

## Grampa

"Grampa, tell me about the word *growth*—our teacher told us that people used to believe in it, but I don't even know what it means."

Well, a long time ago, people used to think that "growth" was important. They didn't talk about what it meant, or whether it might mean different things to different people, or whether it might be good in some situations and not so good in others. For most people, growth was used to describe economic activity that would keep on expanding or growing, just like you kids. Right now, you're not as tall as you will be some day. You and I both imagine that you will "grow" to a certain size. Once you get to that size, you'll stop growing. If you didn't, you could become so big you couldn't find clothes that fit, or get through a door, or you'd need to eat and eat and eat all the time just to feed your ever-growing body. You'd feel uncomfortable, probably terrible, and eventually your body would give up and you would die, because it just wasn't designed to keep growing. Nothing but wisdom can continue growing and growing.



Now, people never thought about growth slowing or stopping. Their focus was on making money. They thought that their most important task was to keep making more money each year, so their pile of money would grow and grow. It didn't matter to them how they were making money, or where they were making money, only that the amount of money would grow. The only way they could imagine making more money was to make more things to sell. This meant they needed more and more materials in order to make more and more things. They also needed to get a lot of people to buy those things. This meant they had to find ways to make those people buy all those things they made.

To get more and more people to buy the things, they had to make up stories about how the new things they made were really useful, or helpful, or attractive, or essential. Back then, people came to believe that *things* made life better and so people came to believe that the more things they had, the better life was.

Back then, there were lots of people on Earth. Most of the people did not have a lot of things. They did not have much food, they did not have cars, or good shelter, or education. It seemed that there were so many people who could benefit from having more things.

The people who made the things generally didn't care about what it was that they made, only that they could sell them and make money. They thought that if they had more money, they could buy

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things with that money and the things they bought would make them happy. They thought things would make them happy because that was the story they heard over and over, just like the stories you like to have me tell you over and over. The sad thing is, this story about things just isn't true. That story was made up so they could sell more things. The people who heard the story over and over thought it was true. They would buy things, and for a short while they thought their life was happier. But it wasn't long before the things they bought seemed old, or not as useful, or broke, or there was a better thing that they had to get.



Remember when you were little, when you ate too much candy when Mommy was out working in the garden? At first it seemed like such a wonderful thing, discovering where Mommy had hidden the candy. There was so much of it! And she was outside! So you ate more and more, and for a while it seemed so much fun! Then after a while you didn't feel so well, and after a little more time you started to feel sick. Then you were really sick.

Most people are a lot like that. They think things will make them happy, then when they get more and more of them, they feel less and less happy. The problem is that something new comes along and they think, well, **This Time** when I get this **New Thing** I'll be happy again. And, for a short time, they feel a bit happier. After a while, they discover that they

have so many things piled up and they really didn't have the money for them. Because of the Growth Story, they continue to try and grow happiness by getting more and more things. But happiness doesn't grow through things.

A long *long* time ago, there were not many people on Earth. The people who lived way back then led a very simple life. Things that were made were really practical. For a long time, the number of people did not increase, or grow, much at all. Then, a few centuries ago, they discovered why most people didn't live very long. A fix occurred and the number of people began to increase. About the same time, other people discovered how to make fire much more useful. Soon there were both more and more people and more and more things for those people along with more stories about how those things made people happy.

You're old enough now to know the truth about Santa Claus. But a few years ago, you believed everything your parents and teachers told you about him. About how he knows who is naughty and who is nice. About how at midnight on Christmas Eve he visits every child in the world and brings them presents (which are, of course, things). About his sleigh and reindeer and the elves at

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the North Pole. When you were little, you loved that story, and you were sad when you discovered the story isn't true. But look at you! All grown up! You're smarter now. The story might have been fun and useful for you, then, but now you don't need it.

It's the same with the story of things. It may have been a useful story for a certain period when the idea of growth seemed to make some sense. Really, back then, it was mostly harmless. Well, actually, many people died and some very bad things were done, all in the name of growth. But people were like kids back then, really like young kids. So, for a long time, just like you when you believed in Santa Claus, the people continued to believe in growth so they could make more money. In general, to them, growth was good. Cities would grow. Businesses would grow. The number of things people did every day would grow. People not only wanted more things, but they wanted to do more things every day. They thought that the more they did every day, the happier they would feel and the more they would get done. Getting things done was very important; the more you could get done, the better you believed you were. What happened then was that people got lost. They were doing so many activities, trying to earn more money, so they could buy more things, that they were too busy to notice that they weren't really that happy.

Of course, there were certain kinds of growth that no one wanted. Back then, there was a kind of growth called cancer that would grow in people's bodies. No one wanted that kind of growth, because the cancer would just keep growing and eventually it would kill the person it was in.

No one wanted to die, so some people spent a lot of time trying to find a way to stop the cancer from growing. That cost a lot of money, so the people with cancer, or their friends or family, would have to work harder to earn the money to stop the cancer. Someone noticed that there was more and more cancer, and they wondered if all those things, and all those activities, and all that growth might be causing cancer.

People did many things then that they don't do now, because they believed the stories. Unlike you, who grew up and learned that Santa Claus wasn't really real, they didn't learn that the stories about things and activities and growth were really like Santa Claus.

You live in a world where people know what really makes them happy. They know that what really makes being alive wonderful is feeling a part of something big and beautiful and working in harmony. You live in a world where people realize that another story told back then—"The best things in life are free"—is really the right story. For a long time, this story was part of a song. People liked the song, but didn't believe it was the right story for them. They would have called it a fairy tale, or a fantasy, or idealistic, or a dream—they would have said that it was unrealistic, impossible, or even wrong.

"But Grampa, how did the growth story end? How come we don't know about it now?"

First, you have to know how the growth story began. I told you that a long time ago there were not very many people on Earth. Back then, a group of people wrote a popular book—the book

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said: "Multiply and subdue the earth." The word *multiply* meant for the people to have more children, because there weren't very many people on the earth, and the story tellers felt that more people would be a good thing. *Subdue the earth* meant take whatever you need from the Earth. If the Earth didn't easily give you what you wanted, then you would use whatever force you needed to make the Earth obey. The story tellers felt that people were more important than the Earth, rather than, as you now know, that people are part of the Earth, not more important. Remember, it was a long long time ago and most people did not question stories then. They simply listened. Every now and then a few people questioned the story but the story tellers did not like that so they killed the questioners. They did it in public, to make sure that any other questioners would know that if they asked questions, they would be killed as well.

We believe that it is fine for any story teller to think his or her story is the only true story. But we don't believe that the story teller has the right to impose his or her story on everyone. Remember the story where Billy wanted everyone to build a sand castle at the beach just the way he thought it had to be done? When Linda didn't want to build her castle Billy's way, Billy smashed her castle. Everyone got in a fight and no one was happy. That was when Billy and Linda were 4 years old. Now they are both 85. Do you think Billy would want everyone to build a sand castle only his way now? What happened? Billy grew up.

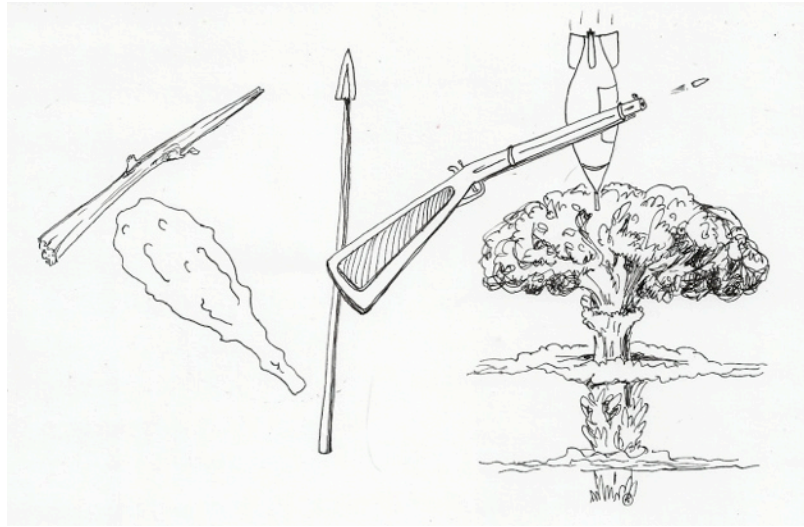


So, what ended the growth story? After a long long time when a lot of people were very unhappy, they slowly began to grow up. You might think I am being silly, saying that the growth story ended when the people grew up. What I mean is that, now, when most people get older, they get wiser. Back then, when most people got older, they didn't get wiser, because they still believed the old growth story, which is not a wise story at all. It was story written a long long time ago when no one thought they needed to grow up, and there was no one to make them grow up. Mostly, it didn't matter if they didn't grow up, even if they were often unhappy, because the Earth was too big to care about their squabbles. Eventually, more or less all of a sudden, the number of people who wanted things and the number of things they wanted became really really large. So large that the Earth couldn't give everyone what they wanted. There either had to be less people wanting a lot of things, or a lot of people wanting fewer things. No one wanted to die, and no one wanted to give up what they had.

To answer your question, the reason you don't know about the growth story now is that it is no longer worth telling. I don't know if you know that a long time ago, people used to kill each other. A really long time ago, they used to beat each other with sticks which they called clubs.

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Then they used spears, which were long sticks with a sharp end. Then they figured out more and more horrible ways to kill. They used to have something called a gun, which would emit a small



hard pebble that would smash through your skin and tear your insides out. They used to have something called a bomb, and at one point they made a really big bomb called a nuclear bomb. A bomb is a small box that explodes, and when it does it wrecks everything nearby—people, trees, animals, buildings, ideas. All these killing things were called "weapons". You can learn about weapons if you want, but we no longer teach you about them because they are ancient. There was a time when people used to wear animal skins for clothing. We don't teach you about that because no one does it now. The same is true about the growth story. It is something people did a long time ago, when they weren't wise, when they believed that they were better than the Earth.

The growth story was about having more and more physical things. So many things were wanted by so many people that the Earth could not provide it. Growing up meant giving up the growth story and creating a new story, a story about happiness through feelings such as love, harmony, kindness, sharing, compassion, forgiveness, humility, freedom. These words describe intentions and motivations. They have no limitations. You can never have too much of any of them. The more of them you have, the better the Earth. They don't weigh anything, they don't take any effort or energy or parts of the Earth to make, they don't harm anything. If one person has more of them another person doesn't have less.

All the living energies on Earth, besides people, had long long ago come into a slow rhythmic dance with each other. Sometimes there would be more of one living energy, but as it took up more and more space on Earth, other living energies would resist.

No one energy could become the only living energy on Earth. There was movement up and down, back and forth, as tiny parts of the Universe would reassemble themselves into different forms of living energies. Some of these creations would emerge, almost like seeds popping up

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from the earth. Others would recede back into the earth. These living energies were called species. People learned that, as time went by, some species were more flexible in their ability to stay in harmony or balance with the other species than others. The ones that were flexible lasted longest.

During the growth story, people had great difficulty learning to stay in balance. Species began to recede quickly—they were not able to retain their flexibility because people were not living in harmony with the Earth. The balance of living things, the slow rhythmic dance, was lost. People, because they were able to subdue the Earth far better than other living energies, and because they believed in the growth story, and because they had never learned to dance harmoniously with Earth, became not just a bully, like Billy was at the beach, but dangerous to the other living energies. They had to learn that they needed those other species, and that if they destroyed them, they would destroy themselves.

It was not an easy lesson to learn. Even though many people had heard of wisdom, compassion, generosity, love, kindness, and other ways of being in harmony, and even though many people could, from time to time, offer those harmonious ways to themselves and other species, the challenge of changing the growth story to the balance story felt like as if they were being forced to give up the things that made them happy. When Billy smashed Linda's castle and everyone got in a fight, the fight ended because Billy's parents, who were much bigger than Billy, picked him up and gave him a big time out. The growth story began to end when the Earth, which some people used to call "Mother Earth", began to change. All the basic life-giving aspects of the Earth began to change. Some places that were cold became hot. Some places that were hot and rainy became hot and dry. A lot of fresh water became salt water which no one could drink. Food wouldn't grow the way people had come to expect. Many changes started happening quickly. Most of the changes caused people to have less food, less water, less of what had seemed to be an endless bounty from the Earth. The subdue-the-earth story didn't seem to be working. No longer was it easy to subdue the Earth.

As the old story seemed less and less helpful, some people started to create the Balance Story. A word they used back at the beginning of this process was 'sustainable'. They could see that the Subdue Story was causing more and more distress. They could not see how the story could be changed to keep growth going without causing more harm. They began to see how growth led to harm not only to other living energies, but to themselves. The Subdue Story created a separation between all other energies and people—the idea of the story is that people owned everything about the Earth. When you own something you feel like you can do whatever you want with it, including treating it with disrespect. Do you remember what you used to do with some of your toys? When you were angry, you would throw your teddy bear across the room. You didn't think the bear had feelings, and even if you thought it did, you were bigger and it was your bear—you owned the bear. When you threw it hard against the wall, it didn't yell at you or leave. If it got torn, you would ask your parent to fix it or get you another one. People had been treating the Earth like that. For a long time, the Earth didn't yell or throw something back at you. Then the Earth started to change. The Earth is way bigger than people. It started to enforce some fairness

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rules. It was as if your teddy bear suddenly walked over to your favorite shirt and tore it to shreds in front of you and said that throwing it wasn't fair or respectful. If you got mad at the teddy bear again, imagine that all of a sudden it would get as large as a real bear, and have real claws! Suddenly you wouldn't feel free to throw it across the room. For a long time it had been tolerant, but now it was insisting on Respect and Fair Play. The Earth was like that.

For humans, changing stories is often hard, but it can be done. People learn to accept the new story and move on, just like you did when you learned that the details about Santa Claus were not true. The old kind of growth, which was the growth of things and caused harm to the Earth, faded off, and it was replaced by a new kind of growth—the growth of respect, tolerance, kindness, compassion and all the other ways of being which bring joy, creativity, inspiration, and cooperation. This is growth of the spirit. It is precious, and it is free! It is abundant! There can never be enough! It can start anywhere from the smallest gesture. You can give it away and never lose it! It's like everyone becoming Santa Claus every day! People learned to replace their want for things with the fun of bringing happiness, comfort, joy to others and to all the living species on the planet!

Now it's time for you to create a story, in pictures or words or music or however you feel most playful and expressive, of how to bring joy to yourselves and something else today.

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For money you can have everything it is said. No, that is not true. You can buy food, but not appetite; medicine, but not health; soft beds, but not sleep; knowledge but not intelligence; glitter, but not comfort; fun, but not pleasure; acquaintances, but not friendship; servants, but not faithfulness; grey hair, but not honor; quiet days, but not peace. The shell of all things you can get for money. But not the kernel. That cannot be had for money.

-Arne Garborg, writer (1851-1924) from: A Word A Day, 2/24/2010

Grampa was written by Joe Symons and illustrated by Anita Orne.