

Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View

Dear Listener:

Thank you for stopping by for a visit at Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View podcast! To make it easy, you will find a transcript of each episode. I hope you enjoy the visit!

Episode 41 - Setting Goals for the New Year

Starting a New Year is similar to holding a brand-new book in your hands. It's one you've been eagerly waiting to read, and you can't wait to see what is going to happen. Before you ease the cover open, you take a moment to feel the book in your hand. The texture. The weight. Some of us, who truly loves the printed word, will even take a moment to smell the pleasing aroma. We can't wait to get started, so we lift the cover and start reading.

In this new book, there are 365 pages just waiting for you to explore. However, instead of each page being filled with words and images, each page is completely blank. It is waiting for you to write the story.

If you compare the number of words in a book to time, and consider each word one minute, you have 525,600 words to read. In the case of a new year, you have 525,600 minutes to look forward to. You can look at this in two different ways. The first is that it may not be enough time to do all you want to do. The second way is it is more than enough time to accomplish what you want to do this year, with plenty of time left over to just enjoy life. Me, personally? I like the second viewpoint.

Most writers will tell you it is very rare for a story to just write itself. Yes, often the words, plot, and characters seem to do just that. But even then, it takes thought and careful planning. Decisions are made. An outline is created. A synopsis is written. Goals and deadlines are set. And all of this is done before the first word is written. And then with each chapter that's written, there's editing to do.

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A great writer knows each chapter needs to lead into the next one. When the book is finished, the story must flow smoothly from the first word to the last.

Starting a new year should be viewed very similarly to writing a new book. You want this year to be better than the last – and very possibly one of the best ones ever. To do that, you need to give it considerable thought, plan carefully, and make some wise decisions. It may also be a smart thing to take a page out of a writer's book and write a synopsis, create an outline, and set a few goals.

First, let's do some thinking about what we want our year to look like. If you have been following this podcast, I'm almost willing to bet you have already grabbed a notebook and pen and are headed to your quiet place – because you already know it's exactly what I am going to recommend.

If you are a new listener, get ready, because you will hear me say this often. The best way to truly think through something is to find a quiet place to sit and relax. Always take a notebook and pen to jot down some notes. I won't go into the details of this now, but if you want to learn more about it, take a moment to listen to Episode 13 – The Pleasure of Afternoon Tea.

For now, though, we are going to spend our quiet time doing some thinking and making notes. Do you have something you want to accomplish this year? It may be something simple, like spending a bit more time with a friend. It could be for a weekend, such as a fun getaway with a spouse or child, or even finally tackling cleaning out that storage shed which is bulging at the seams.

Or it could be a major undertaking, such as shifting your busy lifestyle to one that is simpler, like we talked about last week, learning a new, but more difficult and time-consuming skill, or even thinking about heading in a new direction, such as going back to school.

Now that we have had a few moments to think about what we want our new year to look like, it's time to grab our notebooks and write a Synopsis.

A synopsis for a writer is, in the simplest of terms, a brief summary which describes the main points of the story. For your synopsis, you will simply write a short paragraph or two that gives you an idea of the main accomplishments you want to achieve.

Once you have your synopsis completed, you will use it to take the next step, which is adding a few more details.

Everything we think we want to do, from the smallest to largest, needs to be written down in your notebook. Consider these items as the characters in your story. Once you have them all written down, then it's time to make a few decisions. Look at each one and determine which will be the main character (or in your case, the main priority). Once you have determined that, then list the remaining characters – or rather priorities – according to each one's importance. Then re-write your list, starting with the most important to the least.

Once your second list is finished, take your top three priorities, and begin breaking them down into a plan. This step is similar to 'fleshing out a character' – it adds the details, from the character's external appearance to their internal workings, such as personalities, desires, and viewpoint.

It may help to use the journalistic Five W's – Who is going to be involved and What will be taking place. When can be anything from specifics (enrolling in an academic class means having set days and times) to options - (that weekend escape may need to be scheduled according to the weather). The Where is self-explanatory. That will be the location the priority will take place.

The WHY can be a bit trickier, but still needs to be answered. Before a writer begins a book, they need to understand why writing this particular book is important. Their reasons are usually one of these - to teach, entertain, inform, or persuade. Sometimes, there is only one reason why, and sometimes it involves more than one. But they still have a reason.

Knowing the why is just as important to a well-thought-out plan as the Who, What, When, and Where. When you determine why you want to do something, it can often help to keep you motivated to get it done. It also gives you direction for each step you take along the way.

For instance, you know one of your priorities is to create a stronger bond with your child. What better way to do that than to spend some quality time with them. It's part of the reason 'why' you are planning a special weekend to do something they love to do.

If one of your goals is to stretch your wings and learn a new, but more difficult and time-consuming skill, your 'when' is setting aside time to focus on the learning process.

I recently read it can take 10,000 hours to master a new skill. You begin with the desire. From there you do your research and collect your tools and supplies. The next step is hands on. The remaining hours are practice, making mistakes, correcting and learning from them, and more practice. The more you practice, the better you become. So, setting aside time each day or week to practice is necessary.

Now that you have your synopsis written, lists made, and your priorities set, it's time to start setting a few goals. Your goals can be compared to the 6th Journalistic Question – HOW.

Using your list, start breaking down each priority into goals. In this case, consider it similar to a writer's outline. Make notes of exactly HOW you want to reach this goal. Two items for reaching your goals needs to be creating a budget, if necessary, and setting deadlines.

Setting deadlines will help you stay on track, keep you focused, offer motivation, and help you see your progress. With a major goal, it helps to break it down into smaller deadlines. And be sure to make them manageable. You want to meet your goals, but not by neglecting other important priorities.

Now that your goals are set, grab your calendar. When filling in your calendar, you need to first write down all of the things you know are coming up. This can be birthdays, anniversaries, and even an estimated date of a new baby. The next thing is any appointments you are aware of, such as medical appointments and meetings. We all know we can't truly plan ahead for these, but by keeping your calendar as clutter free as possible, we can adjust our schedules easier for any unseen appointments that may come up.

The third thing to make a note of is any events you are planning on attending. These can be school, church, or community functions. You may not always be able to attend, but at least you are still aware of them.

For the most part, these are the things you know you can't – or don't want – to miss. Now that those are in place, it's time to start looking for the days and times you have available to work on your goals.

With that said, be sure you don't fill your calendar too full. Unexpected things always come up, and we need some leeway to accommodate them. Weather, illness, death, and finances always seem to find a way to redirect our plans, so be prepared for the unexpected and be willing to adjust as needed.

Are you finished yet? If not, then don't worry. Think about it this way – planning for a new year is a lot of work. It takes time, thought, and consideration to create the best plan possible. And it can also be a perfect excuse for a few more quiet time sessions.

If you are finished, then it's time to pat yourself on the back for a job well done and enjoy that last cookie and sip of hot chocolate or tea. Just embrace the quiet for a few more minutes. From there, you can look forward knowing you have started on creating the best year possible, have prepared for the Unexpected, and can get started on that top priority.

Or, you can just refill your cup, grab another cookie, open a good book, and tell anyone who asks, "I'm working on improving my skill level on slowing down and learning how to Relax and Enjoy!"

If you want to learn more about the topic at hand or get a transcript for this episode, just visit my website at www.thefarmwife.com/podcast. To help you out, this is Episode 41.

If you have questions or just want to stop in for a visit, you can do that through email at thevirtualporch@gmail.com. And be sure to subscribe – you don't want to miss a single conversation. I'll be sitting on the porch every Monday morning waiting for your visit! Thanks again for stopping in.

I will see you next week on Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. And while you are waiting on the next episode, grab that glass of refreshment, pull up a rocker, and sit back for a while. It's time to

Relax & Enjoy!

julie