

Building a Cathedral

One year ago, the bank and I took on the stewardship of a very special home and garden. I am enormously grateful to those who have lived here before me. Their thoughtful design and care has enabled me to revel in the cycle of growth and decline that marks seasons in the garden.

The pink flushed foliage of the sasanqua hedge became seven months of flowering. The mop top robinias greened, then dropped, and once again are green. The flowering cherry shed pink snow in the spring gales. Freesias were followed by irises, wisteria and now roses. The climbing star jasmine is about to burst, and, towering over us all, the giant puriri tree is again home to visiting tuis.

There is one delight after another.

As always, blessings are mixed. Mine includes a thriving crop of oxalis, waiting now to push again into leaf. The old gardener's adage that one year's seeding means seven year's weeding has cast the dice. Last summer my self-imposed rule was that every time I passed the garden, a cupful of oxalis bulbs must leave with me. Some days it was a bucketful. Every hour in the garden, every oxalis bulb removed was an investment. At least that's what I hoped.

During the colder months, the foliage died off and the bulbs went quiet. Trips to the vegetable garden witnessed the silent plotting of a summer invasion to come.

Some gardening friends have given up the oxalis battle, while others get rid of the bulbs by sieving the soil. Neither appeals, but I am patient in the garden, and I have a plan. Over the winter, I've had time to go through my Mum's old gardening books. Her garden wisdom is scribbled in margins and on slips of paper tucked inside covers, and among them I found a winning gem. A recipe to kill oxalis, made with a lethal cocktail of ingredients from the kitchen.

Last weekend, grandson Jack helped me to clear away the winter weeds. Gleefully, he plunged his hands into the soft soil, holding up fat wriggling worms and shrieking at escaping skinks.

And there they were, tiny brown oxalis bulbs. Dozens of them. Fresh, full of purpose and waiting patiently for our next skirmish to commence. Game on bulbs, I am armed and ready.

This battle for the vegetable patch will not be easily won. Oxalis is a sly foe, with the smallest of bulbs disappearing quietly into the soil, just when you think you've caught them all. Every turn of the soil reveals another, but this is the slow path to victory, one bulb at a time. There's no quick fix for this one, but it's a battle worth the effort.

It's all part of home ownership that has been the kiwi dream for so many years. Our first home, in 1982, was a tiny do-up in Gisborne, bought for the princely sum of \$35,000. A far cry from the mammoth mortgages that now make a first step on the property ladder almost impossible for so many. At that point, home ownership was about doing a makeover in order to make a profit. Trees and gardens made the place presentable and appealing for the next buyer. Climbing the property ladder was the goal.

It took eight more homes before the idea of stewarding land for future generations took hold. A gully, heavy laden with gorse, that would provide shelter for a stand of kowhais, a grove of maples and, eventually, hundreds of natives reclaiming their land.

I love the saying that the best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago, and the second best time is now. But the act of planting is only part of stewardship. It's deciding what to plant and where. Will this grow well here? What size will it be when fully grown? How will it impact the neighbours? How will it need to be pruned, shaped, and cared for?

Every season, my heart breaks a little, watching Council parks staff tear plants out of roundabout gardens, ready for the new. Yes, I know these plants are called annuals for a reason, but it takes all my self-control not to leap out of a moving vehicle, to rescue discarded bedding begonias or to pick a bunch of iceland poppies that lie sadly heaped, apparently past their use-by date. Like the Council roundabouts, my first garden was planted for immediate effect. These days I'm more interested in longevity.

Stewardship of a property feels quite different to ownership. Ownership is about possession, a place to stand and defend, while stewardship is about serving. Ironically, although I have owned many homes over the years, this is first time that a place feels like it is stewarding me. My offering is time and thought, energy and love, and the garden responds magnificently to that touch, bringing much joy. It's a partnership that will ensure the cycle is paid forward.

There's an old tale told of three stonemasons working on a cathedral. A traveller asked the first what he was doing and was told he was chipping stone. The second mason said he was building a wall, and the third declared that he was building a cathedral.

Recently I heard a similar response from a volunteer Board member, who explained that her involvement is far more than just reading papers and going to talkfest meetings. She is there to help hold the vision of what the organisation can become, making sure that the Trust does the right things and has the right fuel to get it where it wants to go. She sees herself as the latest in a long line of people who have come to serve and build a great organisation.

Stewardship is its own reward. The opportunity to contribute in the present for the benefit of those in the future. You don't own the place, but you do give it your best. And when you give your best, the joy is in being part of something that outlasts you.



My oxalis crusade will continue all summer, abating only when the bulbs settle into winter slumber for a rest. Patience knows this will take several seasons. Persistence knows who will prevail. Purpose knows that this is part of my cathedral.

Jenny Magee

Jenny Magee works with Boomers to make the most of the second half of their lives. Her latest book **A Bold Life – How Boomer Women are Reinventing Life Beyond Fifty** is available at good bookstores or from www.jennymagee.com if

A Bold Life! By Jenny Magee

Women are redefining the second half of life. We're living longer and stronger and making different choices and changes to previous generations. As the clock ticks, we are not going quietly.

What about you? Are you living your best life?

Do you ever wonder what else might be possible? Are you willing to find out?

If you're looking for more from the second half of your life, then this is the book for you.

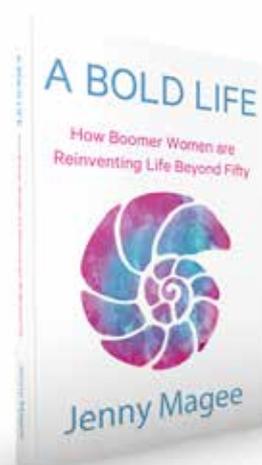
Author and Bold Boomer, Jenny Magee, has written compellingly about the bold moves that women are taking, to transform their thinking and their quest for lives they are proud of.

Within their stories, you'll find encouragement and the inspiration to create your own Bold Life.

On the path to her own reinvention, Jenny Magee went solo travelling on her 'grey gap year'. During her travels, she heard countless stories of how women are stepping into new careers, new relationships and new versions of themselves.

Inspired, Jenny has related the stories of nine women in her book, *A Bold Life – How Boomer Women Are Reinventing Life Beyond Fifty*. These stories shine a light for all of us.

As Jenny says, 'Life for these women is positive. They've made conscious choices, despite their age and circumstances, not just because of them. The confidence to take such a stand is contagious. In their re-inventing, re-modelling and re-shaping, there is an infectious sense of purpose, energy and ease. I caught it when listening to each of them, and I hope you will, too!'



*To purchase a copy of **A Bold Life**, email ance@jennymagee.com*