

a new year DISAPPOINTMENT

I don't know about you, but I'm mostly excited about 2009: four brand new Grapevines in the early-planning stages, with endless opportunities to "give families a lift". And I hate starting a newsletter on a 'down' note. But Grapevine's Happy-New-Year was tinged with disappointment. Our annual Christmas Appeal took an unexpected 'hit' – leaving us \$26,000 short of our target. And, if you'll let me, I need to share the problem with some friends ...



efore we go there, however, I have to tell you: I've just come in from watering the garden!

I'm not sure why, but there are few jobs around our small property that I enjoy doing more. Maybe it's because I usually do it in the cool-cool-cool of the evening when the sun's lost its heat and our suburb's gone quiet. Maybe it's because I'm closer-than-usual to nature, participating in something simple but life-

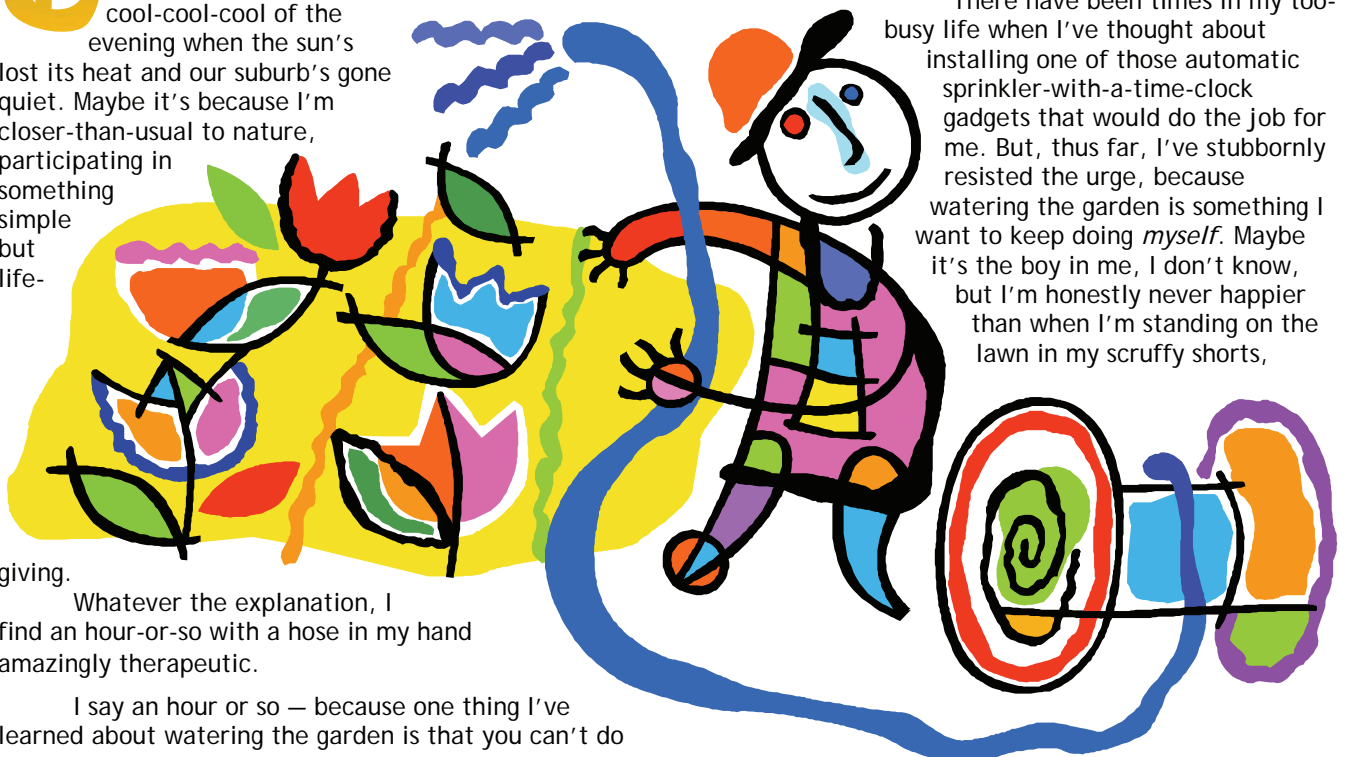
it fast. The green things that somehow manage to grow in our very ordinary dirt need a good soaking at this time of year – not a quick splash. And I've learnt to be patient ...

There have been times in my too-busy life when I've thought about installing one of those automatic sprinkler-with-a-time-clock gadgets that would do the job for me. But, thus far, I've stubbornly resisted the urge, because watering the garden is something I want to keep doing *myself*. Maybe it's the boy in me, I don't know, but I'm honestly never happier than when I'm standing on the lawn in my scruffy shorts,

giving.

Whatever the explanation, I find an hour-or-so with a hose in my hand amazingly therapeutic.

I say an hour or so – because one thing I've learned about watering the garden is that you can't do



squirting water at the plants, shrubs and flowers that sprout miraculously from our humble diggings.

The benefits of this activity are obvious. I mean, it makes me feel good: it unwinds me and lets me think – and the water that wets my bare feet also leaks peace into my soul. It makes my plants feel good – they perk up, nod their heads, bloom a little brighter, and reward me (eventually) with new leaves and stalks and buds.



And it's not just *plants* that I feed. Tonight it was *birds*, too! An old, well-used bird-bath sits out there in the shade of our trees. And, tonight, I'd no sooner washed it out and filled it up when it was visited – first, by a thirsty thrush who, not bothered by me being there, promptly hopped up on the edge and started drinking ... then, by a shiny blackbird, who, wanting to bathe by himself, chased the thrush away before leaping in up to his armpits (wingpits?).

Yes, I know this sounds corny ... but those birds were magic to watch. And if my wife hadn't called me for dinner, I might still be standing there with the tap turned on, draining a dam somewhere up in the hills!

I experienced one disappointment tonight, however, and that was our vegetables. We'd been away



for a week, and I don't think it had rained at all, and our poor vegetable garden had turned into a desert. We've got beetroot that's limp and lifeless ... and potatoes that might still be okay, although their tops have gone yellow and dry.

But our tomatoes, sadly, are all shrivelled up on their stakes, past their use-by date, dying an early death ... and I doubt if we'll get much more fruit this season.

Yes, I know – they're only plants. But I also know they would still be thriving if I'd given them water just a few days ago.

Which brings me back to Grapevine ...



ur colourful, warm-hearted, family-friendly magazine is not unlike the plant that bears the same name. It needs 'feeding' ... it needs 'watering' ... and through almost three long decades you've helped it grow, and spread, and produce more and more fruit.

But we experienced a disappointment last month: our annual Christmas Appeal received a setback – we fell short of our \$70,000 target ... raising only \$44,000 ... leaving us \$26,000 short. Ouch!

I'm not sure exactly why. We believed (on the strength of previous years) that the target was reachable. But maybe our timing was out ... maybe our message missed the mark ... maybe the recession * which is being felt elsewhere is trying to cause a drought at Grapevine, too.

The trouble is, New Year is the one time of year when Grapevine needs a good soaking. And, if 2009 is going to be all that it could be – a year of growth and opportunity – we must achieve an urgent February catch-up.



The truth is, we're going to really struggle without those extra funds ...

Will you help us find that \$26,000 shortfall?

Can you manage a New Year donation of \$50 or \$100? Perhaps you're capable of \$500 or \$1000 or \$5000? Please help us – in whatever way you can.

Our first 2009 edition is on the drawing boards as I write. It promises to be a beaut! And every dollar you can spare will help Grapevine make a greater impact in Kiwi homes over the coming year.

Thanks so much for being there. Together, we're "giving families a lift" ... and thousands of mums and dads, kids and grandkids throughout Godzone are better off as a result.

Oh, by the way ... HAPPY NEW YEAR!

John



* People ask if the recession is likely to hurt Grapevine. And my response is: **NOT if our supporters do what they've done in the past!** Historically, when times have got tough, our friends have just got tougher. They've dug a bit deeper and worked a little harder. So the challenge is: **let's do it again – let's kick the 'R-word' in the butt!**