

By the time this article is published, we'll be ten days into the New Year. Already, resolutions that were made in the newness of the first sunrise of 2007 will have been tossed aside as we resume our trudge along the routine avenues that comprise the direction of our lives. A bleak beginning both to this article and to the New Year, wouldn't you say?



Everyone keeps advising me not to make resolutions. When I raised the subject at the end of 2006, I was asked, "What resolutions have you ever really kept?" and frankly, I didn't have a good answer. I've read a plethora of articles on how to set goals, what questions to ask yourself and how to keep resolutions. In preparation for this column, I looked back at a notebook I started at the beginning of 2006. It was a simple notebook with an uncomplicated goal. The suggestion for that new year had been "Note one kindness extended to you today, note a kindness you extended and jot down a gratitude for the day". I stopped writing down the kindnesses and gratitudes sometime in late January. I made an entry on February 27 with my final admission on March 27. I don't know why that was last day of the exercise. The little pale blue notebook and my good intentions got buried underneath the stacks of books that occupy my night table.

In that same notebook, tucked away in the flap, was an article I read at the end of 2005 written by Hilton Johnson entitled, "The Top 10 Best Ideas for Setting Goals". I wasn't so much interested in making resolutions as I was in setting goals in the coming year. The idea of the article was to create three key goals as imminent as the upcoming week and month, followed by five, ten and twenty year goals. Pretty far reaching. As I looked back at some of those goals, I actually met some, including my ten-year forecasts.

In 2006, I made a spiritual retreat that I had been putting off for years. I think I got my mom's finances in order. No great progress on my own finances but that's a character defect of mine; putting others first at the expense of my own welfare. That's gotta change. Some of my immediate goals fell by the wayside. I didn't walk everyday. I wrote but not everyday. I think I probably prayed everyday. Maybe that's the one thing that has become part of my subconscious. Most mornings, before my feet hit the floor, I awaken from a sleepy fog mentally reciting the Lord's Prayer, mingling the words with a short plea asking for help. I'm always asking for help – in my job, for my family, for clarity and patience – and then I have to go to the bathroom.

Reflecting on the goals I set following Mr. Johnson's methodology, I did finally get wireless set up in my house but it hasn't performed to my satisfaction. I didn't improve my cooking skills and as a result, I did not succeed at healthy eating. I took vacations in 2006 but none just for me. I do have one planned for this coming May. I want to go to Ossabaw Island with my college buddy and right now, it's a plan. I set a goal to improve my work performance. Work changed, as it always does, and I am drifting away from sales to project management. Not sure if that's a good thing. I started to generate a little bit of income from writing and I've decided to apply to graduate school in 2007 to get better at this craft. The extra burden this long-term goal implies makes my stomach churn. I wonder why I think I need more schooling. I'll keep wondering until its over...if I even get accepted.

I still haven't locked into a personal training schedule and the formal spiritual direction I once had has taken the form of letters and books from my good friend Bernie the Monk. My little piece of property in Port Royal is paid off thanks to my brother and we may even knock out our building pledge at church this year.

It's one step at a time, one foot in front of the other, maybe one breast stroke at a time, and hopefully a couple of revolutions on the bicycle in 2007. When I prattled on about New Year's resolutions in a recent discussion, one woman responded by saying that all she plans on doing in 2007 is the best she can. That's all. Plain and simple. In that same conversation, I characterized 2006 as a mediocre year for me but is that really true? I fail to remember that my mom was a lot sicker at the beginning of 2006 than she is today and that along with God and her doctors, I had a hand in that. Even now I am at the brink of tears, grateful that I have my health and that no great tragedy befell my family last year. Life is flying by and my dad was right. It goes by faster the older you get. We recognize that our days are finite. I ramble a lot this time of the year, both verbally and mentally, caught up in my personal encounters with the disappointment of unmet goals. This kind of thinking can lead to emotional paralysis if I take no action when just that first step is all that really matters. Maybe my friend was right. Just do the best you can each day. Get out of bed and out of your head. Put on your tennis shoes and take that morning walk. Pour a bowl of Special K for breakfast and eat a few raw vegetables at lunchtime instead of those mini-Snickers bars. And don't forget to smile. Just like my dad told me, it all goes by too fast.