**Starting-Over Guidesheet #6**

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**Growing a Vision**

***Judith Couchman***

When Jenny Butchart decided to create a garden, her enterprising husband, Robert, considered his wife a visionary. If he hadn’t thought this, she’d probably have been declared totally nuts, because Jenny wanted to grow flowers in a rock quarry.

That is the way of visionaries. Onlookers brand them as brilliant or befuddled, laudable or laughable, depending on their projects’ outcomes. Fortunately, for the gardening world, Jenny’s idea proved her a genius, and she possessed the plentiful resources to turn a hard-bitten pit into a floral masterpiece.

In 1888 Robert left his dry-goods business to begin manufacturing cement near his Canadian birthplace in Ontario. By the century’s end, his pioneering efforts had amassed a fortune in this new industry. Attracted to the West Coast because of its rich limestone deposits, he built a new factory at Tod Inlet on Vancouver Island and established a 130-acre home there in 1904.

When Robert exhausted the limestone quarry near their house, Jenny conceived an unprecedented plan. Why not transform the scarred into the sacred? She requisitioned tons of topsoil from nearby farms, transported it by horse and cart, and lined the quarry’s floor with fresh earth. Step by labored step, under her careful supervision the Butcharts’ eyesore grew into a family heirloom and a community treasure. Jenny created a spectacular sunken garden, bursting with ravishing flowers and ornamental birds collected by her husband.

As also the case with visionaries, one idea led to another. Mirroring their worldwide travels, the Butcharts added a Japanese garden on the ocean side of their grounds, an Italian garden replaced their tennis court, and a rose garden supplanted a kitchen vegetable patch. By the 1920s more than 50,000 visitors flooded to the estate each year, which the couple named “Benvenuto,” the Italian word for “welcome.”

**The Gardens Today**

Today only the chimney remains of Robert’s cement factory kiln, but visitors still pour into the Butchart Gardens, a 50-acre showplace owned by his descendants. Each year over one million plants of 700 varieties maintain the gardens’ continuous bloom from March through October, contributing to its international reputation. That’s approximately one visitor per planting because nearly one million people pass through the gardens annually to enjoy its seasonal beauty and entertainment.

Wandering through the gardens’ meandering paths a decade ago, I wondered about Jenny Butchart. *When she dreamed of reclaiming the used-up quarry, was she thinking only of the estate’s appearance? Or did she envision the millions of visitors? Did she realize she’d created an ever-expanding vision, lasting for a century and beyond, passing to her daughters and later to grandchildren?*

As I sipped tea and munched on finger sandwiches in the restaurant, I asked myself, *Did Jenny dream she’d provide a haven for life-weary travelers like me? A place to breath in hope, dispelling the world’s creeping despair?* I’d escaped to Canada for a sorely needed vacation. As I crossed via ferry to Victoria, not knowing what waited across the waters, I’d prayed to find rest.

In a lovely inn I eventually found sleep and solitude, and from a brochure fatefully placed in the lobby, I discovered the Butchart legacy. For most of a day I soaked up Jenny’s gardens and still-lingering hospitality. I stayed until the serenity seeped into my soul, and as I drove away from this beloved estate, I whispered to the gentle winds, “Thank you, Jenny, for the gift of an enduring garden. Thank you for pursuing your vision.”

**What About Your Vision?**

When we’re starting over, we usually focus on survival. But eventually new dreams can crop up, even if we’re not cultivating them. Even if they seem crazy. These ideas suggest what our future could be; how we could flourish.

At the same time, these glimpses might scare or surprise us. We might want to push them away because we don’t want to get hurt—or hurt again. But the path to satisfaction and influence leads through vision. If we pursue these visionary glimpses bit by bit, we could live meaningfully and leave an unexpected legacy. We could start over purposefully and actually find joy.

For this guidesheet, welcome the bits of vision that request your attention. Dream a little. Open a small window and anticipate the future. Plant a tiny seed. Then watch for what might grow.

1. What dream or vision might be asking for your attention?
2. How do you feel about this dream? Why?
3. How can you open a small window to welcome this dream?
4. At this point, do you feel this dream is possible? Why, or why not?
5. How can you plant a small seed to grow this vision?
6. How will you respond when it begins to grow?

*—Partially excerpted from A Garden’s Promise, copyright 1997 by Judy (Judith) C. Couchman*