like “pick up dry cleaning”. I already started compiling my Life List for the fall. Will I be able to cross some things off the list by January? By next summer? Even before

the birth of this trend, I think everyone shares a desire to accomplish something each day. Even a seemingly simple, small accomplishment makes one feel more productive (Okay, even picking up the dry cleaning!). Our lives are measured in steps – both small and large. In fact, perhaps we don't even realize how doing something each day – whatever it is – is all part of living our lives fully and leaving a legacy of some kind. But lists are not what it is all about either is it? Too many lists and we get bogged down and don't actually create. Perhaps there is a happy medium? Maybe it is a combination of lists, including both seemingly small goals and large and actually crossing some off! But I am more adamant now than ever that it is also about living life and just doing. Let me go back to inspiration for a moment.

During the last week or so I was really touched and motivated by two projects that I heard about. Both were "brought" to me by good friends. One was a fulfillment of a promise made by my dear friend Linda to her first husband, Jamie Livingston, who sadly passed away at the age of 41 from melanoma. For 18 years before his untimely passing, he took a Polaroid photograph of anything that moved him, including up to the day he died. There were no "do-over's" – whatever image was captured was meticulously documented and stored. "The Photo of The Day was his ritual. He collected unusual places, strange angles, curious things, loyal subjects, beautiful times of day. "Photo of the Day is a work of light, color, laughter, pain, travel, beauty, Won Ton soup, afternoons, coffee, hanging out, love, life in its entirety. It's the masterpiece we all create. It's just that Jamie thought to take its picture," explained Linda. I have not stopped thinking about this project since she told me about it. I am sure Jamie did not think about the photos he was taking for 18 years as part of his legacy or crossed off "take picture" from his list of things to do for the day (or for 18 years for that matter). He just did it. Linda is now just two months away from having his six thousand, six hundred and ninety seven photographs displayed at this alma mater, Bard College. Jamie passed away 10 years ago. Did Linda have this goal – to bring the exhibit to fruition — on a Life List? I doubt it. She had it in her heart (and perhaps the steps written down to make it happen got her to this point today). Something to think about. I am truly impressed and touched by this story and her determination to get it done. The exhibit

opens on October 12th. I wish I knew Jamie Livingston.

My college friend Jodi just e-mailed me about a good friend of hers, Pamela French. Pamela's son is best friends with Jodi's son. They are both entering 2nd grade. She just finished her first feature-length documentary scheduled to be aired on TLC Monday, September 10th. The film is entitled, Getting In...Kindergarten. According to Jodi, Pamela filmed three families over the course of a year – through the entire, crazy New York City admissions process — capturing all the trials and tribulations of the families and what they went through to get junior into the school of their choice. I thought about this project and how great it was that someone was bringing this story to life in full-length feature film as opposed to the occasional news specials that have touched upon this daunting process. This film needed to be made. What motivated Pamela to start this documentary and finish it? How did it get on her to-do list, her Life List or any list? Did she cross-off much else when she was getting this done? Probably not. The big projects we take on often means that everything else is put on hold; every choice we make means something else is not getting done. But look at the potential reward. I went through the ridiculous school admissions process myself. I certainly thought about writing about it. I didn't. Other things for me came first. Why? Not sure. We all make these choices. Steve Nelson, the principal of Calhoun School is quoted in the film write-up and says, " If people around the country watched this program, they will have just one more reason to believe that everyone in New York City has lost their minds!" Of course Steve is referring to the ludicrous nature of the admissions process but I think, in New York City, there truly is the potential to lose one's mind. I almost did during the school admissions process a couple of years ago. Maybe that is why we need To-do Lists, Life Lists and more important, just some rituals like Photo of the Day. All working together we can truly take steps of all kinds to get things done and perhaps even leave a lasting legacy of some sort. Just don't forget to pick up the dry cleaning. Most of all, don't forget to be inspired – by a sunrise or just a simple image.


Till next time...

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