

Old growth

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When our family lived in western Pennsylvania we had a rather large yard. It was like a magnet for kids in the neighborhood, which was okay with us. That way we knew where our own children were. It was also neat to see how the older kids would let the younger ones participate as they played whatever sport was in season—football in the fall, soccer in the spring, baseball in summer. They played so much baseball in the summer that they wore base paths in the lawn. When another parent expressed concern about what was happening to our lawn, I said, "We're growing children now. We'll grow grass later."

Many years have passed since then, and the children have long left the nest. In the meantime we've had lots of opportunities to grow grass. But I never was good at it, maybe because I refused to use fertilizers and weed killers. Even without kids around, our lawn always left something to be desired. It just never became a priority. Frankly, I'd rather be outside cycling when the weather is nice than laboring in the lawn—or, in any weather, inside reading.

Now we live in a condo community, and other people take care of the lawn. I neither grow nor cut the grass. And it's the best grass we've ever had, probably because of all those additives that I eschewed. That and the fact that the people who work on it get paid for their labors.

So what are we growing now? I guess you could say we're growing old. I actually like that figure, "growing old." It is so much better than "winding down" or "going over the hill." I like the idea that, though children grow in other ways, even as senior adults we're still growing. Growth signifies something natural, something that must be nurtured and attended to. We have to work at it.

In my old age I hope to keep growing—spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, and relationally—even though my body may be in decline. That's both a challenging and a pleasant thought, wouldn't you agree?