Published on *Kitchen Gardeners International* (http://kgi.org)

Paying Tribute to Nelson Mandela

Tue, 12/10/2013 - 14:29 -- Roger Doiron

Excerpts from Mandela' autobiography, ?Long Walk to Freedom:?

The Bible tells us that gardens preceded gardeners, but that was not the case at Pollsmoor, where I cultivated a garden that became one of my happiest diversions. It was my way of escaping from the monolithic concrete world that surrounded us. Within a few weeks of surveying all the empty space we had on the building?s roof and how it was bathed the whole day, I decided to start a garden and received permission to do so from the commanding officer.

Each morning, I put on a straw hat and rough gloves and worked in the garden for two hours. Every Sunday, I would supply vegetables to the kitchen so that they could cook a special meal for the common-law prisoners. I also gave quite a lot of my harvest to the warders, who used to bring satchels to take away their fresh vegetables.

A garden was one of the few things in prison that one could control. To plant a seed, watch it grow, to tend it and then harvest it, offered a simple but enduring satisfaction. The sense of being the custodian of this small patch of earth offered a taste of freedom.

In some ways, I saw the garden as a metaphor for certain aspects of my life. A leader must also tend his garden; he, too, plants seeds, and then watches, cultivates, and harvests the results. Like the gardener, a leader must take responsibility for what he cultivates; he must mind his work, try to repel enemies, preserve what can be preserved, and eliminate what cannot succeed.

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