

WE CAN DO IT!

There's a lot you can learn about life from boardsailing on the ocean, and spending time in the company of ambitious sheep, advises Discovery member Ann Gadd

Sheepishly ambitious... artist and author Ann Gadd



The works are bright, bold, and witty, showing sheep prancing on hilltops ("Landscape"), or standing on top of one another ("More RAM"), or perched on Table Mountain ("Skaapstad"). But now Ann has taken her Aerial obsession one step further, by penning what is probably the world's first self-help book to be inspired by the ruminations of sheep.

It's called "The Ambitious Sheep", and it's a slim yet engaging fable about three members of the flock, Aahaa, Daa, and Maa, and their Herculean efforts to climb a ladder overlooking the greener pastures next door. Not to give away too much of the plot, but Aahaa is the one who learns that getting to those dizzy heights calls for hard work, integrity, vision, determination, and the courage to leave the safety of your grazing zone and explore fresh pastures. All this from a sheep?

"Sheep have fascinated me for years," says Ann. "I think they may be more intelligent than we believe. In their own way, they have much to mirror to us about the human condition. Like sheep, we seldom stop to question our life, its purpose, and the validity of what we do."

Unlike sheep, Ann paused to ponder those questions a few years ago, leading her to leave her steady position in the corporate world (she was co-director

of an advertising agency) and indulge her passion for painting and practical philosophy. She's written eight books since then, on subjects as diverse as foot care, fairytales, relationships, and her other abiding passion, boardsailing.

"I was pretty useless at sport at school," says Ann, "possibly because I was two years younger than my classmates, or maybe because ball sports were just not my thing. But when I first started boardsailing, I found it an exhilarating rush. And with many hours of perseverance, I found I could also do it competently."

A four-month sojourn in Hawaii proved to Ann that she could also boardsail with competitive flair, and she sailed in competitions back home in Cape Town and at the World Championships in France.

"When I was working in the corporate world, I would sneak out of meetings and head for the surf," says Ann. "It was a pleasant respite from office politics. Somehow the constant coming face to face with danger in the form of big waves, whales and sharks made me feel more alive. You don't sweat the small stuff when you've just survived a 12-foot wave! I love the sea, and being immersed in it has taught me much about life. I learnt to make decisions fast, to act in the present moment, and just to experience the sheer awesome beauty of it all."

In-between painting and writing, Ann still enjoys a quiet sail at Langebaan, where she has ample time to savour the view, test the waves, and ponder the challenges and opportunities that lie just beyond the horizon, and in the fresh green pastures that beckon her back to shore.

**For more information on Ann Gadd, her art, and her books, visit www.artforewe.co.za.*

Some of us are quite categorical about the animals we prefer. Others are more dogmatic by nature. But if you were to ask Discovery member Ann Gadd to name her favourite cuddly creature, she would tell you it's the kind that usually only springs to mind when you're having trouble getting to sleep at night.

Ann counts sheep among her closest pals, so much so that she paints them for a living. Well, not directly on the sheep (although she did once persuade a sheep to help her with a painting in aid of charity) but on canvas, in oil.