

Framing Life in Post-its

Choosing the words you speak over your life

MARINA GROSS-HOY

MAY 16



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Hello friend,

A few months ago, the author Chanel Miller shared a photo of her mirror on Instagram, where she had stuck a Post-it saying:

I am a writer in NYC

She wrote out these words as a reminder to pay attention to this bigger picture as she went through the realities and frustrations and routines of daily life. She didn't want to forget that they all added up to a dream embodied.¹

That Post-it image really... *stuck* with me.

So when I found myself in Manhattan last month for a writing workshop, the first thing I did once I got to my room was pull out a pad of yellow Post-its and a Sharpie to put a frame around this moment in time, on the wall over my desk:

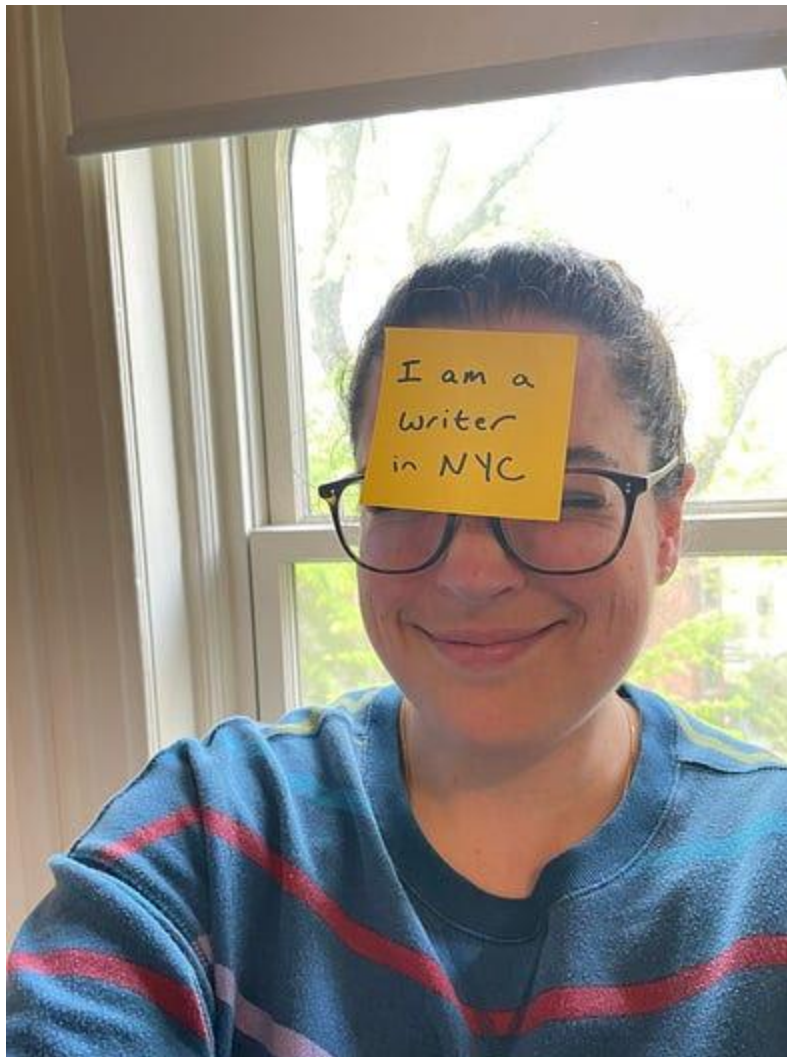
I am a writer in NYC

There were a million reasons why I felt like I couldn't claim those words. I was only in New York for a week. I was a writer, sure, but not an author. Even in the privacy of my bedroom, I felt a voice fretting over my boldness: *let's not be grandiose here, let's not get ahead of ourselves.*

But every time I sat down to my desk to write, to put on mascara, to eat a snack, that yellow Post-it reminded me of how I was choosing to frame this time. *I was a writer in New York City.* As I navigated the experiences that inevitably come with facing a blank page—the doubts and hesitations, the bouts of writer's block—my chosen frame braided me into a larger story of writers who had gone through these same things in this same place.

My experiences were normal. Nothing was broken.

I could stop worrying that I was deviating from the path, and instead enjoy the textures of my story.



There are moments in life when the stories on our Post-its are delicious—when remembering and integrating them is an absolute pleasure. And then, there are the other times. The times when the stories we are navigating are painful, and the last thing we want to do is cover our walls with Post-its shouting out scary words like *cancer* and *Depression*, *long Covid* and *loneliness*, *C-PTSD* and *PhD Dissertation*.

Sometimes it can actually be helpful to hold those words close and remind ourselves that what we are facing has been faced by people before us—that our pain is something that ties us closer to the human family, rather than isolating us. When I was getting to know my anger last autumn, I would look at my shadow and think, *This is what an angry woman looks like*. The practice connected me to countless humans, past present future,

and helped me feel grounded in the disorientation of pain. It suddenly became easier to practice self-compassion and to tap into a curiosity about my sensations and needs.

But sometimes that's all just too much work. Like right now, I am in the final phase of my PhD program. And while I know intellectually that a doctoral dissertation is not a life or death situation, my nervous system remains unconvinced. If I were to put "*I am finishing a dissertation*" on a Post-it over my desk, I would turn into a puddle every time I tried to sit down and write.

That story wouldn't *stick*.

So I've been holding on to something simpler, that's easier to grasp in the hurricane of my racing thoughts. A single word to frame my life in this season:

LOVABLE

As in,

My snail-slow pace? LOVABLE

My frustration with my snail-slow pace? LOVABLE

My earnestness? LOVABLE

My unresponded-to-emails? Oh my goodness so LOVABLE LOVABLE LOVABLE

And I've been scattering these Post-its all over the house: on my desk, by the coffee mugs, on the towering stack of articles to be read, next to my shoes—even one night on a mountain of dirty dishes.

I'm re-training my eye to look at my life and see love.



As our own primary caretakers, it is our job to frame our lives with stories that contribute to our flourishing.

The stories we speak over ourselves can transform how we inhabit our lives. They can remind us to hold ourselves with compassion. They can help us build community. They can impact the space we dare to take up.

It is an act of power to situate ourselves in a narrative. This can feel difficult, especially for those of us who have spent our lives waiting for permission to be granted authority, belonging, and enoughness.

We cannot keep waiting to be given these words. We must claim them ourselves.

And we must keep speaking them over our lives

over and over and over

until the frames become so stuck

we don't need Post-its anymore.



What are the words you use to frame your life?

Are they words you've chosen or words you've inherited? What words would you use in the privacy of your bathroom mirror? What words do you want to declare in public?

What are the words that feel like a warm hug? What words make you stand up taller, move freer, feel less alone? What words feel audacious but also delicious?

I dare you. Plaster your wall with Post-its. See what happens.



Tidbits...

- I've written about frames before, both reframing caregiving and actual frames in the Louvre
- **Speaking of the Louvre (!), I just completed a doctoral research residency** in *muséologie* at the École du Louvre (read about it here, in French). It's been a crazy few months...
- **Here's the essay about anger and (literal) shadows** on Mothering Spirit.
 - *The site's founder, Laura Kelly Fanucci (a ray of sunlight as a writer and a human being) just got a cancer diagnosis: you can support her on GoFundMe.*
 - *And another sunshiny friend, Karen Ward (a Montreal creative facilitator who runs Curiosity Camps for grown-ups) also just got a cancer diagnosis: you can also support her on GoFundMe.*
- For any writers out there, **here's the writing program I attended**. A huge bonus: these workshops are funded by a grant, which means tuition, room and board are all covered. Feel free to message me if you have any questions.

If you know someone who needs inspiration to decorate their walls with Post-its, feel free to forward this newsletter along.

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And if you make your own Post-it frames, please send a photo or tag me on the **socials (@marinagrosshoy)** - I'd love to see.

Warmly,

marina