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Growing, Older: A Chronicle of Death, Life, and Vegetables

Joan Dye Gussow

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Michael Pollan calls her one of his food heroes. Barbara Kingsolver credits her with shaping the history and politics of food in the United States. And countless others who have vied for a food revolution, pushed organics, and reawakened Americans to growing their own food and eating locally consider her both teacher and muse.Joan Gussow has influenced thousands through her books, *This Organic Life* and *The Feeding Web*, her lectures, and the simple fact that she lives what she preaches. Now in her eighties, she stops once more to pass along some wisdom-surprising, inspiring, and controversial-via the pen.

Gussow's memoir *Growing, Older* begins when she loses her husband of 40 years to cancer and, two weeks later, finds herself skipping down the street-much to her alarm. Why wasn't she grieving in all the normal ways? With humor and wit, she explains how she stopped worrying about why she was smiling and went on worrying, instead, and as she always has, about the possibility that the world around her was headed off a cliff. But hers is not a tale, or message, of gloom. Rather it is an affirmation of a life's work-and work in general.

Lacking a partner's assistance, Gussow continued the hard labor of growing her own year-round diet. She dealt single-handedly with a rising tidal river that regularly drowned her garden, with muskrat interlopers, broken appliances, bodily decay, and river trash-all the while bucking popular notions of how "an elderly widowed woman" ought to behave.

Scattered throughout are urgent suggestions about what growing older on a changing planet will call on all of us to do: learn self-reliance and self-restraint, yield graciously if not always happily to necessity, and-since there is no other choice-come to terms with the insistencies of the natural world. Gussow delivers another literary gem-one that women curious about aging, gardeners curious about contending with increasingly intense weather, or environmentalists curious about the future will embrace.

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