

An Underground Movement



by Jeannie Dortch (dortchcamp@mindspring.com)

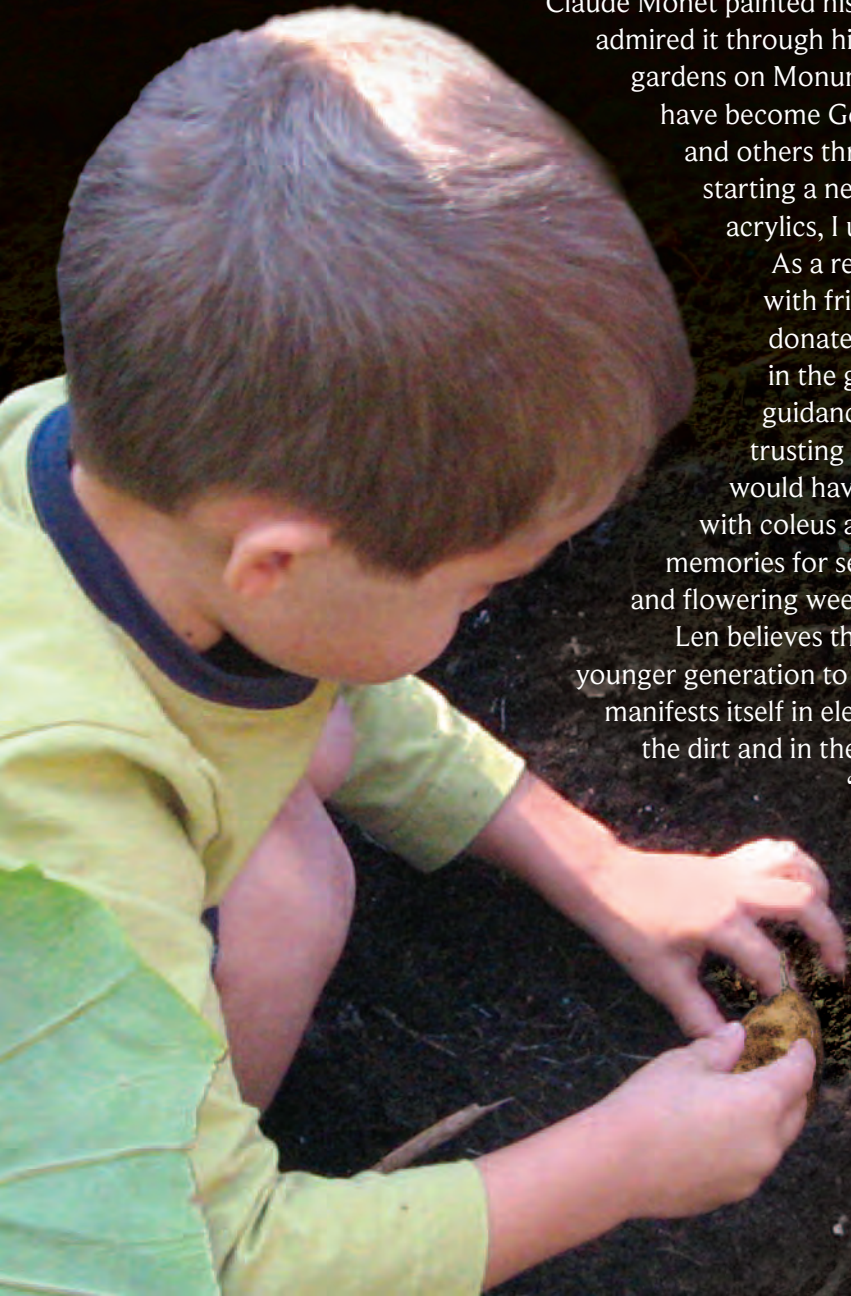
“This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.” (Mark 4:26, 27)

Claude Monet painted his garden at Giverny, France, and the world admired it through his paintings. Dr. Len Morrow plants his gardens on Monument, Mulberry and Park Avenues, and they have become God’s paintings admired by our church family and others throughout the city. Len comments, “It’s like starting a new painting each year, but rather than using acrylics, I use plants.”

As a retired botanist and teacher, Len joins forces with friends and business associates who sell or donate flowers for his projects. What passersby see in the gardens is designed by Len under divine guidance. He faithfully plants what he is given, trusting God’s purposes will be fulfilled: Who but God would have known that planting tobacco and cotton with coleus and zinnias would result in nostalgic memories for senior adults, or that elephant ear caladiums and flowering weeds would delight children.

Len believes that technology has caused many of the younger generation to suffer from “nature deficit disorder.” This manifests itself in electronic recreation instead of outdoor play in the dirt and in the belief that flowers, fruits and vegetables “grow” at the supermarket. This realization led Len to instill in children a new understanding of the sanctity of life found in seeds by working with them to grow gardens at their schools.

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Currently, Len plants and maintains the gardens at five elementary schools in the area, as well as at FBC. When Len noticed available space for a garden at the Pusey House, he approached Mary Hiteman, FBC's pre-school director. This resulted in the First Sprouts program, a kid-friendly vegetable garden that teaches children where food originates.

First Sprouts started with raised beds, but has grown to include tire beds, lattices, trellises, barrels, and even bags of potting soil spilling over with cucumbers on their vines. The children have grown sunflowers, corn, carrots, peppers, tomatoes, gourds, melons, and beans and potatoes. Harvesting so much produce led the children to want to

cook, so with the help of pre-school parents, staff, and the FBC kitchen, each year the children prepare and enjoy a Thanksgiving feast.

Another positive outcome of the program has been sharing the bounty with others. When First Sprouts discovered that the Bhutanese refugees' favorite food was cucumbers, the children grew, harvested, and delivered fifty pounds of this delicious commodity to them. Last summer, Len added a mailbox to the Pusey House garden, where periodically the children find that God has written a letter telling them how proud He is of their efforts to care for His world.

Although the roots of Len's first dream have spread wide, he has more dreams, including a garden that the Bhutanese can work themselves and a program involving the church youth group. When God is at work underground, breaking dirt is the only option. †

Because Len donates more than forty hours a week to this work, volunteers are needed to help plant and weed the beds.

To help, contact Mary Hiteman (Hiteman@FBCRichmond.org).

Opposite page: A preschool child harvests potatoes from a garden off Park Avenue. This page: (Top) An FBC weekday girl plants pansies. Photos by Len Morrow (Right) Children with homegrown gourds. Photo by Nancy Neale



*Garden Cross
©2009, by Janet Hauser*

Seeds Keep Sprouting

Inspired by the sun's rays on the cross and the brilliant colors of the flowers beneath it, artist and new FBC member Janet Hauser captured this beauty on canvas, focusing on the vertical image of the cross to honor Him who had done so much for her. Janet has produced bookmarks of this image with Jesus' Beatitudes on the back and donated

them to the Homeless Ministry, the Muslim Believers' Conference, the Divorce Recovery Workshop, and to Richmond Friends of the Homeless, run by FBC member Shawnee Hansen.

