

AN ON — — ING ESSAY



On Growing

a garden, and the people we plant in it

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Dedication

a double dedication, side by side — one to each of my children

To My Daughter

You don't have any reason to be afraid, you're already asking all the right questions decades before I ever did. Your future is bright, embrace that and don't let go. Every time we talk about life, my mind expands a little more into the future. All I can see for you, is dreams coming true. Reach for the stars.

To My Son

My literal mirror. "My favorite son," as I call him. "I'm your only son" he tells me, not knowing this admission still makes me right. I asked him one day, how he wanted to be remembered. He wants to help people, like his dad. He's just not sure how. Keep that door open, child. Never close your eyes to the possibilities of the future, and your reality will only be as crazy as your most creative dream.

What is the earliest memory you have? Some people have been documented as being able to remember the very day they entered the birth canal and approached the light.

Are they telling the truth? It doesn't matter. That's between them, and well....themselves.

I can't remember back that far, but I've spoken to many children who seem to remember *before* the day they were born. This is a phenomenon that has occurred many times throughout history.

Past life premonitions. Views of "the other side," but looking backwards in time instead of forwards.

Where do we lose this perspective?

Wordsworth asked the same thing two hundred years ago, only he answered it like a man who still half-remembered the answer. He wrote that we arrive into this world *trailing clouds of glory*—that *Heaven lies about us in our infancy*—and then, slowly, the shades of the prison-house begin to close around the growing boy. He didn't think the child invented its wonder. He thought the child *remembered* it, and that growing up was mostly a long forgetting.

Scientists say it's around 7–8 years old that the real rules of reality start to take hold on a young mind.

After that, it's all environmental. Well, not all. But mostly.

We inflict our children with the toxic realities we've built for ourselves.

Children aren't born depressed, angry, or lost. We teach them those things.

Rousseau said it cleaner than I can: everything is good as it leaves the hands of its maker, and degenerates in the hands of man. The raw material of the soul is fine. It's the handling that scratches it.

Jung went one layer deeper. He said nothing weighs on a child quite like the un-lived life of the parent—the dreams we abandoned, the fear we never faced, the version of ourselves we quietly gave up on.

Children inherit our debts before they ever learn the word for money. So maybe the most honest thing a parent can do is keep living. Keep facing the things we'd rather hand down.

I spent a lot of my life taking pharmaceuticals for conditions I realized I allowed myself to have. Are these drugs important? Of course. They bridge the gap for a lot of people, make one day viable as it approaches the next.

But one truth that needs to be taken as we move forward is that we're not meant to take these types of things forever, and they're only effective with therapy.

I found in my own path, therapy was all I ultimately needed. This is not a claim of clinical success, more or less a personal one. But I can assure you that most people are capable of what I've achieved, it's in our DNA. Again, not a claim of clinical success, but look at what the science community is doing **RIGHT THIS MOMENT**.

Waking up.

Realizing there's more to life than extending mortality, and in the process of understanding that, they've begun to unlock new methods of extending mortality.

Funny how that works out, isn't it?

We're not meant to live forever, but maybe we're meant to be, forever.



One day, we're going to look back at this and wonder what the heck was wrong with us. Fighting all the time, over things like money and power.

Not understanding that real power comes from within.

Life is beautiful, depending on how you look at it. Go beyond your five senses, and "feel" your life as you pass through time.

Blake promised that if the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear as it is—infinite. A child doesn't need them cleansed. They were never dirty yet.

Feels like drifting down a river you can't control, but somehow an unknown force keeps you from bouncing off the sides.

Synchronicity.

We need to stop training our children that the world is a terrible place. That's an idea we as humans created. Children don't see that. We pull back the curtain and show them who's really pulling the strings, the illusion fades, and they become parts of the machine like we have been for so long.

From the day they join us, they perceive the world the way it was meant to be seen, no adulterants necessary.

Adulterants. As I said in *On Feeling*, this is such a funny word to put in place of the sensation of maturity being superpositioned over the beautiful and innocent viewpoint of a child.

We force them to be adults. We never give them a choice.

We tell them to exercise patience, but we're not patient when they're telling us about the things that make them happy.

Just the other day, my son told me something that ended up turning into a full piece of prose.

He's one of my strongest muses.

I spent quite a long time being not so great of a father, only to come around and realize all the things I said above over the years. There is true beauty in being a parent. A love that can't be explained. A love so strong that even my wife resonates with it, though neither of my children are hers, you wouldn't be able to tell. Her love for them is inexplicably real.

Of every image human beings have ever made—every war, every king, every god—the one we keep returning to, century after century, brush after brush, is a parent holding a child. Mary Cassatt spent a whole life on it and never ran out. The Madonna and child has been painted more times than any other face in history. We are a species that, when handed paint, keeps drawing the same quiet thing: someone smaller, held by someone who refuses to put them down.

Are we supposed to breed people or breed thought? Both. Fortunately some of us don't want to breed people, and that's okay too. But I only ask you this, don't be bothered by the children of others. Not only does it take a household, it takes a village, a city, a country, and a planet in 2026. We're going to get this right one day.

One day. Until then.

Gibran wrote that our children are not ours—that they come *through* us but not *from* us, that they are life's longing for itself. He said we are the bows, and our children the living arrows. The archer bends the bow with all his strength, not so the bow can keep the arrow, but so the arrow can fly swift and far. I think that's the whole job, said plainly. We are not the destination. We are the tension that gives them their distance.



If I get to do one thing before I go, it will be to ensure that they have everything they need to move forward.

To grow.

To live.

To be, everything they want to be. Which is exactly everything they were meant to be.

There's an old line—a society grows great when its elders plant trees whose shade they know they'll never sit in. I've made my peace with the shade. I won't see all of it. That was never the point.

I wouldn't be the person I am, without their laughter.

This is music too, and it resonated with me in a way that spilled these words on to the page.

Avery and Jasmine, I love you with all my heart.

I promise to always water the garden I've planted, if you promise to grow and never stop.

Even when the “great design” takes me away from your eyes, embrace this piece yourselves, and remember I’m right next to you, forever and a day.



Colophon

*“I promise to always water the garden I’ve planted, if
you promise to grow and never stop.”*

On Growing is part of the ongoing *On ——ing* series — lyric-philosophical essays on perception, time, and the legible traces an aligned life leaves behind.

*On Facing · On Rising · On Arriving · On Lasting · On Observing · On Watching
· On Being · On Seeing · On Counting · On Joining · On Mirroring · On Feeling*

Written by Jamison Johnson · June 2026

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