

FOREWORD:

What If We Took More Risks?

Joe Laur and Isabelle St-Jean



We want to lay out a bit of our individual journeys and the collaborative thinking that led to this book. So here we share with you how the volume in your hands and the concepts it contains came to be.

Joe's Path

On my fifty-fifth birthday, I took a little time for reflection. I had always had a lighthearted notion that I could live to the ripe age of 110, the same age Joseph, my namesake in Genesis, achieved. After all, three of my four grandparents lived into their nineties, and the youngster of the four died at eighty-five. I figured with a little luck and healthy living, I could make 110 in reasonably good shape. In any case, at fifty-five, at least as much of my life span lay behind me as before me. That got me thinking: Regardless of longevity, how did I want to spend the rest of my days? What could I do in the years remaining to me? What would the second half of my life mean, and how did I want to live it?

I began to frame in my mind and heart some of the key questions that would later be addressed by the contributors to this anthology. Instead of playing it safe, as is often the tendency as we age, what if we took more risks, spoke out on what was most important to us, moved boldly (at least in spirit, if not always physically), and lived each day more fully than the next?

Around this time I met Isabelle St-Jean at a conference on business and sustainability that I had conceived and facilitated. As we talked, we discovered our common interest in inspiring our peers to participate even more fully in the grand endeavor of passing on a more loving, just, and healthy planet to future generations. We had a wonderful and deep conversation about the need and opportunity for those in the "second act" of life to take action boldly and to live ever more

audaciously as the years pass. We also both felt a strong desire to do something to counter our culture's fear of aging.

In true collaborative fashion, we decided to help launch an anthology of writings by people both well known and little known who were living and aging audaciously. The stories told by these people would model audacious aging and inspire the rest of us to take our own audacious acts at every stage in life. As Muriel Rukeyser stated, "The universe is made of stories, not atoms."

It is our hope that this book will contribute to the radical redefinition of aging under way in our society. Many baby boomers thought the revolution would take place in the Sixties. Now they are awakening to the reality that it may take place in their sixties!

Isabelle's Story

When I attended the Society for Organizational Learning's conference on sustainability in 2006, I heard Joe Laur deliver a powerful call to action to those of us at the gateway of our life's second half. At that time I was in the midst of writing my own book, *Living Forward, Giving Back: A Practical Guide to Fulfillment in Midlife and Beyond*. Joe and I quickly got fired up in an exchange of ideas and talked from our respective coasts for several months after that, intent on helping to ignite a collective spirit among elders and baby boomers regarding the future—our own and that of the planet.

I told Joe about one of my models for audacious aging: my friend Jan Furst, who is ninety-five as of this writing. Jan has kept up his practice of fencing, just published his third book, and recently started a nonprofit organization to sponsor education in Ghana. Being with Jan stimulates in me questions about how I will keep making a significant contribution as the decades stack up and bring me closer to my last year, my last month, or my last week.

Perhaps you too are reflecting on these kinds of questions. We hope this trailblazing anthology, filled with provocative and empowering ideas, will inspire you to live more boldly and audaciously. We urge this, not for the mere sake of boldness or audacity, but with the knowledge that time is of the essence for the human race.

No matter our age, each of us has the opportunity to be continuously reborn. We are reborn when we take a stand on behalf of the future and bring it forth with both our deep yearning and the power of our actions and words. We are reborn when we unleash our creativity and our fire to re-enchant the world with a love for nature and for everything alive. And we are reborn when we shed the remnants of our

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guarded, timid ways to reveal our true, divinely imperfect beauty, core identity, and authentic strength. These are the rebirths needed to carry the human race and the planet into the future.

We invite you to ride with us on the wings of courage, from the heightened perspective afforded by years of journeying. This book provides tools, information, and inspiration for the ride. May we all rise to the challenge of transforming our society from a youth/appearance-worshipping culture into one that fosters the values of the heart, supports the evolution of consciousness, and leaves to future generations a legacy of which we can be wildly proud.

Joe Laur
Isabelle St-Jean

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