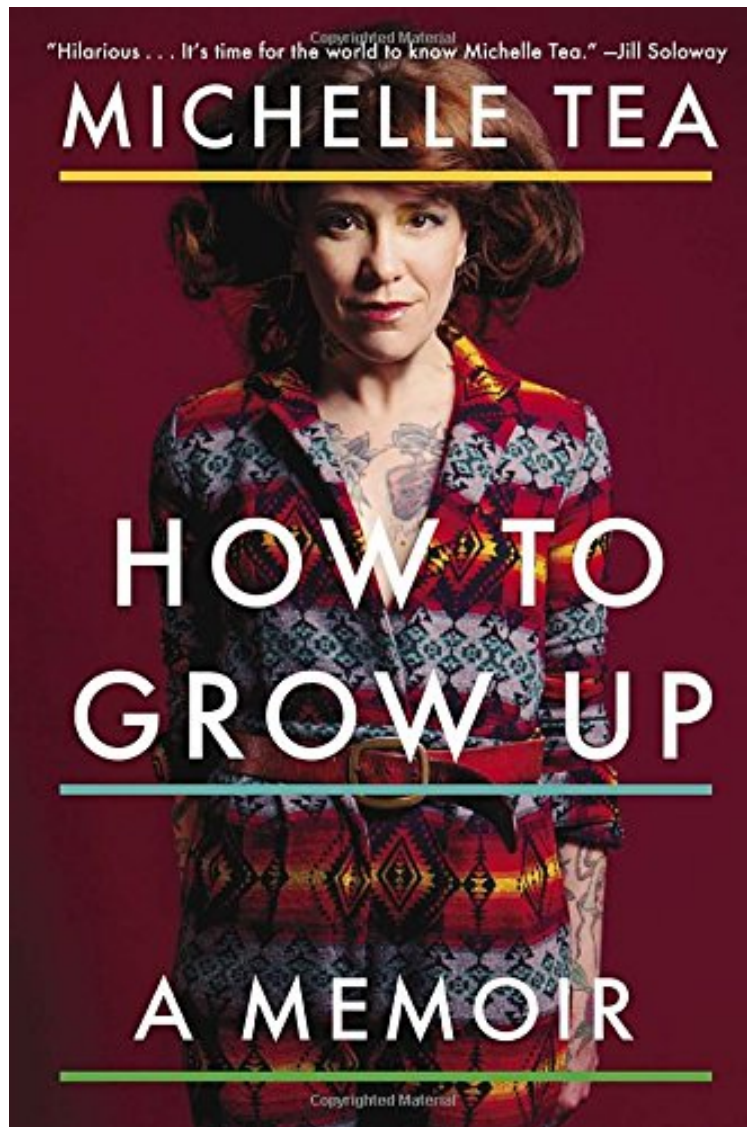


## How to Grow Up: A Memoir

*Michelle Tea*

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**Michelle Tea : How to Grow Up: A Memoir** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised How to Grow Up: A Memoir:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A funny, smart, engaging memoir By zoe bower I really loved this book! I read Michelle Tea's book *The Innocent Mistakes and Passionate Corruption of One Girl in America* when I was a 16 year old punk rock girl and zine writer in a small Northern California town. Her writing made a huge impact on me then, and inspired me to write as well. Fast forward 20 years later, to re-discover Michelle Tea and "How to Grow Up" is like catching up with a long lost friend, and find out that they've gone through all the same dizzying

highs, hilarious, humbling rock-bottom lows, bitter tears, magical love luck and good fortune that you have. Michelle you are an inspiration!! I loved this book! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Funny joyful! By CustomerLoved reading relating to her many varied life experiences! A great contemporary voice and female author to read more from. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Wildly entertaining story and yet so relatable! By KatrinaI thoroughly enjoyed this modern day coming of age story. And although I had a pretty different "growing up" experience, I found Michelle Tea's story easy to relate to. If you've ever felt like a late bloomer to the world of grownups, you will find comfort in this book.

"A gutsy, wise memoir-in-essays from a writer praised as 'impossible to put down'" —PeopleFrom the author of the acclaimed genre-bending *Black Wave* comes this moving personal essay collection about the trials and triumphs of shedding your vices in order to find yourself. As an aspiring young writer in San Francisco, Michelle Tea lived in a scuzzy communal house: she drank; she smoked; she snorted anything she got her hands on; she toiled for the minimum wage; she dated men and women, and sometimes both at once. But between hangovers and dead-end jobs, she scrawled in notebooks and organized dive bar poetry readings, working to make her literary dreams a reality. In *How to Grow Up*, Tea shares her awkward stumble towards the life of a *Bona Fide Grown-Up*: healthy, responsible, self-aware, and stable. She writes about passion, about her fraught relationship with money, about adoring Barney's while shopping at thrift stores, about breakups and the fertile ground between relationships, about roommates and rent, and about being superstitious ("why not, it imbues this harsh world of ours with a bit of magic"). At once heartwarming and darkly comic, *How to Grow Up* proves that the road less traveled may be a difficult one, but if you embrace life's uncertainty and dust yourself off after every screw up, slowly but surely, you just might make it to adulthood. "Wild, wickedly funny, and refreshingly relevant." —Elle "This compulsively readable collection is so damn good, you'll tear through the whole thing (and possibly take notes along the way)." —Bustle

Praise for *How To Grow Up*: "Wild, wickedly funny, and refreshingly relevant." —Elle "An impassioned and honest take on a difficult topic: life itself." —The Boston Globe "Hilarious... Tea has a style, and a sense of humor, all her own." —The SF Gate "Brave and unexpectedly wise....Michelle Tea is a goddess." —The SF Examiner "Straight up riveting." —PAPER Magazine "...This compulsively readable collection is so damn good, you'll tear through the whole thing (and possibly take notes along the way)." —Bustle "An engaging and darkly funny memoir." —Kirkus "Charming." —Publishers Weekly "The peerless Michelle Tea reflects on her thoroughly extraordinary life." —Largehearted Boy "Fascinating... a fearless and honest writer." —Flavorwire "A beautiful book with plenty of self-effacing humor" —*BoldItalic* "Her 'meandering and counterintuitive' path may not inspire imitators. But Tea's candid and colorful writing...speaks to her ability to function as an adult without losing sight of her wackier self." —Mother Jones Praise for Michelle Tea: "Raucous ... [and] unapologetically raw." —New York Times "A+" —Entertainment Weekly About the Author MICHELLE TEA is the author of four memoirs, one novel, a collection of poetry and a Young Adult Fantasy series. She is the creator and editor of Mutha Magazine, and blogs regularly about her attempts to get pregnant on xoJane.com. She is founder and Artistic Director of RADAR Productions, a literary organization that produces monthly reading series, the international Sister Spit performance tour, the Sister Spit Books imprint on City Lights, and other events. She lives in San Francisco with her partner Dashiell and their dog, Charlie. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. \*\*\*This excerpt is from an advance uncorrected proof\*\*\* Copyright © 2015 Michelle Tea. You Deserve This I chose the apartment because of the persimmon tree outside the bedroom window. I haven't always selected my residences based on special magical details—more like, if I was lucky to score a room in an apartment that was a cheap-o price, I snagged it. Never mind if people were shooting up between the cars parked outside my door, or if an anal yet ambitious roommate attempted to charge me an hourly rate for the housekeeping she did (true stories). Never mind if a nation of cockroaches scattered when a light flicked on and roommates responded to my horror with a snotty directive to "learn to cohabit peacefully with another species" (true story). Never mind if the shower was a tin can with a floor so rusted that one had to stand upon a milk crate in a pair of Tevas in order to bathe (like everything you will read in this book, true, true, true). This was the landscape of my twenties. I was flat broke and planned on spending the rest of my life as an impoverished writer; cheap rent was a must. I was a little funny-looking, with tattoos sprawling across my body; choppy, home-cut hair that was dyed a color not found in nature; and thrifted clothes that fit strangely and bore many holes and stains. If all this was overlooked and I was permitted entry to a household, it was always in my best interest to grab it, roaches and rotting showers be damned. In my twenties I spent seven years living in the Blue House, a crumbling Victorian so infamous for its lawlessness and squalor it had its own name, and its name was legend. The rent was ridiculously cheap, cheap enough for even the worst slacker/artist/alcoholic/addict to scrounge it up without having to clean up their lives too much. And speaking of clean—we didn't, as a rule, and we would state this as baldly as possible to new roommates. "You don't clean?" a prospective cohabitant would ask, a bit incredulous. "Just look around," I would invite them. Cigarette butts covered the floor, mashed there by a shoe, as if it were not a house but a bar after closing, before the cleaning crew came in. The beer cans and bottles rolling into the corners also suggested not a home but a tavern, or alternately, a frat house.

Dishes were stacked in the sink, unless they were stacked in the bathtub, where they were piled when the sink stack rose too high. Heaps of trash bags mounded at the top of the stairs, where feng shui practice suggests you have an altar to peacefully greet you as you arrive home. And the kitchen floor—how interesting, the potential cohabitants probably thought, to see a mud floor in an American home in 1997! How unexpected! But no, it was not an actual mud floor; we simply hadn't cleaned the kitchen in quite a while. We were busy doing other things, man! Like, um, getting drunk! And in my case, at least, writing a book about it. Although the Blue House was by any standard a total wreck of a place, it served me well. I simply didn't know how to take care of myself in my twenties. I was feral, and I needed a feral cave that allowed me to live in my simple ways. Because my rent was cheap, I didn't have to work very hard, and because I wasn't spending all my time at a J-O-B, I had plenty of time to write, and I did. I woke hungover every morning (okay, well, afternoon) and would wobble down to the bagel shop to spend the next four hours scribbling into notebooks. I wrote my first few books in this way, back when my alcoholism was, as they say, "working." Sure, there were consequences, but I lived so low I didn't notice them. In fact, my low living was a consequence of my drinking, but I didn't see that then. I just saw, and felt, the thrill of the constant party. So there were some nights spent with my head in the toilet, some baffling inebriated fights with lovers and friends, some roaches in the kitchen. There were also my notebooks, filling up and piling up, and the exhilarating feeling that I was living. I'd missed out on the East Village in the eighties, that heyday of decadent art and culture. I felt like I was getting a second chance in the Mission District of 1990s San Francisco. At the dramatic finale of that wild decade, I hooked up with a man I would spend the next eight years with. Or, to be real, a man-child. He was nineteen years old when I met him, a Teen Poetry Slam champion. He moved straight from his parents' house into my own squalor palace, much to the alarm of my roommates, who I'd believed were beyond feeling alarmed about anything. I guess even a punk house has its limits, and a jobless teen slumped on the couch watching *Unsolved Mysteries* and smoking pot all day is one of them. I was twenty-nine, coming down from my Saturn return, that infamous, dreaded moment when, if you believe in astrology, you feel the often brutal effects of Saturn, planet of limits and responsibility, returning to the place it sat at your moment of birth. This completion of the planet's orbit around the sun syncs up with the end of your twenties. It also roughly corresponds to the frontal lobe of your brain—the place that comprehends risk and empathy—finally developing. The frontal lobe gets damaged by alcohol abuse, so maybe that was why, so close to the moment when one is meant to comprehend her limits and get her shit together, I embarked upon a long-term cohabitation with a teenager. When he and I moved out of the Blue House at the end of my seventh year in residence, I hadn't expected that it would be the start of eight years of house hopping together. But the both of us were a mess, and it was easier to scan our low-rent apartments and declare, "This—this is the reason we are so miserable," than to look at the root causes of our unhappiness. It was as if each new apartment would elicit from us the harmony we lacked, each new house key a metaphorical key, too, the elusive key to making this thing work. Maybe here we would stop squabbling like children. Maybe here my boyfriend would find a job he wasn't compelled to quit, bringing in some grown-up income. Maybe here would be the place where I would stop agonizing over whether mine was an "unhealthy relationship," stop day-dreaming about running away with whatever doe-eyed creature happened to glance my way on the bus. Our first apartment was a studio plagued with roaches; our next one was so crooked that fallen items rolled south. Eventually we scored an apartment that had not a single strike against it—it was clean and spacious, affordable, and bug-free. Of course, we needed a roommate in order to make rent, and so we endured a parade of lunatics to make it work: the compulsive liar who smuggled a pet Chihuahua into the apartment, as if we wouldn't hear it barking; the guy whose girlfriend left strange notes in the common spaces hysterically declaring how super sexy he was, as if she needed us to be aware of their powerful amour; my boyfriend's twin sister, the both of them engaging in the sort of psychotic fighting that only twins from dysfunctional families engage in. Our final home was in San Francisco's Italian North Beach neighborhood. It was as if the clouds had parted and angels had shoved it out of heaven and onto busy Columbus Avenue, bustling with tourists and the young Italian men who worked the restaurants, Chinese grandmothers clutching pink bags of produce, and drunkards on their way to the strip clubs over on Broadway. The North Beach apartment held such promise: no roommates, but bigger than a studio; two bedrooms, yet affordable enough that even I with my freelancer's erratic income and my boyfriend with his underachiever's erratic employment could make rent, no problem. Sure, our building manager, Mr. Fan, strangled ducks for dinner on his back porch right behind our bedroom. But he was always handy with a set of keys when I locked myself out, and I supposed I preferred witnessing the occasional murder of waterfowl to participating in the daily murder of vermin—our new little apartment was bug-free. The special magical detail of this apartment was the old-fashioned funeral band that played outside the mortuary across the street each weekend. At first, we were both enchanted by it. The apartment would suddenly fill with horns and drums—"Amazing Grace" and some wrenchingly dramatic melodies lifted from Italian opera. The sound would invade the space and, just as abruptly, be gone, like a plane traveling overhead. It was so majestic that we forgot it was in honor of someone's passing. Anyone who believes in omens knows that a funeral band and a procession of mourners outside your window every weekend is not a good one. The songs were like odes to this dying relationship, one I'd started nearly a decade ago. A lot had happened since then. I'd gotten sober, hadn't had a drink in years. I'd gotten published, and a photographer from the daily news came to take my picture. He snapped my

photo against a brightly painted mural in my neighborhood, the wind blowing my hair around, a chunky strand of fake pearls around my neck. In the picture I'm looking off in the distance, as if at my own future—which, now that I was sober, I actually had a shot at. I'd felt so old before I'd quit drinking. The damage and drama that accompanies a downward spiral weighs on your body and mind like age. The longer I stayed sober, the younger I felt, as if emerging from a chrysalis. Even though my boyfriend had also gone through significant changes during our eight years together, eventually dealing with his own addictions, our personal transformations hadn't made our relationship any easier. I'd read somewhere that people's patterns are established very early on, and if that's the case, my ex and I had gotten off to some brutally bad starts, back when I was still drinking and he was a deadbeat teen. But for eight long years we continued. And at the end of every fight, when we made up, we would dissect what had happened and feel like we'd solved the mystery—the mystery of why, when we loved each other so much, we couldn't get along. Armed with knowledge, we'd pledge to never, ever do it again. But of course it would happen again. All of it. Our apartment in North Beach should have been the best ever—both of us the best, sober versions of ourselves, living without the annoyance of other people. Playing house. But our days began in anxiety and too often ended with me crying and us making promises of peace we seemed incapable of keeping. By the end, I knew one thing for sure. Whatever relationship you are in right now, that is the relationship you're in. You're not in the future awesome relationship that may never happen. You're not in the possibility of it; you're in the reality of it. When my ex brought his mother to help move his stuff out, I sat down—stairs at the French patisserie and ate my feelings. I promised myself that I wouldn't let the dream of a better, more harmonious connection allow me to stay in an exhausting relationship ever again. I wanted to make my life work in that North Beach apartment, solo. Living alone sounded great in my mind, the epitome of adulthood. But that house felt haunted to me now, empty, lacking the ruckus of my and my boyfriend's habits—our fights, sure, and the blaring of his reality television shows, but of our laughter, too, and our conversations. The silence was creepy. I barely used the kitchen, just snacked at the table. I never watched the TV, so there was no reason to sit on the futon. The little room I'd kept as an office, a tiny spot of privacy and quiet, was unnecessary now that the whole place was so private, so quiet. Not even the bedroom was a comfort; I'd paid for the mattress but had allowed my ex to select it, and it was hard as a rock to accommodate his aching back. I didn't want to be a grown-up if it meant being lonely and isolated, living in a tiny haunted house. I put the word out to the people around me that I was looking for a new place in my old stomping ground, the Mission. I knew the chance of finding another affordable apartment to live in alone was unlikely in San Francisco with my fluctuating writer's income. I was in a tender, lonely state from the demise of my relationship. Even though it had been no good, we'd worked so hard and for so long. When I shared about it at a support group, an older, gray-haired woman took my hand. "It's like a death," she said knowingly. Maybe roommates wouldn't be so bad, I thought. Maybe it would be nice to not be the only body in a house, stuck with my downer thoughts and aching heart. Maybe being a grown-up wasn't about the total independence of living alone, capable of paying 100 percent of the bills yourself. Maybe being a grown-up could be more about knowing what you really need and letting yourself have it. Even if what you need is to live in a household full of people half your age, in a bedroom meant to be a dining room, with a window that looks out onto the most beautiful, fiery persimmon tree you have ever seen in your life. Have you ever seen a persimmon tree? As all the other trees lose their leaves and begin their winter dying, the persimmon flares up brighter than any of them have ever been, bearing fruit, even. That was me. I wasn't on the same timetable as the other trees in the garden, but I was alive, coming into a certain prime, even. It wasn't starting over, no. It was just the newest chapter. So, at thirty-seven, the most adult I'd ever been, I moved into a home that looked suspiciously like a lighter, slightly cleaner version of the Blue House. Know what's a grown-up thing to do? Having movers move your shit for you. It cost me three hundred dollars for a trio of dudes to come and heft my vintage kitchen table, my flea market desk with the Bakelite handles, and my boxes and boxes and boxes of books from my apartment in North Beach to my new home in the Mission. My new roommate Bernadette, a twentysomething writer, stood at the top of the stairs as the movers lugged my belongings into the house. "It's so cool that you're moving in," she gushed. "You have furniture!" In the kitchen, my yellow Formica table gleamed, the only piece of furniture in the room. Bernadette took me on a tour. She brought me to the back door off the kitchen, where shambly stairs led to a tiny yard crammed with a billion plants that had gone to weedy seed in cracked pots and sawed-off milk jugs. "The hoarder who lives in the garage took over the yard," Bernadette explained. "But people hang out here on the stairs. And smoke, obviously." She pointed to a dessert plate being used as an ashtray. There were so many spent cigarettes on it that at first glance, it didn't look like an ashtray at all. A grotesque installation, it resembled a Bloomin' Onion from the Outback Steakhouse, a circular configuration of butts rising out from the plate. It was absolutely disgusting, if somewhat fascinating. Off a narrow hallway sat my new roommate Christopher's room. Christopher was a twink. He was as skinny as a string bean, with those undeserved muscles boys get simply for being boys, with wide blue eyes and a scoop of golden hair on his head. Christopher had grown up on a farm in the middle of nowhere, cultivating a fierce bitchiness to get by. He was sort of the "head roommate"—his name was the only one on the lease, and he was the only one who had the landlord's phone number. Bernadette's bedroom was lined with books. A collection of feathered jewelry hung on the wall, and a giant broken mirror sat on the floor. Much of what I saw in the house appeared to have been dragged in from the street, a look I was familiar

with. Back in the Blue House all of our furniture had been found on the street. The realization hit me: Everything the movers were lifting into the house was stuff I'd actually bought. Things I'd selected because they were what I desired, and I'd paid for them. None of them were pieces I'd pulled into my life because I just needed something—a table, a chair—and there it was, right there on the street, and it was free, and I had no money. I hadn't intended to weed out my curbside finds and replace them with nicer pieces; I just had, slowly, over time.