

by MARIAN VAN WYK

# ONE THING AT A TIME

FROM GRATITUDE POSTS TO KNITTING A BLANKET BLOCK A DAY, PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD ARE PARTICIPATING IN 'ONE THING A DAY' PROJECTS. FOR SOME IT'S A NEW CREATIVE OUTLET, WHILE OTHERS FIND IT'S A GREAT WAY TO BREAK LARGE PROJECTS INTO SMALLER COMPONENTS.

Type '365 projects' into a Google or social media search and a wonderful world of personal and creative challenges opens up. Often accompanied by a blog, there's 365 days of crocheting granny blocks, decluttering, knitting, blogging, gratitude posts and much more... even Friday night meatballs.

The reasons why people take up these projects in an era of instant gratification are varied. Psychologist Dr Rosa Bredekamp (rbredekamp@absamail.co.za) says there's a connection between this global trend and the desire to live slower-paced, less chaotic lives. 'People have realised that a mindful, slower life is the key to a better quality of life and that they can have better control

over their lives when they focus on one thing at a time,' she says.

'When our attention is divided, which causes frustration and conflict. Big tasks become less intimidating when broken up into smaller pieces. As soon as one aspect of a task (like crocheting a block for a blanket) is completed, we feel content, which leads to other positive emotions,' Rosa explains.

Christopher Reid, trend specialist at the International Trends Institute (iti.ac) in Durban, believes these projects are a combination of two trends – mindful living and people's desire to reconnect with craft and making. 'We find that there is too much connection, choice and clutter

in our worlds and not enough meaningful engagements and real relationships. Because of this, we're seeing people go through phases of auditing their lives, whether it's by defriending all the random people on their social media or by doing less but living more. It's about living in a more focused, intentional way.

'By breaking a year into 365 approachable chunks and then doing just one thing in each of them, we can learn to focus again after living such scattered lives. The projects also appeal to people's need for order and being connected. As long as we feel disconnected from each other and our world, we'll try to find ways to counteract it,' Christopher says.

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Mood boards by Susanne Randers



## CRAFTER turning her life around

Others, like **Susanne Randers** ([mitkrearum.dk](http://mitkrearum.dk), #365moodboardsin2014) from the Danish village of Køge, feel no need to slow down. Since completing her '365 mood boards' project in 2014, Susanne has gone from being stuck in a career rut to living a more fulfilled and meaningful life with a job she loves and hosting part-time creative workshops.

On 1 January 2014 she made her first of 365 mood boards – a collage from old magazines – and decided that 2014 would be a year in which she would play as much as she wanted to, and do what she wanted. 'My project on Instagram was a commitment to my new creative lifestyle.'

As her project progressed, her creativity flourished together with her creative network and Instagram following. 'I became aware of so many creative disciplines. I learned how to make *kawaii* (Japanese for 'cute') drawings and hand-carved stamps, to draw and doodle again, to embroider freehand, to make mandala symbols with flowers and much more.'

Her newfound creativity inspired her to host creative workshops at home and sent her on a new career path as an activity coordinator at a home for the elderly in Køge. 'It's so fulfilling to make a huge difference to people's lives each day rather than communicating only via a computer.'

However, her biggest creative reward was when Dutch magazine *Flow* spotted her daily doodles (#mitkrearumdoodles) and commissioned her to design doodles for their *Flow Weekly*. 'My doodles have become my daily meditation, my daily quiet time. I feel so proud and happy,' she says.



## CROCHETER taking it slower

Rather than looking at a crochet blanket as one enormous project, an approach where she focused on one block at a time made her project much more enjoyable, says Oklahoma City librarian and crafter **Dana Beach (craftyminx.com)**. She committed to, and completed, a year of crocheting blocks for her 'granny a day' project: 'I tend to be a very sporadic crafter and someone who barrels through a project just to get the finished product. This project taught me to slow down and enjoy the process more. It also made me feel a lot more dedicated to the craft.'

'I believe any handicraft can help us slow down and enjoy the process that goes into making things ourselves instead of buying something. Not only does doing something daily create beautiful products, but you develop your skill as well.'

## SINGER-SONGWRITER overcoming his inner critic

**Simon van Gend of Simon & the Bande à Part** found that his 'song a week' project in 2014 ([asongaweek.simonvangend.com](http://asongaweek.simonvangend.com)) showed him what he was capable of, despite his inner critic.

'For me the solution to writer's block is to risk writing bad songs – or songs that the internal critic would label as bad. But that's not an easy thing to do; the internal critic is a huge energy stealer. A self-imposed deadline is a brilliant way to overcome this, especially if you go public with it, so that you'll look like a fool if you fail to meet the deadline.'

Five months and 52 new songs after completing his project, Simon was compiling the band's new album (released in June; the title was still unknown at the time of going to print) with 12 of his 52 songs. He has realised you have to write the bad songs to write the good ones. 'The weekly deadline forced me to constantly look for ideas, trying various approaches to the writing process.'

'I don't think one can work consistently and attentively at something and not improve. I found new courage to explore ideas I might have rejected before. I've also learned more about the power of habit, how doing something for a relatively short time each day can lead to big results in the long run.'

It also worked for Simon to go public with his commitment. Besides not wanting to look like a fool for missing his deadline, he found that he got a pretty good idea from the online feedback whether a song was a good one.

## FICTION WRITER sticking to a schedule

Many successful fiction writers commit to a schedule. **Francois Bloemhof, a full-time writer** who adheres to a strict discipline, simply writes five pages in single spacing every day. He has made exercise part of his daily regime. 'This is when I clear my head and create space for my story.' After training he sits down to meet his writing commitment.

'Working in such a disciplined way makes things easier.'

'If you complete the same number of pages each day, you will be writing fit in no time. I reward myself when I've reached my quota for the day. In the afternoon I would read other writers' work, for research of course,' he laughs.



## PHOTOGRAPHER

### communicating via pictures

**Cape photographer Justin Patrick** recently participated in a Facebook challenge to post a black and white landscape photo every day for five days. 'I enjoyed trawling through hard drives and reliving the trips and holidays I had while taking pictures. This project reminded me how the most powerful pictures come when I feel strongly about things,' he says, referring to his first post – a series of photos shot on Robben Island.



'I remembered how, once I started printing them, I experienced that same uneasiness I felt on the island, and loved that I could bring that across through the images. I have realised that I do miss the darkroom. Working with digital is very instant. Sometimes it's good to be kept waiting a bit... it allows the mind to become part of the process.'

## MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL saying 'thank you'

Gratitude posts have taken Facebook by storm. For the people doing the posts, it initially changes the way they feel about a specific event in their own lives and then progresses to change the way they see their circumstances, until a general optimism takes hold and changes their outlook on life and the world. **Sonja Cronjé, senior executive**

**officer of a faculty in a specialist medical college** in Sydney, Australia, posts daily gratitude messages with a photograph. 'Of course we all have difficult and stressful days when it is not easy to think of something to be grateful for. But that is when I find the project most helpful. It forces me to focus on something positive even in tough times.'

'Thinking about what I had to be thankful for has made me appreciate my life more, which made me feel happier. I enjoy photography, so focusing on gratitude via images is also a creative outlet. Another bonus is that I now look for opportunities to be grateful throughout the day. It is certainly helping me to live a more enjoyable life.'

## CREATIVE LEAD having fun with knitters

A fun way to work with other knitters and share stories, online knitalongs, like those hosted by Universal Yarn ([universalyarn.com](http://universalyarn.com)), usually come with daily or weekly goals and a deadline. For **Amy Gunderson, creative lead of the yarn supplier** based in Harrisburg, North Carolina, it's also not about slowing down. Although she realises that it's part of the appeal for many knitters, she says: 'This is my job, and while it's still fun there is a lot of pressure to produce.'

'I love knitting and crochet projects just as much as the folks we sell yarn to. Sitting here in my office all day can be a little disconnecting. The best part of our knitalongs is the chance to engage with our customers.'

In a recent Afghan blanket knitalong she put out a new 203mm square every other week and was knitting them just in advance of the participants so she could share techniques and tips. 'As a knitwear designer, I found that the blocks' various categories reminded me of all the things knitting stitches can be. I was very inspired and made a lot of mental notes on techniques for future garments, such as twisted stitches and counterpane squares.'

In March Amy visited H+H Cologne ([hh-cologne.com](http://hh-cologne.com)), the only international trade fair for handcrafts and hobbies. 'It was dominated by yarn and fabric. I am sure these projects are a global trend and here to stay.'

## DIVORCEE coping with emotions

**Copywriter and language practitioner Johan Emerson Grobler** found that his daily letter-writing regime helped him to cope with emotional stress after his divorce. 'I would have episodes of being overcome with anger, which sometimes interfered with my work or kept me awake at night. A friend recommended that I write a letter to my ex, print it, delete it from my computer and then burn the pages.'

Johan adhered to a daily writing routine for about two months and eventually some of the anger dissolved into positive thoughts. He knew it was time to stop when he realised he was just writing down a few keywords once or twice a week. 'Having those thoughts was losing its sting. It no longer gets in the way of my work or my interactions. So, strangely enough, it ends here, on these pages.'

'I would recommend this ritual without reservation. Writing is a very focused process. The more structured the way one goes about this, the better.'

## EDITOR-WRITER making lives happier

When **writer and editor Sarah Grey** of Philadelphia in the US began feeling isolated, overworked and stressed, she and her husband, Joe, started Friday night meatballs get-togethers ([fridaynightmeatballs.com](http://fridaynightmeatballs.com)) with family and friends. The reason? 'To make our lives happier,' she writes on her blog. When Sarah announced this idea on Facebook in November 2013, she was inundated with likes. Her project has grown into a blog and a weekly ritual she describes as 'a comforting, relaxing, energising cross between a Shabbat dinner, a salon and a play date'. 'It wasn't long before we realised the solution to our problems was working. Little Lucia (my daughter) began looking forward to Friday night meatballs as a weekly play date. Joe and I saw more of our friends and strengthened our social networks as word began to spread. And my isolation? Well, this was the winter . . . Philadelphia had record-breaking snow, there were entire weeks when I barely left the house. For this hardcore extrovert, Friday night meatballs became a lifeline.'

Joe and Sarah have been having their get-togethers regularly every Friday since they started, give or take a few.

'They have been extraordinary months. It turns out people around the world are hungry for a sense of community!'

