**Starting-Over Guidesheet #9**

****

**Was It Really a Mistake?**

***Judith Couchman***

I peered into the bathroom mirror and a bloody face stared back. Scratch marks and bites covered my cheeks, chest, arms, and hands. Blood filled my mouth.

“Maybe this was a mistake,” I thought. “She doesn’t understand I’m trying to save her life.”

For several months I’d been feeding a feral cat who lived in the shed. She’d given birth there and for a few weeks had been dragging around a puffy, wounded tail. I’d named the cat Bella and thought she trusted me; she often entered the house to eat. But then I tried to capture Bella so I could take her to the vet. Hell broke loose. After an hour of stalking her around the house, I finally pushed her into a carrying case and drove to the vet. I followed this appointment with a trip to the doctor for myself and two weeks of strong antibiotics. Both Bella and I felt shaken.

Bella lived in a big cage in the house for a month while she healed. So did her surviving kitty, Molly. After four vet trips, lots of hissing and batting, and incessant all-night crying, I released Bella and Molly into the house. Molly is a treat: playful and silly like most baby creatures, and bugging my older cat Wolfie. Bella still hisses if we approach her, but at least she doesn’t cry all night. The mama and baby have created their own routine in the house, but clearly let me know they don’t want human touch. I feed and talk sweetly to them, but keep my distance. I think Molly would naturally befriend me, but Bella teaches her to fear.

My cat-loving friends say to give Bella time. Eventually she’ll come around. Some days I’m not so sure, but for now—for better or for worse—I’m committed to these cats. Bella doesn’t realize it, but I saved her life and she and Molly now live in cat comfort.

Was bringing in Bella a mistake? In my deepest heart, I don’t think so. However, the daily results seem to indicate otherwise. I’m learning that I can’t assess the outcome until many months from now. Trust and love develop slowly.

I’m beginning to think many “mistakes” could be judged this way. Not immediately, but with time’s perspective. Sometimes what we call mistakes turn into benefits or even joy. A stray cat transforms into a loving companion. A difficult class teaches us important lessons. A failed business offers us lifelong wisdom and connections. Even a horrible marriage can produce wonderful children.

Of course, some decisions *are* mistakes. But all mistakes, with time, can be redeemed. They can make us wiser, deeper, grateful, more spiritual people. Scripture says if we love God, he makes all things work together for good. The caveat is that we cooperate with this redemption, and stop clinging to our mistakes. We allow time and transformation to do their work.

When we’re starting over, it’s tempting to pound ourselves with past mistakes. Maybe it’s time to take the proverbial sledge hammer out of our hands and instead, hold the gift of time. We can get at least slightly excited about how these missteps can turn into good.

1. What mistakes do you keep mulling over and regretting?
2. Why do you keep clinging to these mistakes?
3. What have been the results of reliving these mistakes?
4. What might happen if you released these mistakes to God, who can turn them into good?
5. With time and transformation, what good could result from these mistakes?

—*Copyright 2009 by Judy (Judith) C. Couchman*