

Staying Afloat

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Lists.

Long, long lists of unfinished business.

They keep me awake at night, or rouse me from a sound sleep to toss and turn with worry. Daytime, they cause me, agitated, to skitter from one activity to another, foiling the chance of any true productivity, or paralyze me with the futility of the effort.

There are the simple tasks of daily home maintenance, that seem to pile up faster than I can address them. In addition to sweeping floors, wiping down surfaces and keeping the laundry moving through it's cycles, I have a layer of dust on top of my refrigerator and food spoiling

inside of it. I have windows that advertise this home is not friendly to flies and mosquitoes. The list goes on...

Home repair needs a list all alone. There are things that have never been finished, like woodwork at floor level and trim around closets. There is the major issue of a real floor, rather than the painted particle board I have now. There are things that need maintenance: kitchen cupboards need to be replaced or at least painted; shingles are sliding down from the roof; the particle board floor – if I must live with it – really needs another coat of paint. Screen doors...if summer brings the heat...would be a nice addition.

Yard and garden has a long list this time of year. Mow, trim, pull weeds and dead-head flowers, pick fruits and vegetables...and then repeat, over and over, until the snow flies.

I always have a list of tasks to accomplish for the news magazine. At this moment, I have township news and a couple of community events to write up. I have subscriptions to update, invoices to send out and banking to do. I have interviews to do for the next feature story, some editing...and my own writing.

Other jobs have lists of their own, varying in importance and worry-potential, depending on the activities going on at the time. I gave my aunt's house a good going-over on Friday, so can write that off for a week or so. Phragmites treatment is coming up soon, so meetings and paperwork are demanding more time. The hardware store keeps me busy while I'm there, and I always have a running list of things I'd like to re-organize...when I have time.

Studio work, which should be a pleasure, holds its own list of "must-do"s and "should-do"s. Now, with all of the busy-ness of summer, I would usually be closing the studio door until fall...but I have deadlines, an art show, and work that needs to be finished.

There are lists of bills to be paid. I have my charge slip at the hardware store, that includes large veterinary bills and other things that I've purchased. Some of it is deducted from every paycheck. I feel like I might catch up, if I could just back off on the cheese crackers, pistachios and candy bars...but then I'll do something insane – like get a lawnmower – and I'm right back in the weeds. I have my folder of bills, and I generally make enough money to pay them all regularly...except when something unforeseen happens. This month, two visits to the dentist, gravel for my driveway, a flat tire, an oil change and a wheel bearing for my car were enough, in combination, to throw my budget into a tailspin.

That leads to the list of resources. Do I have anything to sell? Do I have work I have not been paid for? A little savings account I could close? I keep a "hidden balance" in my checking account. I accumulate it by rounding up for every check I write, and rounding down every deposit. It's just the cents, not the dollar amounts, and yet it adds up to about three hundred dollars a year. Some years, that has covered the cost of a small vacation or a special expenditure. This year, it contributed to getting me through a financial crisis.

There are other lists: letters I need to write; recipes I'd like to try; books I want to read; places I'd like to visit...and if these were the *only* lists running through my mind in the middle of the night, I think I could happily roll over and go back to sleep with a smile on my face.