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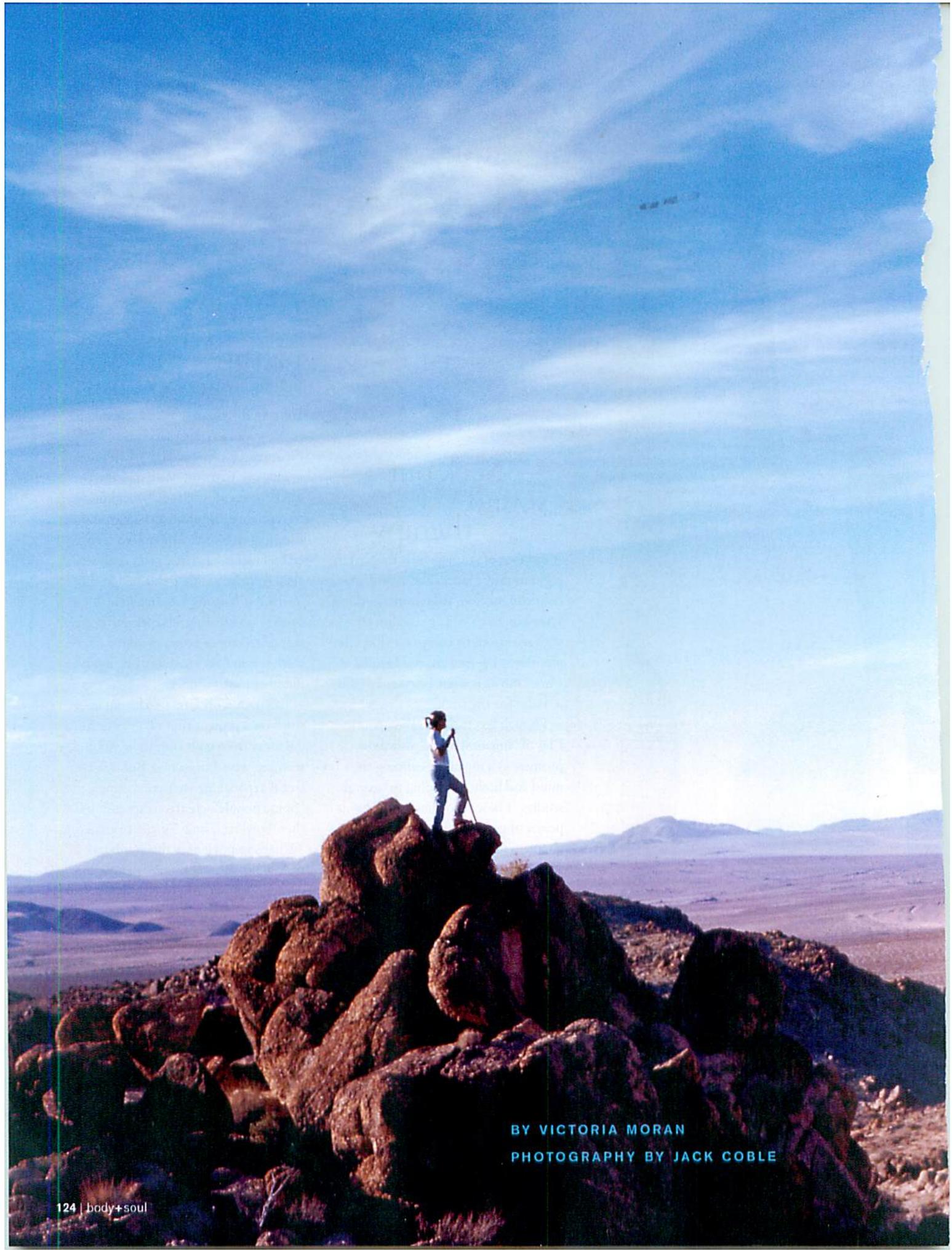
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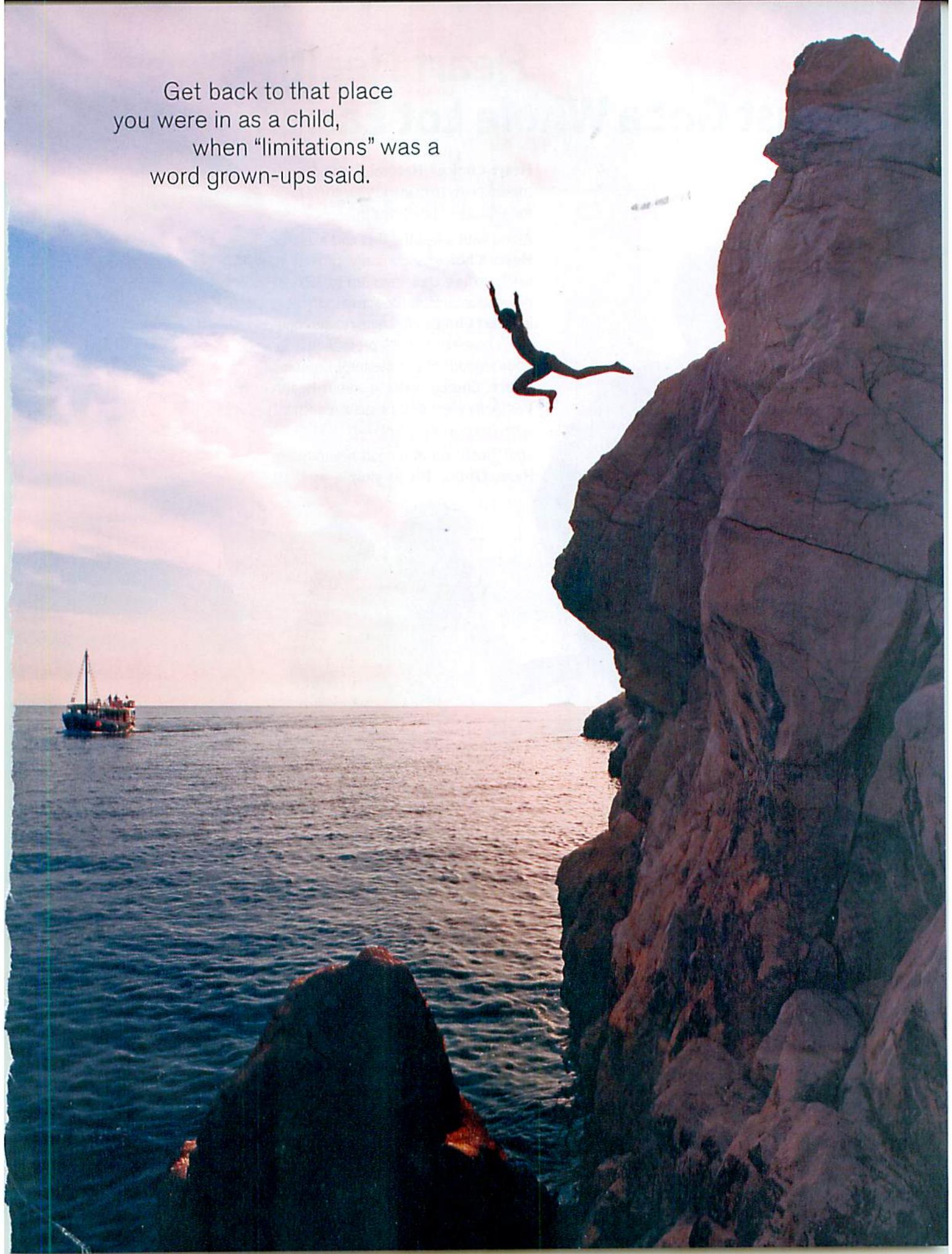
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BY VICTORIA MORAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACK COBLE

Get back to that place
you were in as a child,
when "limitations" was a
word grown-ups said.





Could achieving all your goals be
as simple as jotting them down?

Can the act of writing really
help you discover what you want in
the first place? Find out from people
who've made their own life lists



Think Like a Seven-Year-Old



YOU FIND THEM on the hard drives and bulletin boards of tweens and their grandparents, street musicians and hedge fund managers. You see them online, on scraps of paper, and, in at least one case, on the cardboard liner of a pantyhose package. They're life lists, a free-form jotting down of everything you want to do before you've ditched this earthly realm. Fueled, perhaps, by the uncertainties of global events (not to mention the movie *The Bucket List*), making the most of the life you've got—and not wasting time about it—is the order of the day.

The concept is simple: Write down your major life goals and, in the process, motivate yourself to actually achieve them. If, like me, you find the word "goals" too reminiscent of what you do from 9-to-5, then think "dreams," "intentions," "desires." Remember, it's a wish list, not a decades-long to-do list.

Are life lists gimmicky? Sure. But they're a gimmick with a strange tendency to produce results. "I'm not a fatalist. I don't believe things happen for a reason," says Jackie Keller, a wellness and lifestyle coach in California. "But I do believe that by putting elements of what you want in life at the forefront, those things will come to you."

What follows are the five immutable laws of life lists. Put them to work with your own list and see what happens. Who knows? You might even uncover aspirations you never even knew you had.

I'd never heard of life lists until my seven-year-old daughter made one. One day Rachael produced a piece of poster board with the title: "Things I Want to Do." The entries were ambitious: Go to Paris. Go to China. Learn to scuba dive. Be in a movie.

I didn't want to dash her dreams, but it seemed like a good dashing was in order. I was a single parent without much money. We lived in a rented cabin in the Missouri Ozarks. "That's nice," I told her.

By age 12 she'd checked everything off her list. I snagged a writing assignment in Hawaii, and she tagged along and took diving lessons. We were invited on a group trip to China, then used the frequent flier mileage for a trip to Paris. She scored a role as a zombie in a low-budget horror flick being filmed near where we lived (her list didn't stipulate that the movie had to be good).

The point is, Rachael made her list when she was too young to fret about limits. It's a lesson we can all take: Get back to that place you were in as a child, when "limitations" was a word grown-ups said. When you think like a child, you expose your limits as mirages.

TRY THIS

What did you want to be when you were young? A painter? A zoologist? Make a list of your early ambitions. What can you do now to bring those dreams back to life?

When the List Feels Done, Keep Going

As you write your list, you might hit a wall after a few entries. Push through it. "The first 10 or 20 items will be easy to come up with," says Caroline Adams Miller, who created the Web site your100things.com. "You might write 'learn Italian, visit the White House, get the kids through college.' But after 20, you start to see what you've buried." In this way, life lists do more than catalog things you want to do. They also uncover hidden dreams.

When Rochelle Melander of Milwaukee wrote her first list a dozen years ago, down near the bottom was this entry: "Write about my time as a clergyperson." Her first child was an infant at the time, so memoir writing wasn't a high priority. But she updated her list every year or so, and somehow that clergyperson memoir stuck around. "Then one day I was folding laundry, and the question hit me: 'If you died within a year, what would you regret not having done?' I knew it was that memoir." Within three months she'd finished a first draft.

TRY THIS

Give yourself half an hour to write down 100 goals. Turn off your filter and keep the pen going. When you're done, look the list over. Did you uncover any long-concealed aspirations? Any surprises?

Climb Out of Your Sinkhole

Fifteen years ago Nadja Piatka was just divorced, out of work, and heavily in debt. She didn't think she could sink any lower, at least until she mentioned her job-search troubles to her ex-husband. "Lower your standards," he said.

"That was it for me," Piatka says. "I may be the only person who wrote her life list on the cardboard insert from a package of pantyhose, but that's what I had nearby. I thought, 'I'm going to write what I want to do, despite everybody who's ever told me I wasn't good enough.'" On her list? Own a national company. Become a best-selling author. Be on TV. Bring value to people's lives.

She started with a newspaper column on healthy remakes of fattening recipes. This led to a best-selling book and the launching of Nadja Foods, now a \$2-million-a-year company. She's promoted her work on *Oprah*, and she sponsors a program that offers wellness retreats at a reasonable cost. "When I wrote that last goal, I didn't even understand it," she says. "I think I wrote it because I didn't value myself at the time. I knew if I ever had the chance, I'd want to help other women out of that, too."

TRY THIS

When you feel down, don't wallow. Get out a pen instead. Think about something you're *not* doing now that could make you happy, and jot it down. Then commit to bringing that idea closer to reality.

Cast a Wide Net

As your list takes shape, the last thing you want to do is show it to someone who dunks your dreams in cold water. So share it only with those you trust—or, share it with everyone, anonymously, at one of the Web sites devoted to life lists. They're a great way to connect with like-minded people, and you can post your dreams without anybody knowing that "AJ from Hackensack" is really you. "Just having your list out there offers that extra bit of 'oomph' to get you going," says Miller.

Gigi Burgdorf of London can testify to that. One of her entries on 2dobeforeIdie.com was to overcome her "fear of nudity." After blogging about it, she decided she would pose, *au naturel*, for a figure drawing class. "If I hadn't been writing about it on the site, I would have lost my nerve," she says. "I did feel some panic before I did it, and during the modeling—which took three hours—I think I was in shock." One of the artists gave her a sketch, which she posted on the site. "I debated about doing that. I mean, it's a naked picture of me. But I figured I could be proud of that drawing."

TRY THIS

Post your list at 43things.com, your100things.com, or 2dobeforeIdie.com. Make it known if you're looking for support and motivation. Then find someone else with a worthy goal and cheer them on.

Break It Into Pieces

A life list isn't a sworn oath, so make changes whenever you like and divvy it up in any way you please. Write a five-year or one-year life list—or take one bigger goal and split it into steps. "This is an opportunity to get excited, to recognize that larger goals can be broken down into smaller parts," says Michael Ogden, coauthor of the book *2Do Before I Die*.

Denise Foley of Philadelphia found that her list was "all over the place"—go to the Galapagos, lose weight, get into photography. "But after taking a closer look, I saw they all had a connection." What she really wanted, she realized, was to be the kind of person who *could* do all those things, if she were fit enough. So she broke her list into primary goals (get in shape) and secondary goals (go diving). "I saw that a few really important things would make all the other things possible." Since then Foley has lost 25 pounds and learned to swim. "Doing the list gives you a new understanding of yourself—and of what you really want," she says.

TRY THIS

Pick one big-picture goal and take a small step to bring it closer. If your list says "Live in Paris," subscribe to a Parisian newspaper, join Alliance Française, or research international job sites. These forays into the neighborhood of your dream will give you the know-how to make the larger idea a reality.

WHAT'S ON THEIR LIFE LIST?

ANDREW WEIL, M.D., integrative physician and best-selling author

- See the Northern Lights display in the Yukon
- Get invited to Harvard Medical School to give a lecture on the success of integrative medicine
- Own an electric car
- See the green flash (a rare light phenomenon at sunrise or sunset)
- See the day when healthy food is served in hospitals

CHARLA KRUPP, TV style guru and author of the best-seller *How Not to Look Old*

- Clean out my closet so that it contains only what I actually wear
- Speak French fluently enough to have an apartment in Paris
- Start a hugely successful business
- Drive across the country
- Launch an organization to empower women
- Learn to cook the perfect Provençal dinner



TRISH MCEVOY, makeup artist and owner of Trish McEvoy Cosmetics

- Enjoy the simple pleasures in life
- Do more for the Girl Scouts (I so believe in what they stand for)
- Make room for more time in my weekly schedule for family and friends
- Read a book a week
- Take up gymnastics again



SUSAN PIVER, author of *How Not to Be Afraid of Your Own Life*

- Become an excellent rhythm guitarist
- Pay off my parents' mortgage
- Meet Bob Dylan
- Visit Taktsang Monastery in Bhutan
- Go on a three-month meditation retreat
- Become enlightened
- Stop eating sugar
- Write a memoir and a children's book



CHRISTIANE NORTHRUP, M.D., author of *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom*

- Get really good at ballroom dancing
- Travel through the Greek Isles by boat
- Learn Spanish
- Go to Ireland
- Visit the sacred sites of England

