

The Ultimate Goal

— by Josephine Gross

How do goals work...? You've got me on this one. I have no idea!

I haven't heard a single theory on goals that I can see actually working in my life. I grew up in Belgium under a low gray sky; when I was about 10 years old, I would look out the window and gaze at the rainy clouds while dreaming about sunny places with palm trees and beaches. I wanted to live in a place warm enough to have citrus fruits growing in my garden. Today I live in Los Angeles, where we have grapefruits and tangerines all year long in the back yard. I never wrote this goal down, or consciously thought about how to make it happen.

Another rainy day, about 10 years later, in my hometown of Ghent, I happened to run into an American painter from San Francisco, who invited me out to visit. I immediately liked the freedom, the weather, but mostly the space I experienced from being 9000 kilometers away from my family and my roots. After my tourist visa ran out, it became clear that in order to prolong my stay, I had to become a student. I inquired with some community colleges but found the tuition for foreign students prohibitive. (In Belgium, education is free!)

Someone at the Italian cafe where I worked told me about a nearby university called Stanford, where they offer financial aid to people like me. I still remember filling out the forms on a table corner in that same cafe, the afternoon before the deadline; a few months later I was awakened at 8 a.m. by a call from the chair of the French department, letting me know I had been accepted into the Ph.D. program, offering me a \$100,000 scholarship--and asking if I would accept it.

Much later I found out that people normally plan years ahead to get themselves or their offspring into Stanford. It is considered a pretty hefty goal and you are supposed to be very well prepared and even then, it is extremely hard to get in. So what happened to me? All I wanted was to find a way to stay in the Bay Area a little longer. I can assure you I never dreamed of a Ph. D. in French or planned for a Stanford degree. Let alone write down any goals that would lead me in that direction. In retrospect, I understand how my time at Stanford was instrumental in what I wanted to accomplish next.

I could list countless examples where I have been offered something I had not asked for, and numerous times where I desperately wanted something I didn't get...only to find out later that instead, I got something even better.

Today, I continue to express my heart's desire--and I make a conscious effort to let go of too many specifics as to precisely what path will lead me there. I welcome surprises as the bigger plan is revealed to me. I have learned that my only real goal is peace of mind, and for that I became a student at the University of "What's happening now?"

How do goals work? Realize and live as though nothing separates you from your ultimate destination, then be very present and receptive to what every day has to offer. A plan will unfold--and there just is no way you can miss where you were meant to go.