

JANUARY:

What have I gotten myself into?

Time spent this month: 98 hours, 46 minutes

Dollars spent this month: \$707.01

Advice from Oprah that I've passed on to other women: to Buy

Dr. Christiane Northrup's Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom.

I truly felt more empowered to become my own health advocate while reading this book.

Words that stuck: "You're doing what?"—Mark Okrant, my dad, when I first told him about *Living Oprah*

JANUARY 1, 2008

I can feel adrenaline pumping through my body. I'm moving and talking a mile a minute. I've got the same buzz that I usually feel on opening night of a new play, although it's noon and I'm not going onstage. Wasabi, our cat, dashes by me, terrified by the loud noise as Jim turns on our ancient vacuum cleaner.

My husband and I are putting the last-minute touches on our annual New Year's Day foodfest and movie marathon. It's been many years since I've enjoyed a late night party, but I still love to celebrate the dawning of a brand-spanking-new year with close friends. So, while I'm generally fast asleep around 11 PM on the 31st, I wake up bright and early on January 1 to clean the house, prepare mountains of food, and decorate. I realize most people are probably sleeping in and enjoying their day off, but when my alarm rings at 8 AM, I turn into a worker

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bee. The clock is now creeping closer to 1 PM—party time—and we're almost ready for folks to come over to lounge around our home in their comfiest clothes, drape themselves on the couches that we've finally paid off, enjoy some movies, and chat the day away until long after sunset. Oprah might have called us all "schlumpadinkas" had she witnessed our casual clothing. But how can you enjoy hours of eating without elastic waistbands? As usual, I've put out enough food to sink a ship.

I'm especially excited about this year's event as I'm unveiling my Living Oprah project, which launches today, to those closest to me. I can't wait to hear my friends' feedback, and I've visualized their reactions throughout my morning preparation. In my imagination, their responses run the gamut from impressed to *very* impressed, and I am feeling confident as I bring a dish of blueberry bars into the dining room to place on the buffet table.

The only problem is, I can't seem to get the dish to fit without making the array look squashed. As I juggle everything to make space for the platter, I start to regret that I don't own an actual dining room table. The old hand-me-down drop leaf that was in Jim's bachelor pad before we were married might not have been pretty, but it did its job—until today, that is. I take a step back to assess the awkward-looking presentation. I imagine celebrity party planner and regular *Oprah* contributor Colin Cowie shaking his head in disgust. Tension builds between my shoulder blades. I want this day to be perfect, but the table is sagging under the weight of the food and the whole affair looks a little unsteady. I try to chill out. It might not look like a spread in *O, The Oprah Magazine*, but hopefully (fingers crossed) everything will taste great. Generally confident about the food I present when I entertain, I gasp when I spot the layer of green slime inside the blueberry bars.

I was certain the pureed spinach I folded into the fruit preserve mixture would be invisible to the naked eye after the bars were baked, but there it is, plain as day. That's right, I said spinach. In a dessert. It's not what I'd usually put out as a treat, but when I planned this year's menu, I created it based on recipes and ideas I found on Oprah.com. As I clicked through the website, perusing delicious-looking dishes, I

happened upon this one for Blueberry Oatmeal Bars (with Spinach) from Jessica Seinfeld. The wife of the famous “have you ever noticed/don’t-you-hate-it-when/what is the deal with” comedian appeared on *Oprah* in 2007 to promote her cookbook and discuss tips for hiding vegetables and other healthy items in comfort food. Oprah gushed over Seinfeld’s creations, and although I was wary I followed the instructions to the letter and hoped for the best.

Jim offers a really helpful question. “What if you can’t just see the spinach, you can actually taste it?”

Gross.

“Will you eat one?” I hold a bar up to his face.

He looks like cornered prey and shakes his head. “I better make sure we have enough ice,” he says and skitters off to the kitchen.

Coward.

I shove a blueberry bar in my mouth and chew quickly, alert to any hint of off-putting flavor. Actually, it tastes pretty good, it only looks unsavory. I close the blinds a bit, hoping it’ll be too dark in the dining room to see the spinach. I guess if my friends hate the bars, I can just pass the buck. It’s not my recipe, after all.

Wasabi, frightened by the sound of our doorbell, bolts under the love seat as our first guest arrives.

Some time later, plied with Oprah-approved food and drink, my friends seem cheerful and ready to hear my plan for the coming year. I tell them it all started just a few weeks earlier (cue the flashback music) when I was sitting in a cramped video-editing suite with my friend Anthea, who was also my partner on a final project for our graduate school film class. We were trying to make heads or tails of our video, which combined two aspects of our mutual interest in women in pop culture: specifically, my fascination with self-help gurus and their followers, and Anthea’s focus on various female stereotypes. We had been discussing Oprah Winfrey for the better part of an hour. Let’s face it, we’d have to be living on the far side of the galaxy not to draw a connection between the Queen of Talk and the subject matter of our project. She is at the pinnacle of the self-improvement, popular culture mountain.

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We were gabbing about Oprah's abundant advice on how to improve our health, relationships, homes, finances, spiritual lives, fashion sense, and the list goes on and on. Winfrey inspires masses of women all over the world. And yet, it dawned on me, for every Oprah fan I've come in contact with, there has also been someone who can't hide her vitriol about the media sensation. I wondered why.

And more important, why do so many women put an immense amount of pressure on themselves to live up to the Oprah ideal? I was buzzing with excitement (and my fourth extra-large Earl Grey tea) to find out. Could Oprah's guidance truly lead a woman to her "best life," or would it fail miserably? Is it even possible to follow someone else's advice to discover one's authentic self? I told Anthea I thought it would be a great social experiment if someone actually tried to adhere to every suggestion that Oprah offered.

Like many of my ideas that seem brilliant (to me) at first conception, yet impossible and bordering on insanity the longer I think about them, I decided this spark would probably fade into oblivion. But, for the life of me, I couldn't get it out of my head. On one hand, it seemed like an entertaining and somewhat ridiculous challenge, but on the other hand, it felt . . . important.

In our journey toward a more satisfying existence, we are faced with solutions from many disparate sources, and yet Oprah Winfrey stands out from the rest. Her well-known catchphrase and tagline is "Live your best life." In order to lead us toward this goal, Winfrey's advice is completely holistic. Her television program, magazine, radio show, and website offer a wellspring of guidance for the modern woman. When it comes to suggestions for better living, Oprah leaves no stones unturned.

Later in the year, when I was steeped in this project, folks curious about my experiment would ask, "Why Oprah? Why not Martha Stewart or Ellen Degeneres?" Choosing Oprah was a no-brainer for me. No one else reaches as deeply and thoroughly into every corner of a woman's existence. She does not teach us to decoupage, like Martha, or encourage us to lighten up and dance, like Ellen, but she does teach us how to live.

I've definitely taken her advice intermittently over the years. I poured myself into body-shaping, fat-smashing Spanx after she extolled their virtues on her show. Buh-bye, muffin-top! However, I was not an everyday Oprah viewer. I did not read her magazine or peruse her website. Until I began this project, I would have considered myself only a casual audience member.

Even so, I do have a long history with *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. When her talk show became syndicated in 1986, I would watch it with my mother. I was comfortable with Oprah's format immediately. After all, I watched her predecessor, Phil Donahue, throughout my childhood, and my mother even recalls viewing his show when she was pregnant with me. Some babies in the womb enjoy the concertos of Mozart and are read the poetry of Robert Frost. I was introduced as a fetus to topics along the lines of extramarital affairs, 1970s sexual taboos, and stunning celebrity gossip. I was trained before my birth to enjoy a good talk show.

Oprah was an immediate hit in our household, in part because of her gender. While Donahue might have been an outspoken supporter of feminism, and his show geared toward women, there was no getting around the fact that the dude was a man. He might sympathize with us, but he could never stand in our shoes. Well, technically he could, but my pink and gray Kangaroos with Velcro closures and side pockets would have looked ridiculous with his rumpled suit and tie.

On the other hand, Oprah, a plainspoken, strong-willed woman, ruled her own roost. And we suspected she really understood us because she was one of us. In those early years, as she covered the usual sensational talk show topics, she showed amazement when we did. She laughed when we laughed. She seemed uncomfortable when we were. And I held a warm spot in my heart for her because she seemed slightly awkward, not incredibly stylish, and not the stereotypical "beautiful" woman we were accustomed to seeing on TV. I certainly wasn't a beauty at that time in my life (don't argue with me, Dad, I have photographic proof), and I never saw anyone who looked like me on screen. Well, Oprah didn't exactly look like anyone on television at that time, either. She gave me hope. I figured if she could do it, who knows? Maybe I

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could do anything I set my mind to, as well. I felt a definite kinship to the rising queen of television.

That was many moons ago, and after decades in the business of talk, she's come a long way, baby. She's risen from a talk show host to become a media mogul, a corporate trailblazer, and a spiritual guru. Her fame and fortune shot through the roof, making her one of the most influential and well-known celebrities on the planet. Now I have to wonder, do Oprah and I still have anything in common, or have we drifted apart? While her bank account has bulged and her privilege has expanded into the realm of American royalty, can she still represent the average American woman? While her advice is certainly plentiful, is it still relevant?

I wanted to find out.

Several days after I devised my experiment, my husband and I stood in our pajamas, eating oatmeal in the kitchen. Wasabi was running in circles on the linoleum floor, a brown paper lunch bag over his head. I eyed my husband, trying to guess his mood. I knew that if I were to take on such an involved project, I'd need his complicity.

"How would you feel if—" And here is where I witnessed Jim shiver reflexively, as he usually does when I begin conversations by soliciting his feelings.

I took a deep breath.

"How would you feel if I spent some time doing everything Oprah says?"

He looked confused and gulped down his espresso. "Is this for school?"

"No, it's for me."

Jim slumped in minor disappointment as the cat extricated himself and started strutting around the kitchen, acting as if he'd actually meant to trap his head in a brown paper bag for the past five minutes.

Jim asked, "Would I need to do anything?"

I shrugged. "I doubt it."

And truly, at the time, I didn't think this experiment would impact him very much. I assured Jim that I could compartmentalize my activities by setting a couple hours aside each day to watch and read Oprah,

do some Oprah-advised activities, look at her website, and move on with my day as usual.

That night, I was so excited I couldn't sleep. As Jim snored at my side, I lay with my eyes wide open, wondering in what time frame I should complete this experiment. While I'm no natural athlete, I'm no stranger to endurance events. I've trained hard over the years and have (barely) finished a multiple-day 500-mile bike ride, (stiffly) flowed through 108 yoga sun salutations at one time, and spent weeks (huffing and puffing) trekking, climbing, and crawling my way through the Nepal Himalayas. I am drawn to test my physical limitations and have found that long-term events help me discover what I'm really made of. So why not apply the same principle to a more intellectual pursuit?

A month of living according to Oprah's recommendations seemed too easy, and a few months seemed arbitrary. But a full year felt right: a cycle of seasons in which to explore Oprah's influence and my ability to follow directions without question. Could I possibly last an entire year—a leap year, no less—as Oprah's crash-test dummy, placing myself at the mercy of her advice without resistance?

I was certainly game to find out.

First and foremost, I decided on a title for my project: Living Oprah. I wish I had an amazing story about how I came up with that, but there isn't one. It just popped into my brain. It was simple, succinct, and struck the right chord for me.

But how would I keep myself accountable and inform my friends, family and, colleagues about Living Oprah? Although I was gun-shy about blogging, it seemed to be the perfect medium. It's easily updatable, accessible to readers, and it's gloriously free. On December 14, 2007, I set up my blog: www.LivingOprah.com. I was nervous. I felt out of touch because I had no clue what any of the blogosphere lingo meant or what might be construed as dreadful blog etiquette. I already had to google common Internet abbreviations such as DH, IDK, and JMO. To all of these and more, I had to wonder, WTF? But I would learn. And besides, I was certain my audience would be comprised of my mom and... well, that's it... just Mom.

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I was also anxious about making all my private thoughts public and I definitely didn't want to embarrass the daylights out of my husband. I decided the perfect solution would be to remain completely anonymous, going simply by the moniker LO, short for Living Oprah. Sure, my friends and family would know that I was committed to the project, but beyond that circle, people didn't need to know my name.

In the planning stages of Living Oprah, if you can call the last 17 days of December 2007 "planning stages," I thought I'd apply for grants and sponsorship to support my project financially. My husband and I weren't exactly rolling in dough, and we had to be careful and wise with our budget. He's an artisan who works for a tile manufacturer and I am a yoga teacher, and during the first half of 2008, I'd also be working on my graduate thesis at a very pricey art school.

So patronage seemed like the right way to go. Did I mention how expensive art school is? It costs a fortune to hone one's craft and earn a degree in a vocation almost guaranteed to provide a life of barely making ends meet, frequently doubting one's career choice, and taking a day job simply because it offers health insurance. I know many of you folks in the arts can relate. And if you aren't in the field, please tip your barista well.

Sponsorship and advertising for a Web-based project inevitably require banner ads and wacky animated links. I know they are a necessary evil on some sites, as click-thru advertising generates revenue, and while I could have used the money, I really didn't want the distraction. Also, I thought advertisers would have an impact on my project. What if a sponsor wanted to have some say in the content of my site? I couldn't allow that. Most important, since I would be attempting to determine how Oprah's advertisers impact her message to us, it seemed mighty hypocritical for me to use them.

I came to the conclusion that it would be too easy to have financial help. One of the reasons I decided to spend a whole year Living Oprah was to see if it's remotely feasible to live entirely as a celebrity guru says the average Jane should. To draw the most honest conclusion about whether the benefits outweighed the costs, I had to use my own means. I was interested (and a little scared) to see what psychological impact

this would have on me, and felt I would be deviating from my project's intent if I avoided its financial demands.

With the decision made to fund this project on my own, I clarified exactly how I'd follow Oprah's advice for the year. I decided to turn to the Big Three: *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *O*, *The Oprah Magazine*, and Oprah.com. If Oprah gave a directive of any kind through one of these outlets, I'd follow it. If one of Oprah's guests gave a piece of advice on her show, I'd act upon it only if Oprah personally backed it up. Additionally, if Oprah wrote a suggestion to us in her "Here We Go!" letter or her "What I Know for Sure" column in *O* magazine, I would take heed. In fact, if she made a suggestion anywhere in the public eye or ear, I latched on. I committed to taking all of her suggestions quite literally and would leave as little to interpretation as possible.

I would use Oprah.com in a slightly different manner. As it contains all Oprah-approved material, I'd refer to it as my encyclopedia for living. If I planned an event, desired advice on fashion, required remedies for stress, or even if I needed a way to ease strife in my marriage, I'd search Oprah's website for solutions and guidance.

Armed with my rules, my blog, and my remote control, I was ready to roll. The year 2007 was coming to a close. I bade a fond farewell to free will and embraced Living Oprah with open arms.

Back to my New Year's Day party (fade out the flashback music, bring the lights up to full)...

I've detailed the whole Living Oprah project to my guests and am witnessing a moment that harkens back to the old opening of the Richard Dawson version of *Family Feud*. My friends are frozen in a vignette: mouths full of Mushroom, Goat Cheese, and Caramelized-Shallot Pizza, looking alternatively distraught, anxious, and uncomfortable. Luckily for me, they could all win awards for their sense of humor, and the room soon erupts into laughter. But the hilarity too soon devolves into cautious giggles. They're worried about me. Will I have enough money to make all the purchases Oprah asks of her viewers? Will my marriage last? Jim busies himself with refilling people's drinks so he doesn't have to answer any questions that start with, "Jim, how do *you* feel about..."

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My friends voice concern over whether there are enough hours in the day to live under Oprah's rule.

"That's one of the reasons I am doing this project," I tell them. "If it runs me ragged, then so be it."

There are many women in my life who look up to Oprah and feel inadequate in comparison to her. But why should we compare our lifestyles to that of one of the wealthiest and most powerful people in the public eye? I remember an episode of *Oprah* about germs and cleanliness. The TV hostess mentioned she prefers her bedsheets changed every other day. At that point in my life, I was digging around in the cushions of my sofa for enough quarters to do my laundry. I vividly remember wondering, while watching that show back in 2004, if Oprah could empathize with my priorities.

It's clear to me that she very much wants to share with her audience what she's learned over the years. She offers herself as a guide, a teacher, a role model. But is Oprah's ideal possible for women who don't have domestic help, who have families to manage, and who can barely make ends meet? Her show is filled with "musts" and "gottas" and "can't live withouts." These are incredibly strong words coming from such an influential media figure. Let's face it, when Oprah says jump, millions of people—mainly women—ask, "How high?"

My friend Joe looks concerned for me and offers his help. I've worked with him for years creating ensemble-based theater projects, and he knows how much I thrive on collaboration. I thank him but tell him I want to handle this one alone. "So many women around the world allow Oprah to dictate what we should read, watch, listen to, how we should cook, exercise, organize, and how we should vote. I want to find out if Living Oprah is actually the road to happiness and fulfillment. Besides," I tell him, "it's something I need to try on my own or else it'll feel like cheating."

Oprah is admirable. I find her career path from rags to riches awe-inspiring and can understand why many want to be just like her or at least learn how to put her secrets to success to work in their own lives. In the earlier years of her syndicated television program, women were able to relate to her struggles, her excitement at meeting celebrities, and

her amazement at coming into contact with those living on society's fringe. We imagine that she can relate to us and we to her. However, with her overwhelmingly privileged lifestyle, can she still be the voice of the everywoman? Surely she can sympathize, but can she still speak for us? Well, she does. And we listen. We fall in love with her decorator, her doctor, her chef. Oprah defines how high we set the bar for ourselves, and based on her suggestions, we challenge ourselves to meet tough expectations.

It's vitally important for women to question the sources of influence and persuasion in our lives. We are inundated with get rich/get thin/get married suggestions every time we turn on the TV or walk by the magazine rack. And sadly, we tend to judge ourselves against seemingly impossible standards. I want to get to the bottom of why this cycle exists and find out how I'm complicit in it. I spend a lot of time worrying and bellyaching about it, but that's just a waste of time and energy. I want to better understand myself, other women, the self-help entertainment industry, and Oprah Winfrey.

My friends munch thoughtfully on their blueberry bars and I cringe to see Joe begin to inspect the layers of his.

One friend pipes up, "If this project kills you, can I have your kitchen?" (Note to self: Adjust guest list for next year's party.)

We all laugh, turn the subject away from Oprah, and begin to debate which film should kick off this year's movie marathon. It dawns on me that I should have Netflixed *The Color Purple*.

Joe places his half-eaten bar on the edge of his plate, turns to me, and repeats quietly, "Seriously, if you need any help on this, let me know."

I can't understand why everyone is so anxious.

Jim puts his hand on my knee reassuringly.

"This is gonna be a piece of cake," I whisper to him. But my friends have me wondering if it'll be less like angel food cake and more like Oprah's 400-pound 50th birthday cake.

It's about five minutes until the start of the first Oprah show of 2008. I know it's going to be a rerun, but still, I sit bolt upright on my couch

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with my laptop, notebook, pens, pencils, highlighters, remote controls, and a nutritious snack. I could be mistaken for the suck-up student on the first day of school who sprints into the classroom, breathless, in order to sit in the front row and impress the teacher. Actually, if memory serves, that *is* what I did in high school. I can't imagine why I wasn't very popular.

My husband, rushing to leave for work, hurries back and forth in front of the TV. He keeps blocking my view and it's driving me crazy, so I'm forced to pull out that oldie but goody: "You make a better door than a window." He rolls his eyes at me and I remind him I'm not sitting around *enjoying* morning talk shows while he heads out to bring home the bacon, I'm doing *research*.

"This is going to be a long year," he grumbles but smiles sweetly before kissing me on the head and flying out the door.

I sigh out all my tension. Alone at last. Just me, the television set, and Oprah Winfrey.

Like I said, today's episode will be a rerun, as will the next couple of weeks' shows. No matter. If the show is on, I'll be watching, taking notes, and following directions. Just because an episode has had a previous airing doesn't mean I'm off the hook. It's possible that I'm a glutton for punishment. As I watch the show, I want to be slammed with Oprah's assignments, as if being swamped will prove my commitment to the experiment. And yet the thought of being bombarded by a steady stream of Oprah's directives produces a stubborn streak in me.

As if she senses my rebellion, I receive my first bit of advice from Winfrey: "You have to get things tailored. This whole idea that you can buy things off the rack...and they're supposed to fit you perfectly... It's ridiculous."

I guess I'm ridiculous. I can count on two fingers the number of times I've had clothing tailored in the past. My wardrobe of choice is generally low-key and low maintenance. Whether I'm teaching, going to the supermarket, or meeting a friend for dinner, I can usually be found leaving my front door in black yoga pants and cotton tank top, Jim lint-brushing cat hair off my butt. I scribble "tailor clothes" on

my to-do list and grin broadly at the first assignment at the top of my otherwise blank legal pad.

It is quite easy to wish for more to do in the first days of January. School isn't yet in session and I have a lot of free time on my hands. This is unusual. I tend to fill up every moment of my day with activity and deadlines until, inevitably, I regret it. I always swear that if I can make it through my projects without keeling over, I'll never over-extend myself again. Even when I have downtime, I pack it tight with activity. If I were to draw a picture of what I look like on a day off, the image would depict me neatening up my living room, eating lunch, and watching old episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. I would be moving back and forth between two knitting projects, planning my next yoga class, hitting refresh on my laptop to see if new e-mail arrived, all the while returning phone calls to friends and paging through a fitness magazine. This is how I'd define a relaxing afternoon. Doing everything I enjoy in life. All at once.

Maybe Oprah has some insights to share on the topic of self-care, and I might actually find some peace this year. I'm 35 now, and for the past five years or so, my chronic Superwoman syndrome has teetered dangerously close to becoming a key ingredient in a recipe for emotional disaster. But—and this is a big but—multitasking to the point that I can barely see straight has served me well, and it's hard to let go of a quality that's helped me out in so many ways. For instance, anyone who works in non-Equity Chicago theater knows when you sign on to be part of a production, you're inevitably expected to help build the set, hang posters up around town, assist with marketing, and if you're not required to be onstage, you'll probably end up working the box office at some point. This all takes place in the hours you're not in rehearsal or working your 40-hour-a-week day job. I've been scraping by as a writer, director, and actor in this environment for the past 15 years and as a result have turned into a human version of a Swiss Army knife. I fear if I ever lose my usefulness, I'll be replaced by a newer, sharper model.

I do trust in my ability to get a job done, and in the safety of my living room I feel ready to take on the world. I've read my January copy

of *O* from cover to cover and already completed my first assignments from Oprah:

- “Quick, name five terrific things about yourself!” (I’m funny, I’m loyal, I’m a good daughter, wife, and friend, I can laugh at myself, I’m willing to take risks.)
- “Give yourself a time-out. Get into bed with a good book, the Sunday paper, or your favorite magazine . . . unplug the phone, and instruct, bribe, beg, command your family to grant you a few blissful minutes of rest . . .” (I spend an hour in bed reading the paper, wondering when I can get up and make good use of my time.)
- “. . . reinvigorate your appearance with some great advice on how not to look old . . .” (I learn that dressing too young for my age makes me look older and, as suggested, I pack up my graphic T-shirts and cargo pants and put them in the back of my closet for the year.)
- “. . . rethink your eating habits with some absolutely delicious and utterly original meals . . .” (The Smoky Halibut Paella with Brown Basmati Rice looks yummy but time-consuming.)
- “. . . just plain enjoy my interview with the dazzling Denzel Washington.” (Done. With pleasure.)

The glossy pages of *O* reflected a lifestyle quite different from my own. As I paged through the lovely clothing, the jewelry, the adorable bric-a-brac, I felt like I was visiting a natural history museum and viewing a diorama of how the other half lives. I am ashamed to say I found myself wishing I could own a lot of this stuff (especially the most gorgeous \$275 bathrobe I’ve ever seen and probably never will in reality). I had an honest to goodness emotional response to these images. Paging through the magazine’s editorial pages and advertisements, in my mind’s eye I chose the items I would buy if I could afford them. And because I am very generous in my imagination, I also thought about what I’d purchase for my mom (a gorgeous cashmere scarf), my sister, Elisabeth (cocktail rings for every finger), my girlfriends (super cute purses). As fun as it was to visit fantasyland in the moment, afterward,

the excursion made me feel lacking. It made me very aware of what I can't have—what I didn't really think I even wanted before I saw those images. And instead of brushing it off easily, I actually felt bad. The magazine made these items look so much fun to own. But what fun is it to be reminded that I am not one of the people who gets to wear the \$178 pair of miracle jeans that *O's* fashion team celebrates for making every woman appear slim and sleek?

I felt so removed from the world I saw in these glossy images that I expected to be held at arm's length by the articles, as well. I was quite relieved when I read them, however. I had a preconceived notion that they would be fluffy or perhaps aimed at a very different demographic than my own. But, for the most part, I was wrong. Reading the magazine this year might prove enjoyable and, hopefully, constructive. While the material items chosen to grace the pages of the magazine were reminders that I didn't—or couldn't—belong to this club of women, the writing was far more inclusive and encompassing. I got sucked into self-help articles by Martha Beck and Suzan Colón and tell-it-like-it-is financial advice by Suze Orman. Just as Oprah's audience is mainly female, so are most of the contributors to the magazine. I was impressed by Oprah's ability to attract intelligent women willing to share their knowledge in the pages of her magazine. But I wished their work didn't have to be enveloped by photos of lipsticks, articles on “yoga for your face” and psychotainer/entertiatrist Dr. Phil.

When I had a fever as a little kid, my folks would crush my aspirin into a teaspoon of sugar water to disguise the flavor of the bitter pill. This seemed to be a grown-up version of the old aspirin trick. *O, The Oprah Magazine* hides life lessons within pages of sweet treats.

Maybe I shouldn't have a license to read magazines that are filled with pretty things. They tend to give me a bit of an inferiority complex. I tell myself I buy magazines for inspiration and entertainment, but in the end, I almost invariably compare myself and my life to what is shown in the idealized imagery. For several years I was on a complete magazine fast. I wouldn't even pick one up to pass the time in a waiting room, partly because I was working on my own empowerment and partly because I'm a germophobe. You might see a three-year-old copy

of *Golfer's Digest* in my doctor's office, but I see enough bacteria to bring civilization as we know it to its knees.

But I digress

Fashion magazines were the worst for me. Logically, I know those images don't reflect real women. Before I became a yoga teacher I was a graphic designer and understand the magical power of Photo-shop. I know how to make a five foot four inch woman with curves look like a six foot two inch alien who could pass through a keyhole. Even with that comprehension, looking at those models and actresses still made me feel like my butt was a little squishier, my hair a little frizzier, and my teeth a bit more crooked than could ever pass for beautiful. Knowing I had this embarrassing tendency to allow an inanimate object make me feel crappy, I went cold turkey. And it felt good. I felt free from the desire to compare myself to some media-manufactured idea of beauty. But like a drug addict who never truly kicks the habit, one day I found myself in the magazine section of a convenience store, looking for a fix. Stupid *Vanity Fair* Young Hollywood issue!

I am very curious to see what my relationship with *O* will be over the next eleven-plus months. I am hoping I'll be able to see past the advertising and sweet treats in order to benefit from the wisdom of the contributors.

January 8, 2008

I discover a discrepancy between Oprah's priorities and my own. On a show that insists it is giving its audience bargain ideas to decorate ourselves and our homes, Oprah tells her guest, "I think in terms of investment . . . the best thing you can ever give yourself is to have beautiful surroundings."

I freeze. My husband and I are in the midst of robbing Peter to pay Paul to cover health-care expenses, and I am up to my eyeballs in student loan debt. I struggle to pay my bills and often create artwork at grad school based on the materials and time I can afford. Oprah seems to genuinely think she is helping us, but when she utters those words, all I hear is "Let them eat cake." In my world, the best investment I can

make is staying healthy, getting a better education, and traveling to see my family.

I've already received comments through my daily blog and e-mails from my handful of readers who are upset by the divide between Oprah's world and their own. I speculate that it isn't a matter of jealousy due to her wealth. Folks are mainly irked that she continues handing out advice while they believe she has no idea what it means to live in their reality.

On the other end of the spectrum, I also hear from women who believe Oprah can do no wrong. They share their opinion that because of her philanthropic work and generosity to her audience, she is above reproach. While I don't believe anyone is above criticism, I can't disagree: Oprah does make a positive impact in the world and inspires many others to do the same.

Everyone who writes in is passionate about her or his point of view, and I feel energized by all the enthusiasm. I add poll questions to the blog each week to gain more insight about their perspective. And while it's challenging, I consider it my job to remain as neutral as possible. Although, truth be told, fence-straddling is not an event for which I'd win Olympic gold. I'm floored that anyone is even reading my blog, to be honest. As of today, I have 738 visitors checking out my website. Where have they all come from? I'll never question the power of a forwarded e-mail again, as my friends and family must have dispersed the announcement of my project to everyone in their address books. I feel like I'm hosting a coffee klatch on my computer, and I get a thrill every time I see I've received a new comment or e-mail.

January 14, 2008

Reruns are mercifully over. New topics, new guests, new obstacles to overcome. I'm like a kid in a candy store—which is ironic because this morning's episode is about how Americans are getting fatter and fatter. Oprah and her fitness expert, Bob Greene, are traveling to Mississippi, the fattest state in the country, to kick off their 2008 Best Life Challenge. They are encouraging the denizens of the town of Meridian to tackle their personal demons and take care of themselves, and the

at-home viewers are asked to do the same. We are told to download and sign our Best Life contract today.

While my heart goes out to the obese guests, I am distracted because Oprah looks disengaged. Is it because of her own weight struggles? This can't be an easy topic for her. I wish I weren't so strongly inclined to mention "Oprah" and "weight" in the same sentence, because I usually wish everyone would just leave her alone and allow her body to be her own business. I think the trouble is that Oprah has always invited us into her weight loss celebrations and has spoken with such certainty that *this* time she has it beat. When she does this, she gives an already overly nosy celebrity-watching culture a free pass to speculate on her dress size.

I have always felt empathy for Oprah because of her public battle with weight. It's because I've been in the same pain, had the same frustration, allowed my weight to yo-yo in an extreme manner. I've been fat and I've been thin. I've used food to numb the stress in my life. I've had trouble with my thyroid and wondered if my metabolism was on permanent vacation. I've felt inferior when I was heavier and on top of the world when I slimmed down. I've known logically that I should be able to love my body at any size, but struggled to do so. I can imagine that my humiliation factor would have gone up exponentially had my entire weight history been witnessed and judged by millions, frequently used as a punch line by late-night talk show hosts.

While Oprah might live in a glamorous world, beyond my imagination, she is also a painfully public display of a dangerous epidemic to which many of us can relate. In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control statistics, 63 percent of Americans are overweight. We can see ourselves reflected in Oprah's struggles. Sadly, I think many judge her without understanding her life-threatening problem. And I have to wonder if her detractors get a smug satisfaction from seeing someone who lives a life of luxury be repeatedly defeated by a lifelong battle. Oprah's years of riding the weight roller coaster have been a lesson for me. I can't tell you how many times I've thought that if I just had enough money for a personal trainer, chef, dietician, and stylist I could have a great body and always look terrific. Well, Oprah has access

to all this and more, and she still struggles. This is proof that the grass is not always greener on the other side of the TV screen.

I'm in pretty decent shape these days, but I'm curious to see how this Best Life Challenge will impact my eating habits and exercise routine. I've downloaded my contract. It states:

Get on board and make the commitment. Sign the contract—hang it wherever you need that extra bit of motivation. You're on your way to living your Best Life!

I hereby commit to living my Best Life. I will participate in a program of regular exercise, including a minimum of 80 minutes of activity over the course of four days each week. I will focus on challenging my abilities in the pursuit of elevating my physical performance. I will endeavor to be conscious of when I eat, and consistently terminate the consumption of all food two or three hours before bedtime. I will also be aware of why I eat, and will, to the best of my ability, eat primarily to satisfy my nutritional needs as opposed to my emotional needs. I will do my best to make healthful food choices by substituting foods that are nutritionally empty with those that are rich in nutrition.

Furthermore, I realize that this contract carries no promise of rewards, penalties or punishments other than those associated with the reflection of the strength of my character and of my health.

I sign my name on the contract. This all sounds doable, and I'm not as intimidated as I expected to be, although I am disturbed that the "strength of my character" is tied to how well I manage to diet and exercise. That seems harsh. I never judged Oprah's character based on her body. Regardless, 80 minutes of activity a week isn't too vigorous and is much less exercise than conventional wisdom suggests (30 minutes a day five times a week). I already exercise more than 80 minutes most weeks but will definitely benefit from showing up at the Y more consistently. The only thing that sounds like a real challenge to me is that I'll have to stop eating two to three hours before I hit the hay.

There are some days I don't get home from teaching until 9:30 p.m. After my physically demanding job, I need to eat when I get in. Now I'll have to make certain I don't go to sleep before the allotted window closes. Staying up past my bedtime to fulfill this suggestion is not exactly making me dance a jig of happiness (unless dancing counts toward my contracted minutes of exercise, in which case, I'll jig).

Hold the phone! Oprah says she's not going to sign her contract for a couple days. She wants to drink champagne at an upcoming event, and as Greene informs us, once the contract is signed, we're not allowed to drink alcohol for at least a month or two. I look at my signed contract and groan to think of all the goodies I'll miss out on during my mom's big birthday bash tomorrow night. I'm not happy that Oprah isn't signing today with the rest of us. She admitted on the show that she needs to get back on track, and if we have to put our excuses aside (along with the sinfully delicious deep-fried pot stickers at my mom's favorite restaurant in Chicago), I wish Oprah would as well. I know it's ridiculous to connect my enjoyment of the Challenge to Winfrey's commitment, but I think it'd be more fun if she signed today. We all want the most popular girl in school on our team. I bet if she played her cards right, we'd even let her be captain.

January is coming to a close and I am very excited to learn what Oprah's Book Club selection will be. Her last choice, *Pillars of the Earth*, was a sweeping historical drama. As highfalutin as I'd like to think my literary choices are in general, I am a sucker for this genre. While I might have taken the cover off of *The Other Boleyn Girl* so nobody in my graduate-level writing classes knew I was reading the bodice ripper, I savored every word.

Pillars is a long book—my mass market paperback looked like a brick at 983 pages—but it's a quick and fun novel. I actually read my mother's copy when I was in high school, titillated by all the sex. It was just as much fun to reread when I was double the age but evidently no more mature, as I still eagerly awaited the next down-and-dirty-behind-the-pillar moment. By the time I started the Living Oprah project, Oprah's foray into Ken Follett's drama about horny medieval cathedral builders was coming to a close.

I am eager to hear what the next novel will be. My fingers are crossed for a contemporary author. I'd love to read something by a wry, clever, thought-provoking author such as (dare I dream it?) David Sedaris. Looking at the list of past selections, I see very few books that would provoke a big belly laugh. I think this might be the year. So the carpet is truly pulled out from under my feet, *yanked*, if you will, when Oprah heralds her newest Book Club selection, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*, by Eckhart Tolle.

Oprah says, "If you're interested in becoming all that you were created to be, if you want to begin to live your best life from the inside out, not looking at external ways for doing that, but how you really can begin to fulfill the potential of your life, this is the book for you."

Oy! This sounds like work, not pleasure—a sit cross-legged and ponder my inner demons kind of book, not a melt into a bubble bath and relax kind of book. As phenomenal as Winfrey makes this publication sound, I soon discover it isn't powerful enough on its own. Just like Butch Cassidy needed Sundance and chocolate cries out for peanut butter, Tolle's book also needs the perfect pairing. Oprah tells us, "You're gonna need one of these for reading *A New Earth*." She holds a bright yellow pen in the air, for all to see: the Post-It Flag Highlighter from 3M. Suspicious about how much a writing implement will enhance my spiritual growth, I add the product to my shopping list.

I'm always a bit wary when I hear that someone else believes that he or she holds the key that might unlock a previously sealed door to my enlightenment. Part of this is because of pride. I get prickly at the implication that (a) I don't know my life's purpose and (b) simply living my life isn't a valid enough journey without the wisdom of a questionably qualified outsider. Is it necessary to buy into someone else's plan to quicken my evolution as a human being? Somehow the writers of these books, the purveyors of these pearls of wisdom, were able to find a deeper sense of peace, joy, or enlightenment by seeking out and following their own path. I wish they would trust that we all have the ability to do the same. Right off the bat, Oprah's announcement makes me sullen and sulky.

Insult is added to injury. Not only will there be an absence of bodice-ripping in my near future, Oprah makes an announcement

that we are also to sign up for a ten-week webinar that includes online classes every Monday night to be taught by Tolle and Winfrey. The course begins in March, and yes, like most classes, this one will also require homework—ten weeks of workbook pages to complete. I revert to my 15-year-old, stubborn, homework-avoiding, excuse-generating self. I don't wanna do homework! I don't wanna soul search! I wanna hang out with my friends! If I had a staircase in my home, there would be some *major* stomping up to my room and door slamming. This is not a good start to kick off my spiritual journey. Maybe I need to read this book after all.

As assigned, I immediately get myself a copy and sign up for the class. For the first few days I own *A New Earth*, I find myself glowering at the bright orange book and busying myself with other projects. I can't help but feel that cracking open the front cover will be like popping the top off a can of worms. Exhausting worms.

Speaking of the front cover, I have a weird feeling about carrying one of Oprah's Book Club picks around in public. Pre-Living Oprah, I never bought a book with the *O* seal on the jacket. Why? I can't quite put my finger on it. I've never been embarrassed that I watch her show, so I'm not entirely certain why I have such a strong feeling about these books. I think part of the reason is because Oprah is so tightly tied to pop culture and I didn't want to advertise that I allowed trends to drive my literary decisions. Also, before this year of Living Oprah began, I didn't really want to give the impression that I belonged to a "club" led by a talk show host. In fact, I would resent it if I went to a bookseller, found a book I was interested in, and discovered it was also part of Oprah's Book Club. I would even search the shelves for a copy that didn't have the telltale seal on the front cover. Why would I want to advertise for Oprah when I wasn't part of her organization? I never understood why people who didn't attend Harvard or have a child who attended Harvard would wear a sweatshirt with HARVARD emblazoned on it, so why would I carry a book with OPRAH'S BOOK CLUB on the cover when I wasn't part of the club? I'd rather wear a sweatshirt that said HARVARD on it. At least I've seen *Legally Blonde*. Twice.

Also, I always felt as if Oprah took sort of ownership of a book

when her name was on the front cover and wonder what the Book Club would be without her branding on the jacket. I would bet money—hypothetical money of course, this is a recession—that it wouldn't be as powerful a merchandising tool. I believe that many people are drawn to a book not just because they heard Oprah mention it on her show but because it sits in a special section of their brick-and-mortar or dot-com bookstore. They buy it because they *do* want to be part of the club that I shy away from. They proudly display Oprah's stamp of approval on their book covers. I've seen women nod to one another and laugh on the Chicago El train when they realize they're both reading the same Oprah pick (this was years back and *She's Come Undone* was Oprah's favorite book).

But here's where I get really torn. Oprah is getting people reading, so why on earth should I complain? I spend countless hours commuting by Chicago's public transit system each week, and the majority of my fellow bus and train passengers are usually plugged into something electronic. They're not reading. But Oprah inspires people to appreciate the printed word. I love books. I am a writer. Therefore, shouldn't I love that Oprah loves books and authors? I feel I should be over the moon that there is a public figure suggesting that Americans should read. No other modern-day influential figure drives us toward specific literature like Oprah. The last time I had someone like her in my life, it was a crotchety literature professor in college who handed out a mile-long reading list to a room of groaning, hungover coeds.

Oprah's deciding a lot for us. She's creating our literature syllabus, and until this year I've never registered for her class. I wonder if I'll giggle with other commuters as we mouth to one another over our copies of *A New Earth*, "What page are you on?"

"Are you enlightened yet?"

"Keep reading, you'll love the part when you learn the meaning of life!"

Jim and I sit down to a dinner of Mustard Grilled Chicken and Roast Potatoes with Lemons. After searching for recipes on Oprah.com that would appeal to my husband, I spent a couple hours shopping,

prepping, and cooking. The apartment smells fantastic. I cook most nights of the week, but I'm more of an improviser in the kitchen and tend to shy away from recipes. Because of my mad-scientist-meets-the-Swedish-Chef-from-the-Muppets cooking style, the results are sometimes fantastic, and other times we end up ordering Thai. Following a recipe isn't my cup of tea, but as I cooked tonight, I was relaxed knowing the end product had been tested and approved and there would be little room for failure. I adored the look on Jim's face when he came home from work to a welcoming smell wafting from the kitchen.

We dig in, and after just a few bites, Jim asks if I'll make this meal again. I am both thrilled and annoyed. I guess I wish he'd said something along the lines of, "Well, it's good, but it can't hold a candle to your cooking."

With a mouthful of potato, he casually mentions that a coworker of his mom asked why I'm making fun of Oprah. My heart leaps into my throat. It didn't occur to me that I was giving that impression. First off, I don't think I could spend an entire year making fun of anybody without all that negativity burning me to a piece of coal. A tiny, hard, angry, Robyn-shaped piece of black rock. What an ugly way to spend my days that would be. Nope. Not making fun of Oprah. Also, between you and me—don't tell Oprah—I'm a little bit afraid of her. Living in Chicago, sometimes you can feel her influence pulsating in the city, through the airwaves. She's like the Wizard of Oz. Except she really *does* have power and isn't some flaccid "man behind the curtain." Because she's such an omniscient presence in pop culture, media, and entertainment—and because I am an itty-bitty bug holding on as tightly as I can to make a career in the arts—I'm slightly scared she could squash me with one of her painfully uncomfortable Christian Louboutin heels.

Besides, this project is just as much a critique of myself as it is of Oprah. I am part of a celebrity-watching culture that puts one woman up on a pedestal even as it nudges another off a cliff. I am a consumer. I am a television watcher. I am a Web-surfing-Internet-junkie-Facebook-friend. And I am always seeking a deeper understanding of myself. Oprah's media empire caters to people like me. As much as I'd like to think of myself as my subversive, ideological, fearless teenage self, I'm just not. I'm a 35-year-old woman who frets about the newly forming wrinkles on my

forehead all the way down to my carbon footprint. I have been shaped by pop culture, by the self-help industry, by fads, and by the media. Oprah is at the epicenter of influence, and her power is ever growing, ever flourishing with the times. As I witness Oprah dip into new media and deepen her stronghold over the world of infotainment, I wonder whether I am a creation of hers, or vice versa.

A note about the monthly accounting charts: I do not include behind-the-scenes project-related costs, such as the amount of money I spent on VHS tapes for the year, or the time I spent blogging everyday. These logistics were integral to Living Oprah, but they were obviously not advised by Winfrey. I felt it would be unfair to pad my monthly totals by adding them here.

Additionally, the charts show when advice and suggestions were received, although assignments may have been completed on a different date within 2008.

January 2008 Accounting

Date	Assignment	Cost	Time	Notes
1/1	Subscribe to <i>O, The Oprah Magazine</i> . (LO)	25.92	0h 5m	1-year subscription for \$21.97 plus \$3.95 for Jan. 2008 issue
1/1	Read <i>O</i> from cover to cover. (LO)		2h 30m	Mmmm... pretty things...
1/1	“Quick, name five terrific things about yourself!” (MAG)		0h 5m	I’m funny, I’m loyal, I’m a good daughter, wife, and friend, I can laugh at myself, I’m willing to take risks.
1/1	“Give yourself a time-out. Get into bed with a good book, the Sunday paper, or your favorite magazine... unplug the phone, and instruct, bribe, beg, command your family to grant you a few blissful minutes of rest...” (MAG)		1h 0m	I should do this more often, I’m sure, but it’s not in my nature to put time aside for myself.
1/1	“Reinvigorate your appearance with some great advice on how not to look old...” (MAG)		1h 0m	I went through the 25 things on the “gotta go” list and tore through my closet. I think this will be an ongoing, yearlong project... I’m going to log the initial hour, but know with my taste, it’ll be never ending! (O)
1/1	“Rethink your eating habits with some absolutely delicious and utterly original meals...” (MAG)		0h 0m	I rethought them. I think I eat very well but could spice things up and add more variety. (O)

1/1	“Just plain enjoy my interview with the dazzling Denzel Washington...” (MAG)		0h 12m	I just realized that sometimes she’s going to tell us to <i>feel</i> a certain way. This is weird. I’ll do my best.
1/1	Blueberry Oatmeal Bars. (SHOW/WEB)	18.31	0h 45m	<i>Deceptively Delicious</i> highlighted on <i>Oprah</i> . I visited her website and found this recipe.
1/1	Mushroom, Goat Cheese, and Caramelized-Shallot Pizza. (WEB)	38.39	0h 45m	This created several pizzas for about a dozen people. We kept making them fresh as people ate them. Big hit.
1/2	“One of the big secrets for women to understand is you have to get things tailored.” (SHOW)	10.00	3h 15m	2 pairs of pants altered. I altered 2 dresses by hand (hem, strap length). Moved buttons on a blouse. I’m a terrible seamstress, but getting better.
1/4	Use cloth and reusable bags at grocery store. No more plastic. (SHOW)	8.98	0h 5m	I bought one bag at Trader Joe’s, one at Whole Foods. We have others as well. We carry bags around with us “just in case.” (\$4.99 for one bag, \$3.99 for another) (O)
1/4	Change lightbulbs to energy-efficient bulbs. (SHOW)	56.00	0h 15m	The \$56 was for the initial purchase. As conventional bulbs burn out, we replace them. (O)
1/8	“I think in terms of investment, it’s the best thing you can ever give yourself is to have beautiful surroundings.” (SHOW)		1h 0m	I spend an hour beautifying and decide this will have to be an ongoing project for me. (O)

(cont.)

January 2008 Accounting (*cont.*)

Date	Assignment	Cost	Time	Notes
1/9	"I would just say to anybody, whatever secret you're holding, live your own truth." (<i>SHOW</i>)		0h 0m	This is a major one. I have to ruminate on it daily and also in the evening to make certain I fulfill living my "own truth." (O)
1/10	Sharon Salzberg meditation. (<i>WEB</i>)		0h 10m	Discovered this audio file when I searched Oprah.com for stress relievers. I liked the guided meditation very much and will do it again. (O)
1/10	Switch from overhead lighting to lamps. (<i>SHOW</i>)		1h 0m	This just took some rearranging in our home. It was like doing a Rubik's Cube, but finally figured it out. (Oprah-approved Nate Berkus suggestion on show)
1/10	Put stuff on my walls that becomes art once I hang it. (<i>SHOW</i>)	51.39	2h 0m	\$5 for antique plate, \$44.10 antique vent grills, \$2.29 for picture kit to hang these. Also stuck some things around the house on our walls.
1/10	Add sea life to rooms. (<i>SHOW</i>)		0h 15m	Used stuff we had in closets and drawers: a nautilus shell, a sand dollar, and some stones we collected at the ocean. This is not my decorating style. (Oprah-approved Nate Berkus suggestion on show)

1/10	Add a fabulous chair to each room. <i>(SHOW)</i>	429.68	4h 30m	\$160 in kitchen, \$19.33 in bathroom, \$40 in bedroom, \$13.00 in front room, \$197.35 in living room. I decided to call the yoga ball I use as an office chair “fabulous” so I wouldn’t have to get something new. (Oprah-approved Nate Berkus suggestion on show)
1/10	Frame important notes. <i>(SHOW)</i>	1.00	0h 10m	I reused some frames I already had. Only needed to buy one from dollar store.
1/10	Add books about subjects you love to each room. <i>(SHOW)</i>		0h 10m	Just took a tiny bit of rearranging. We tend to do this anyway. (Oprah-approved Nate Berkus suggestion on show)
1/10	Make your rooms personal. <i>(SHOW)</i>		3h 30m	Our rooms are in a constant state of flux as we continue “personalizing” them. It’s been fun. I stopped counting the time at the end of January and will simply make this ongoing. (O)
1/14	Sign Best Life Challenge contract. <i>(SHOW)</i>		0h 2m	Download, print, sign. This Challenge will be an ongoing project though the year. (O)
1/16	See the movie <i>Juno</i> ASAP. <i>(SHOW)</i>	10.00	1h 36m	Well, I had already seen it and thought at first that covered the assignment. Then I realized that Oprah’s wording meant I still had to go see it ASAP, so I did.

(cont.)

January 2008 Accounting (*cont.*)

Date	Assignment	Cost	Time	Notes
1/17	Oprah hopes we will buy Christiane Northrup's book <i>Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom</i> . (<i>SHOW</i>)	13.91	19h 15m	(15 minutes to find lowest price; approx. 1140 minutes to read) This was a <i>great</i> buy. I read this book from cover to cover and have returned to it several times.
1/17	Read Book Club selection <i>Pillars of the Earth</i> . (<i>BC</i>)		17h 0m	I had a copy but can't figure out where it came from. Did someone leave it at my house? Let me know.
1/21	Take Peter Walsh's online clutter test. (<i>WEB</i>)		0h 5m	I'm mortified.
1/23	Make Mustard Grilled Chicken and Roast Potatoes with Lemons. (<i>WEB</i>)	17.54	2h 0m	Jim loved this meal so much. It encouraged me to continue cooking in this way. (\$17.54 was for all ingredients not already in my pantry... why is it I never have mustard? Is someone stealing it?)
1/23	"If visiting New York, visit the museums but then go to Dylan's Candy Bar." (<i>SHOW</i>)		0h 20m	I've never wanted a salad as much as I did when I left that store.
1/23	Oprah wants everyone to taste a MoonPie. (<i>SHOW</i>)		0h 1m	Done.
1/23	Oprah hopes we will watch <i>African American Lives</i> on PBS. (<i>SHOW</i>)		4h 0m	Really interesting. Wish Henry Louis Gates, Jr., would research my family tree.

1/23	“Please don’t tell Bob Greene” about all the junk Oprah ate on the show today. (SHOW)		0h 0m	I promise I won’t. But should we be keeping secrets about our food and feeling shameful about it?
1/25	Read “Feel the Heat” article. (WEB)		1h 0m	Trying to build sexual energy in my marriage while working on my MFA thesis is not so sexy. Going to revisit later this year. Will keep the lessons in mind moving forward, though.
1/29	Read Gavin de Becker’s <i>The Gift of Fear</i> . (SHOW)	9.00	3h 0m	Is it ironic to be scared to read this?
1/30	Purchase Post-It Flag Highlighter Pen from 3M. (SHOW)	8.49	0h 30m	Oprah <i>loves</i> these. They seem like a waste of packaging and materials to me.
1/30	Get Eckhart Tolle’s <i>A New Earth</i> . (“Run out and get your book.”) (SHOW/BC)	8.40	0h 10m	The first book I’ve owned with Oprah’s Book Club seal on the cover.
1/30	Register for Eckhart Tolle online class. (SHOW/BC)		0h 5m	Wonder if Oprah will be teaching? Moderating? Studying with us?
Through-out month	Watch every episode of <i>Oprah</i> . (LO)		23h 0m	23 episodes
Through-out month	Do Best Life Challenge exercise. (BLC)		4h 0m	80 minutes a week × 3 weeks: 240 minutes
TOTAL		707.01	98h 46m	
<p><i>Accounting Abbreviations:</i> LO = Living Oprah project task; SHOW = <i>The Oprah Winfrey Show</i>; WEB = Oprah.com; MAG = <i>O, The Oprah Magazine</i>; BC = Oprah’s Book Club; BLC = Best Life Challenge; (O) = ongoing project</p>				