

# Curiosity — the driving force in human growth

By David Gibson  
NC News Service

The struggle between an expanding stomach and its owner, a man reaching middle age, was recounted in a short story by American writer John Cheever. The stomach won the struggle. The personal expansion the man then underwent may have been typical, though not the sort of growth actively sought out by people his age.

What kinds of personal growth are open to adults like the man in Cheever's story? Undoubtedly Cheever had his finger on a real concern of many who would like to alter lifestyles by eating less. Probably they'd also like to alter lifestyles in other ways: by reducing stress or getting free of a habit that enslaves them. Some want to grow by entering into more valuable conversations with spouses and friends — and by listening more carefully to those very people.

The "me generation" proposes that you grow best by becoming rigorously independent, seizing control over life's events and making certain those events are to your advantage. And, it can't do much good if life's events swirl out of control, making you their victim.

But there is another side of the coin. It is found in a Gospel that proposes adults grow by discovering the true potential of interdependence.

**"Communication with the others who are intimate parts of your life is of the essence when it comes to decisions about change."**

The pursuit of adult growth can be frustrating at times.

A photographer can observe a plant's development over time, capturing each stage of that development on film. Yet if you sit still and watch a plant, you can't see it growing.

It is much the same with personal growth. After a long period, an adult looks back and says "Yes, I've grown, matured." But

the growth may have been nearly imperceptible all along the way. Furthermore, the growth likely occurred along a twisting, irregular path.

It seems that the conscious decision to foster personal growth does not produce instant perfection.

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A decision to grow — to develop as a person — is a decision to change. This kind of decision, of course, can produce its own set of fears. Not least is the fear that your own change won't be welcomed by others — or, worse, that your changes will hurt others. This fear can be a healthy reminder, however, that personal change isn't achieved in isolation. Communication with the others who are intimate parts of your life is of the essence when it comes to decisions about change. Isn't it possible that people will grow together?

There is, however, a basic curiosity that drives people to develop as persons. We sense that we are underdeveloped in certain areas.

This writer confesses he is an underdeveloped pianist. At age 19, 12 years of piano were behind me — literally. I gave it up, only to return 20 years later wondering just how much I'd left behind. Our niece, a piano teacher, says she now takes more and more students in their 40s, people just like me. They are curious to discover how much they left behind — to recapture a missing part of themselves.

Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk who was an influential writer, was driven by curiosity about his potential for spiritual growth. He died of accidental electrocution while visiting the Far East. But he left behind his "Asian Journal" to reveal just how intense his curiosity was about ways to grow as a Christian.

Like Father Merton, many people suspect there are depths not yet touched within themselves. And they become curious about those depths. It is, I think, a curiosity colored by the sense that each human person is incomplete — with much more to come in the future.

(Gibson is editor of Faith Today.)

By Suzanne Elson  
NC News Service

Some of us sat in comfortable chairs, others perched on chairs arms, most of us leaning against the carpeted floor, the way people find most comfortable in any location.

That was 25 years ago. We were a group of senior women gathered in the living room of a red brick dormitory at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

We were together for a bit of conversation with the college president. We would soon graduate and he wanted a few informal words with us.

It's amazing how I still remember the faces and personalities of the room — my roommate, my close friends, just Betty. We'd lived together and fun together for four years, we were leaving.

I don't remember the words President Johnson said to me that evening, but I remember

## An eye on

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## Life's mean

By Father John Castlot  
NC News Service

Jesus was a dinner guest at the home of a certain man named Simon (Luke 7). His host had treated him quite rudely, omitting the customary kiss of greeting and the soothing anointing of his head with perfumed oil.

This had to create a certain tension and matters didn't improve.

The dining area was on the ground floor, open to the street. The interesting talk of a group of intelligent men was a strong attraction and it was not unusual for passersby to slip in unobtrusively to sit quietly along the wall.

On this occasion the party crasher was a woman, a notorious streetwalker. Her entrance surely brought the conversation to a sudden, embarrassed halt. The guests

reclined around small tables, supporting themselves on their left elbows, with their legs extended into the room.

The woman made straight for Jesus, fell at his feet and wept so copiously that her tears splashed on them. Embarrassed now, she hurriedly wiped away the tears with her hair (loose hair was the mark of a loose woman). Then, brazenly, she kissed his feet and rubbed them with scented oil she had in a vase.

This was too much for Simon who muttered: "If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is that touches him, she is a sinner."

Jesus then told about two men who owed a moneylender unequal amounts. The creditor wrote off both debts. Which person would be more grateful? Simon grudgingly replied: the one whose debt