

BEHAVING
AS IF THE GOD IN ALL LIFE
MATTERED

UPDATED AND REVISED

Machaelle Small Wright



PERELANDRA

*CENTER FOR NATURE RESEARCH
JEFFERSONTON, VIRGINIA*

2010

Copyright © 1983-2010
by Machaelle Small Wright

Published by Perelandra, Ltd., Warrenton, VA 20188
www.perelandra-ltd.com

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book. The scanning, uploading and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions and do not participate in or encourage electronic piracy of copyrightable materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

First eBook Edition: March 2010

Excerpts from *To Hear the Angels Sing*, by Dorothy Maclean
(Lorian Press, 1980), used with permission.

Photographs by Clarence Wright.

Cover design by James F. Brisson

Edited by Elizabeth McHale

eBook layout by Machaelle Wright

eBook team: Karla Johnson, Beth Shelton, Cheryl Crow

ISBN: 0-927978-83-0

To David

CONTENTS

Preface	vi
Introduction	ix
1. Entering the Monastery of the Streets	1
2. What's This Crap about Fairies?	101
3. The Lessons Continue	143
Reality as Energy	145
The Lessons Really Did Continue	162
The Balancing of Energies	171
The Mineral Kingdom	180
The Animal Kingdom	185
And, Finally	201
4. I Can Do It Myself, Ma!	207
“Inanimate” Objects and Energy	210
Cosmic Chess Exercise	211
Caring Custodianship	213
Appropriate Release	215
Thought and Communication	219
The Ecological Effects of Thought	220
Energy Movement Exercise	224
Relaxation Exercise	227
Simplified Energy Cleansing Process	231
Afterword	239
Perelandra Today	240
Bibliography	243

Preface

IT HAS BEEN QUITE an eye-opening experience for me to read something I wrote sixteen years ago and to compare it with what I know about the subject today. When I first wrote *Behaving as if the God in All Life Mattered* in 1981, I poured my heart and soul into the project. When I finished writing, I couldn't imagine anything else I would have to say about the things in this book. Well, I am pleased to report that we really do continue to learn and grow. What a difference sixteen years can make! This updated edition of *Behaving* is a celebration of our continuing education and growth.

Of course the facts about my early life in Part 1, "Entering the Monastery of the Streets" have not changed. I must admit that for a fleeting moment I considered inventing a whole new life with a completely different cast of characters just for the sheer joy of it. And it would be kind of fun to see the reactions of the readers who have previously read *Behaving*. But I controlled my cheekiness and kept the story straight. However, I added a few pieces of information and made some word changes that I feel make the story clearer. And I included an update at the end of Part 1 in response to the requests of readers who wrote asking how my life with my parents was ever resolved.

As with my personal history in Part 1, the facts of my first-year co-creative garden in Part 2 (“What’s This Crap about Fairies?”) also did not change. In writing about this very special time in my life, I use the words I wrote in the original *Behaving* so that the simplicity and even innocence of that summer is maintained. Looking back, I can clearly see that I was a young woman just starting a co-creative relationship with nature, and that this first-year garden was a very special beginner’s classroom. Any wording that I changed for this edition was a result of the deeper perspective and understanding I have gotten over the past sixteen years that has allowed me to “say it” more clearly.

Part 3 (“The Lessons Continue”) is where that sixteen-year difference surfaced in full and shined. In this section, I have included what I wrote for *Behaving* in 1981, and then I have added new material about what I understand about that particular subject now. I was especially pleased to find that nothing I understand now contradicts what I perceived and understood then, even though my present perceptions and understanding, for the most part, have expanded well beyond what I originally wrote. In actuality, when I reread Part 3 of the earlier *Behaving*, I knew for certain it was time for an updated edition—and I felt that everyone was ready for more information, whether they have read *Behaving* before or not. We’ve *all* changed over the past sixteen years.

In the last sections, I have improved and clarified the different exercises (Part 4) and updated the “Perelandra Today” information (Afterword). Since the original publication of *Behaving*, Perelandra has expanded in its size and in the scope of work going on here.

As you can see, I was often struck by the sixteen-year period as I revised *Behaving*. The writing of the original edition of the

book began the period and this edition ends it. The time between connects the starting and end points and contains all the life experiences that led me from the first point to the present one. The fact is, we've all moved through a sixteen-year period. If you want to take a moment to appreciate how much experience and change is packed into life, think back to what you were doing and thinking in 1981 and compare that with where you are now. It's quite a trip. May the next sixteen-year period be just as eventful and full of life for you as this past period has been for me. I guess if I'm still around, I'll have to revise and update *Behaving* again. Maybe then I'll rewrite the story of my early years.

Machaelle Wright
Perelandra
1997

Introduction

BEHAVING AS IF THE GOD IN ALL LIFE MATTERED

is a book about the intelligent world of nature we traditionally know as devas and nature spirits and about the need for us to change our relationship with that world and, ultimately, our relationship with the planet. I emphasize the word “need,” for without the understanding of the need, we’ll never have the energy and drive to make the changes in consciousness and action I am suggesting in this book.

We live in a world of high technology and expertise. We have countless teams of exceptionally qualified research scientists who are dedicated to finding the answers we need in order to live a healthier life on a healed and thriving planet. We look to these people to tell us what we can do in our lives in order to achieve that healthier life on a healed planet. Yet I am saying that, despite all this earnest technology and research, what we need to do now is turn our attention to nature itself, recognize the intelligence inherent in all natural form on Earth and allow it to teach us what we need to know in order that we may apply that information to our lives and our technology, and pull ourselves out of the present ecological mess.

The nature intelligence I speak of contains within it truth—a truth that has been present and available to us since the

beginning of time. It is not available exclusively to the gifted. It is a vast universal truth that is present around us everywhere. Our doorway to this truth is through nature itself. Many have opened the doors. Individuals such as myself who live in tiny rural areas around the world, such as Jeffersonton, Virginia, have tapped into the truth within nature purely because of a personal need to understand something more about life. On a larger scale, we have the Findhorn Community in Scotland, which began its growth and development in the 1960s on a foundation of discovery of the co-creation between man and nature. But these examples only serve as affirmations to you that, indeed, there is truth, and it is available to us all, no matter who we are and where we live.

I first consciously tapped into this truth in 1976 when, after a series of events which I share with you in this book, I decided I wanted to become a student of nature and be taught by nature. I immediately discovered that there is an extraordinary intelligence inherent in all forms of nature—plant, animal, mineral, etc.; that contained within this intelligence are the answers to any question we could possibly have about nature—its specific rhythms, its true ecological balance, how this balance can be achieved with the help of humans (and in some cases, despite our interference), the deeper role nature plays on Earth and its various relationships with mankind. This information is just sitting there for us. All we have to do is decide we want to hear it—which can at times be a gutsy decision on our part, since what nature has to teach is not always the easiest thing for us to take in—and to learn how to tap into and receive the information.

I also quickly learned that the desire of the intelligences within nature to connect with us, to communicate and work

with us, is intense. The quality of our life and of all life forms on Earth depends on our willingness to learn how to act and move in such a way that we enhance life quality, not damage or destroy it.

In a session with the Overlighting Deva of Perelandra, I passed along a question that had been asked of me: "If I were to ask you 'Why is it seemingly so important for humanity to re-connect spiritually to planet Earth now,' what would you say?"

OVERLIGHTING DEVA OF PERELANDRA

I would emphasize to you the word "survival" in answering a question such as this one. But I would be quick to point out that I don't mean survival in the traditional sense you humans tend to understand. You see survival as the opposite of death. We don't recognize death as a reality, therefore we don't use survival in the same context.

By survival, we mean the act of maintaining the fusion and balance between spirit and matter on the physical planet Earth. There is no death, in that spirit does not suddenly cease to exist. Spirit is timeless and shall exist for all eternity. But on Earth, the primary thrust is to fuse in balance spirit and matter. Therefore, to separate spirit from that form is to go contrary to the very purpose of the planet within the larger universal community.

If mankind, through either ignorance or arrogance, succeeds in separating all spirit from form on Earth, he will not render the planet out of existence. He will only shift its level of existence. This change will not take Earth's purpose from it. It will not suddenly be excused, shall we say, from ultimately demonstrating to all universal levels of reality the celebration of unlimited spirit seated into and reflecting from perfect five-senses form. If such a disastrous shift

should occur, mankind will only have succeeded in making a challenging job that much more challenging.

We were always meant to work in partnership—we of nature and man. The physical existence of man on Earth has depended upon all kingdoms of nature. In short, the very fact that man and nature co-exist on the planet has partnership inherent in it. The partnership, prior to these present changing times, has developed and grown. Quite often, man has been reluctant to acknowledge this fact. The force behind our partnership has always been the discovery of what must occur between man and nature for spirit and matter to be fully fused in balance. From the moment man and nature came together on the planet, this link between us has not changed.

Times, however, have changed. The partnership, as with everything else, must be modernized and brought into the present time. It must shift from being one of distant benevolence, as it has been in the best of past times, to being one of conscious co-creativity. This must happen in order to move forward in the demonstration of that which is Earth's purpose, break down the barriers that you have built between us and work with us in a new partnership.

Humans do not, on the whole, understand the dynamic relationship between spirit and matter. Nature does. It is a dynamic that is inherent within the life force of nature. But in order for the dynamic to be fully useful to all other levels of reality within this universe, it must be unlocked from its custodianship within nature and linked with the human tool of intelligence. Only then can it be applied in principle within all realms of life. That which is nature is powerful beyond your imagination. And that which is human is also powerful beyond your imagination. Man and nature, come together as we have on this planet, hold the promise and potential of many times their individual power, if only they can work

together to unlock that which nature holds and infuse the human ability to create expanded usefulness through the tool of applied intellectual knowledge.

If humans continue their reluctance to join us in the partnership we are suggesting, then surely out of human ignorance and arrogance, we will all continue to experience difficult challenges to our survival and, eventually, we will be faced with the full separation of spirit from matter on this planet.

ALONG WITH SHARING my work with nature and the results of that work, I have included a section on my personal history. I do this so that you can see that there was a logical progression in my life that brought me to the point where I could accept the reality of nature intelligences.

And that brings me to the more important reason I have included my history. We all have a logical progression. I call it the spiritual thread that runs through life. Our personal history is a series of events, some of them subtle, some traumatic. We tend to look at these events in an emotional light. What hurt me? Who hurt me? Who took away my chances? etc., etc. I feel this is a natural and necessary process when dealing with our past. Certainly, I've experienced emotional pain in my own life. But I don't think this is the only way to look at what's happened to us. In this book, I took a series of significant events in my life (by no means is this a complete record of my history, since a detailed autobiography was not my goal) and looked at each event from a different angle. I looked for that spiritual thread. Instead of asking why something had to hurt and take so much away from me, I asked what this thing, this event, this person gave to me that was necessary in order for me to get to my present position. It was as if I was looking through a kaleidoscope,

with each event being one of the colored pieces. I turned the kaleidoscope slightly and the same pieces, the same events, shifted, forming a new pattern. That's where I found the spiritual thread. It was connecting this new pattern.

If a person believes me to be different, to be special, part of an elite mystical group, then he will believe himself to be incapable of exploring and understanding what I have to pass along about nature. He has created a separation between us and declared himself a lesser human than I. Well, horse hockey. We all have the spiritual thread. We all have that logical progression, whether it be traumatic or gentle, that moves us from point A through points B, C and D, all the way to one point where, suddenly, we are faced with a world we didn't know existed. None of us arrives at that point by accident.

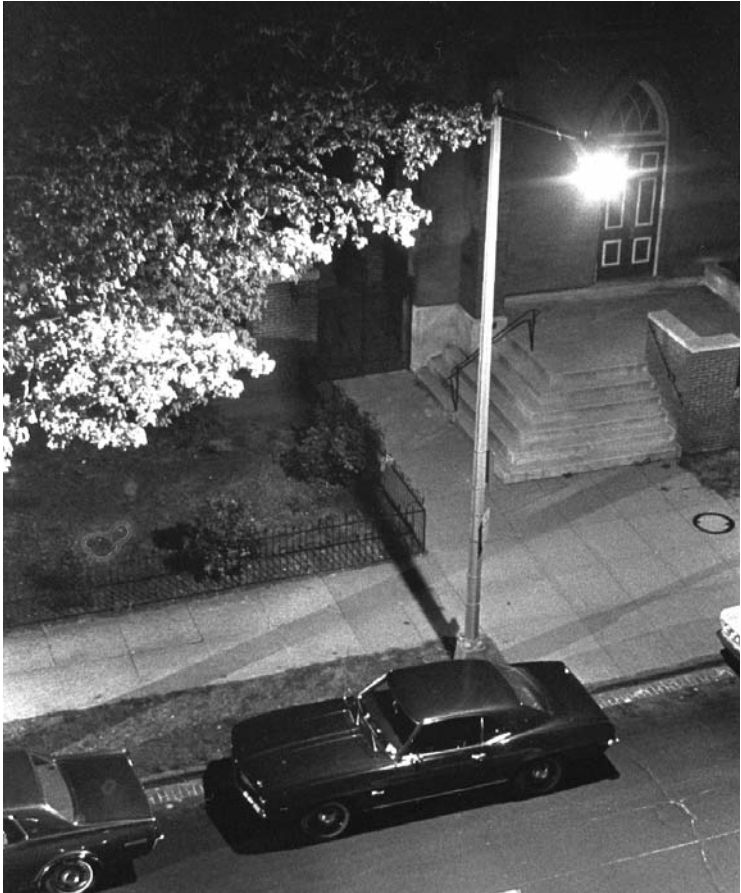
I offer this search for the spiritual thread in my life as an example for you to use when looking back into your own life. I can't adequately express how wholeheartedly I recommend this exercise for anyone. For me, it went a long way to ease, at times even eliminate, the state of duality in my life—looking at something as being right or wrong, good or bad, necessary or unnecessary. By seeking the spiritual thread, I saw the purpose contained within the individual events and how each event was built on top of the previous ones, creating a pattern of oneness, wholeness. I saw the light of synthesis. The result has been that more and more I don't look back in anger and disappointment—instead, I look back in gratitude, even celebration.



BEHAVING
AS IF THE GOD IN ALL LIFE
MATTERED

1

*Entering the Monastery
of the Streets*





IT STARTED OUT normal enough. Only child, born in 1945 to a young couple living in Baltimore, Maryland. Mother beautiful. Father dedicated to making a success out of himself. Both bought into the “Dick and Jane Concept of Reality,” which was passed on to the daughter.

I remember feeling safe and secure with my parents Dorothy and Isadore, our maid, our German Shepherd dog Mark (known for eating anyone who dared to look at me the wrong way), my two pet white mice and all my friends in the neighborhood. I became an accomplished roller skater, except for one minor detail: I couldn’t stop without sitting down on the asphalt. I went to the movies with the gang every Saturday. In kindergarten, I eloped with my true love—to his house. I was returned by his parents and spanked by mine.

It was also at this time that I began to develop my unusual relationship with the Catholic Church. I was born into a Jewish family. What did *I* know about the inner workings of the Catholic Church? Every morning as I walked to school, I knocked one block off my trek by cutting diagonally through a Catholic church. On the way, I passed a huge bank of lighted votive candles. For some reason, I decided that it was dangerous to leave the candles burning, so every morning for one year, I blew them out.

I moved through first grade without incident. Toward the end of the school year, my parents announced that we were selling our house and moving to the country. Isadore was quickly moving up the ladder of success and had discovered a new passion—horses. We were now to have a house befitting our status and enough land for my father to pursue his passion.

Early that summer, we packed up ourselves, the maid and the dog. The white mice and a bunch of their babies escaped from their cage and took up residence in the basement. We never found any of them, and my parents moved from our row house with great glee over having left a basement full of white mice for the new owners. And so we moved to the country.

It was here that the “Dick and Jane Concept of Reality” began to crumble.

Dorothy had enjoyed her life and friends in the city. I learned much later that she was a shy woman, which she covered with a veneer of snobbishness, and a disturbed woman—neither of which surfaced until after we moved. Unfortunately for me, one of the things she was disturbed about was having a child. She didn’t enjoy children and did not appreciate being left alone with one. I no longer had the usual inner-city neighborhood to occupy my time outside the house, so I spent much of my time

during the first months in the country sitting around trying to figure out what someone living in the country did for entertainment. My presence made Dorothy tense. Our maid, bless her, saw what was happening and took over much of my care and feeding, anything that gave my mother a little space from me.

To add to Dorothy's loneliness, Isadore, who was now a successful traveling salesman in the garment industry, was spending three months at a time on the road. He would return for three weeks, devote most of his time to his horses, argue with Dorothy about her habit of writing checks without filling out the stubs and then leave again for another three months.

It was during this time that the three of us unconsciously isolated ourselves from one another. Dorothy cut herself off from me, except to perform the barest of parental duties, and tried to find something to occupy her time until Isadore came home from his trips. She wasn't very creative about it. She watched soap operas on TV. In the winter she sewed. But she had a rule that if she couldn't finish what she was working on in one day, she would never pick it up again. She had a lot of unfinished clothes lying around. In the summer, she bought plants from a local greenhouse, set up a flower bed and spent hours every day weeding. It wasn't that she enjoyed working with flowers so much as it was her determination to have a good tan. She decided that if she stayed out in the sun long enough, her freckles (of which she had many) would run together and form one big tan that would never fade.

Isadore would return home from his trips, change his clothes and go to the stable to work with his horses. His passion for horses equaled his passion for making money. He was going to train himself to be the best rider with the best trained hunters and open jumpers in the country. In the beginning, Dorothy

rode with him, but she didn't share his passion. One day after an argument, she stopped riding altogether.

Our maid buffered me from most of the tension and isolation that developed between my parents. But she still had other duties around the house, and I had a lot of time to be alone.

I began to develop an interior life by letting a secret world grow inside me—a world that gave me pleasure and excitement. My room became my womb. The eight acres of woods behind our house became my secret safe place, my friend. I would play games where I would see myself as an Indian traveling through the woods on foot for thousands of miles, going to my new homeland. (In 1988, I discovered that Dorothy was half Native American—a fact she had never talked about. Her mother, who died during my mother's birth, was Hopi.) I was always running from the white soldiers who were never far behind, so it was important to move through the woods without making a sound. I spent hours tiptoeing and moving my body through tight spots without disturbing one leaf. Then I'd climb trees to see if the soldiers were on my trail. I became quite adept at entertaining myself. It was something I shared with no one—certainly not my parents.

As soon as I learned to write, I began recording my adventures. I also began to write about my fantasies—strange places and people I would experience when I sat quietly by myself. I recorded the sounds and the smells, the strangeness of the environment. I didn't know where these places were. There was nothing about them that was familiar to me. I just assumed they were fantasies and that everyone had them. It wasn't until I was twenty-eight years old that I found out that these childhood fantasies were actually astral travels.

During the summer between second and third grades, Isadore

decided it was time for me to learn how to ride a horse. Dorothy had stopped riding and he needed another “body” to help exercise the horses. So he gave me Dorothy’s horse—a big, gentle 16½ hand, half-breed hunter named Freedom.

I had been afraid of this horse for a year because he was so big and played with our new dog by grabbing the back of her neck with his teeth and slinging her onto his back. The dog would scramble to her feet, and he’d carry her around the field like a circus pony. I was afraid that he would grab *me* by the neck if I walked too close to him. In second grade, our school counselor gave the class one of those ghastly personality formation tests in which one question was: “What are you most afraid of?” I, of course, answered “Freedom.” Well, my teacher, the counselor and the principal became somewhat alarmed and called my parents to school for an emergency meeting about this strange child who was afraid of “freedom.” McCarthyism was running rampant at the time, and I think my parents thought the school authorities figured we were communists! Isadore cleared up the misunderstanding quickly—and about six months later he gave me the horse as a gift. I’m not sure if it was a reward or a punishment.

The first thing I decided about Freedom was that I did not want to fall off him—I thought the sheer distance would kill me. For the next three or four years, this was the guiding motivation that kept me glued to that horse.

There is an old adage about it being disastrous for wives and children to be taught by their husbands and fathers. Being taught to ride by my father fit this adage.

He started me on a program that had as much drive, dedication and discipline as the one he had developed for himself. He was demanding and impatient, and, somehow, due to my

nervousness, I was able to prove to him time and time again that his daughter was an imbecile. He would yell out a command, I would choke, do the exact opposite, and he'd threaten to take the horse away if I didn't pay attention. Each day, for two or three hours, he'd plunk me on this animal and we'd go through the same tense routine. (What neither one of us knew at the time was that I suffered from dyslexia. Isadore would shout for me to turn the horse's head to the left, my brain would go blank and I'd invariably turn Freedom's head to the right. Dyslexia.)

One day I noticed that when Isadore shouted a command, the horse would automatically do whatever was shouted. Freedom had been trained to follow voice commands and I hadn't known it! If I just sat on the horse and let him react to whatever Isadore was shouting, I wouldn't make any more mistakes.

Brilliant move. And it worked. The tension between my father and me decreased dramatically. I doubt that he thought I had made a miraculous breakthrough, or that I had suddenly become clever and smart. All along he had been telling me that the horse was smarter than I was. But I think from this point on, he appreciated the fact that I was beginning to understand just how much smarter this horse was.

I spent nearly every day riding for seven years. In the beginning, I rode Freedom while I learned the fundamentals. As I became more accomplished, Isadore put me on other horses. I spent hours riding in a ring—riding in a circle. My friends at school also had horses, and they talked about going out together on long rides through the woods around the countryside. My father wouldn't let me do that. It was too dangerous. Horses were serious business. I could fall off doing something stupid; I could kill myself. As if to accentuate the issue, one of my

girlfriends hopped on her Shetland pony while it was grazing in the field. Something spooked the pony, causing it to wheel around and bolt. She fell off—she wasn't wearing a riding helmet—her head hit a rock and she lay in a hospital, deteriorating into a vegetable.

So I continued riding in circles.

Due to a lack of more frivolous options, my focus turned to the notion of excellence: I wanted to do everything with the horse as perfectly as possible. It became intriguing—a constant puzzle, a game. What were the horse and/or I doing wrong that made a movement slightly off? When we did hit perfection, I could tell the difference in the quality of movement. And eventually, riding in a circle became fun.

I came away from this intense experience with my father with a number of useful things: One, a sense of accomplishment—I became an excellent rider. I overcame my fear of Freedom. And I had not fallen off! I also experienced what it meant to strive for excellence—and to achieve it. Now I knew what it was to focus my energies in a disciplined manner. And I learned how to get inner joy and satisfaction out of something that looked tedious.

I learned all of this by the time I was twelve.

A FEW YEARS AFTER I started riding, our maid had to leave. She had been living in our home during the weekdays and returning to her family for the weekends. Someone got sick—her husband or son—and she was needed in her own home. I was sad to see her go. But even though I considered her a friend and a surrogate mother, I was more frightened about what would happen if she wasn't there to buffer me from my parents.

For awhile it wasn't bad. Isadore's business trips changed, and

now he was away for three weeks at a time instead of three months. He also became very involved with the horse crowd—hunting, parties, horse shows. Although Dorothy didn't ride, just going to the shows, giving the parties and being around new people gave her some sense of direction in her life. She seemed not to be as lonely.

But these people were heavy drinkers, and during this period she started drinking—something she hadn't done before. So now during the summer, instead of weeding and trying to make one big freckle of her body, she would lie in the sun and drink mint juleps while going for her big freckle.

We all went into a new level of isolation from one another. Dorothy fell more and more deeply into the bottle. Isadore created personal goals with his horses that caused him to become even more single-minded in that area of his life. At the same time, he made a business shift. He decided to buy out the company he had been working for and make the business his. His life was now totally divided between business and horses. It was Dorothy's job, as his wife, to take care of the house (she could hire the maid of her choice) and the children (of which there was only one).

For me to survive in this environment, I had to retreat deeper inside myself. Riding still occupied much of my free time. I concentrated on getting very good grades and took on as many school-related activities as possible. During those hours when I was alone, I had my inner adventures. I developed a new level of quiet and fascination at what "popped into my fantasies," and each night I recorded them in a journal.

Everything went into my journals—my fantasies, observations about the people I had met, my fears, angers, problems, desires. By the time I was twelve, I had developed an outlet for

all the things going on inside me—an outlet that gave me a wonderful sense of emotional release because I could “say” anything I wanted without fear of outside judgments. Through this process, I experienced and developed a sense of inner freedom despite external limitations and pain.

A bird in flight within a prison—my flight was inward.

Dorothy became a full-fledged alcoholic by the time I was ten. Alcoholism was not an upper middle class issue in the mid-1950s. It was seen as an affliction that poor people and bums had. So all the warning signs Dorothy sent out were ignored. Isadore had the extraordinary ability to see only what he wanted. (Many years later, I brought up the issue of Dorothy’s early years of drinking, and he told me that he had not noticed she had been drunk every day for the last two years they were together. I believed him. He had the ability to be that tunnel-visioned.)

Her behavior became increasingly erratic—especially toward me. The alcohol brought to the surface the anger she had about having a child, and she began doing strange things to me—twisted things. If she caught me lying on the living room rug watching TV, she would stand on my hair, so that I couldn’t move my head, and slowly spit on my face. Although I was just a child, even I figured out that this behavior was strange. None of my friends talked about their parents doing these things. She also took out her frustrations by trying to bean me on the head with a cast iron skillet, by pushing my face and hands into vats of hot food, forcing me to eat until I threw up, putting me through strange psychological tests that, when I failed, caused her to send me to my room for long periods of time. (That punishment I liked.)

Interspersed with these activities, she would come to me

weeping, telling me how much she loved me—which I accepted, since in the “Dick and Jane Concept of Reality,” mothers love their children.

On the whole, I responded to her by hiding as much as I could. I increased my school activities even more, spent more hours in journal writing and escaped into my inner adventures. Other than to hide, I didn’t know what to do about my mother.

The environment in the house took on a feeling of intense pressure. No one was talking to anyone. We weren’t even saying good night to one another. Each of us kept up a facade by keeping very active. My parents continued to have weekly parties. By now, Dorothy was becoming more overt with her strange actions. Of course, she was always drunk, but now she was becoming sloppy about it in public. She’d be sarcastic—even downright nasty—to the people who were invited to the parties. She’d tell someone their prized, darling little child was actually a royal pain in the ass. . . .

Looking back on this period, I sometimes feel that my mother was the only sane one in the family. We had created a world of total absurdity, and she finally chose to act it out in absurd ways. The parties were the stuff from which Dorothy Parker short stories sprang. Respectable facades were put up by everyone. Somehow, in her drunken stupor, Dorothy saw through the whole mess and exploded.

It happened at one of those parties. Someone made the mistake of asking her when dinner was going to be served. She was only three hours late. She responded by flinging her martini glass across the kitchen; it hit someone’s child (the one she considered to be the greatest royal pain in the ass). She then ran through the house systematically destroying it as she went along. Isadore didn’t catch her before she put the chair through the TV,

but he did catch a chair in mid-air just as it was about to hit the glass china cupboard.

I sat on the sofa watching all the ashen expressions and hushed, urgent whispers as everyone scurried out of our house and headed for their cars. My mother ended up sprawled on the floor right at my feet with my father straddling her body, trying to keep her from moving. Blood was coming from his face, dripping onto her, as he cried. Dorothy screamed a lot of sailor-like, violent things about Isadore until she passed out.

At least she had gotten his attention.

I slipped into a semi-state of shock—a state I was to stay in for the next eight years. None of this fit into what I thought “family” should be. It was at this point that I seemed to split into two people. One person had an amazing, joyful, powerful, vibrant life going on inside her. The other person took on the somber task of surviving. By this time, I was so used to dealing with my own problems and my own life that it didn’t dawn on me to yell for help. If I just hung low for a while and went about my business, this situation would work itself out, and we would all return to the Dick and Jane bit.

It was during this time that I overheard a lengthy and especially loud argument between my parents. They were yelling about divorce and which one of them should have custody of me. They weren’t fighting about who had the right to keep me or who loved me more. They made it clear that neither one of them wanted to keep me. My mother declared she didn’t want me around her. And my father kept shouting that he wouldn’t know what to do with me, so she better take me. I sat at the top of the stairs listening—and quietly crying.

My world was quickly disappearing. At least I had my school and my room—they were still stable in my life. My routine was still there.

Within a month, Dorothy managed to destroy these last areas of stability. One day I returned home from school to find that she had gone to the lawyer's office, signed divorce papers and wasn't planning to come back. Mind you, I was still in a semi-state of shock—a state that buffered me from the raw, damaging pain that was flying around. I took the news from Isadore like a trooper, put the information into my little “computer” and tried to figure out what this turn of events was going to mean to my life. As far as I could tell, I would still go to school, but I wasn't sure about my room and meals now. I looked to Isadore for some indication that my basic needs would be taken care of. After all, that was still the father's role.

Isadore went into a tailspin. His concept of family had been based on the wife fulfilling her job description. Now he was left with this child—this twelve-year-old—whom he had barely spoken to and had no idea how to care for.

Several people offered to help by taking me into their homes, at least until the school year was out.

The first family could not deal with my periods of quiet. They thought I was very strange. And the mother and four teenagers truly resented the fact that I made friends with the father—a quiet, gentle, highly intellectual man who enjoyed telling me his stories while the rest of the family was elsewhere in the house living their own lives. Together, we formed an unofficial club for outcasts, thus making my living there unacceptable. It was a surprise to me the day Isadore came for me because no one had told me that I would be leaving. That day, everyone in the house disappeared. I left a note saying thank you and good-bye.

The second home had a husband (a friend of my father), a wife who was a teacher (retired) and a baby. The teacher-wife

accepted my periods of quiet, and all went rather well until one weekend while the wife was away the husband got drunk and tried to rape me. Somehow I talked him out of it. When the wife returned, she found me more deeply interior, writing away madly in my journal. She must have suspected something, for she came into my room while I was in school and read about the dirty deed in my journal. When I came home that night, Isadore was waiting for me. There was a big confrontation with the husband in which I had to state the charges I had written about in front of him, his wife and my father. He confessed and I was immediately whisked out of that home.

Nothing was ever said to me personally by Isadore about the incident with his friend. I was left to feel that I had somehow failed again. I hadn't even been sure my father believed my story until a few days later when the husband came to our home to speak to him. I listened to the conversation from upstairs. Apparently, Isadore had contacted a lawyer about taking this guy to court on charges—attempted rape, I guess—but he had been advised by the lawyer to drop the idea since taking it to court would have been traumatic for me. The man was most relieved that my father was not going to press charges—he had just found out that his wife was pregnant again. He apologized to Isadore and left.

FOR THE TIME BEING, I was back in my own room.

Isadore was actively involved in getting a new wife so that he could put his family back together again. The candidate was his secretary—a woman eight years older than his own daughter. I was looking forward to any kind of re-creation of family so that I could get back to my old, familiar routine. But the new woman was interested in something else. Money. She knew

Isadore was about to purchase the company and was on his way to becoming a very wealthy man. The last thing she needed was an heir from another family laying claim to all that money. So while I was looking to her in anticipation of having an “older sister,” she was working on ways to get me kicked out of the house and out of my father’s life.

Enter Dorothy. My mother had disappeared for six months. Apparently, she had gone through one of her guilt sessions about being such a rotten parent and, in a case of classic timing, called Isadore to ask if I could come live with her. He had been having all kinds of problems and arguments with potential wife #2 about me and decided if he could just get me out of the house long enough to marry her and get her settled down, then he could eventually pull me back into the home—and we could all live happily ever after.

As soon as school ended, I was told to pack—I was going to live with my mother. I was stunned.

I was also told that I could take anything in the house I wanted. I packed all my clothes, my encyclopedia set, all my journal writings, all of our record albums (about ten in number), the portable stereo my father had given me that Christmas and one framed picture. We had a limited-edition series of charcoal sketches of horse scenes throughout the house. I chose my favorite—the one of three mares and three foals in a field. Two foals were having their meal supplied courtesy of their mothers. The third foal and mother were separated, each eating grass—the foal’s forelegs straddled so that he could reach the ground. It wasn’t until many years later when I dropped the picture, causing the plate to fall out of the back, that I found out the title was “The Rugged Individualist.” Without realizing it, I had chosen the picture that symbolized the new stage of life into which I was moving.

THE DAY I LEFT HOME, I knew I would never return. A heavy sense enveloped me as I took a long look at the house, the woods, the field, Freedom. . . . I knew I wasn't coming back. I was sad and scared. Everything had been taken away from me. My safe, predictable rhythm. My school—the next year I would have to go to another school since my mother lived so far away. The safety of my room. The security that fathers were supposed to provide. My home.

I was thirteen. I had a sense of foreboding about my future. The day I left, I somehow knew that my future was dependent on me and me alone. I wasn't sure what that meant, but I could sense it nonetheless. Consciously, I knew I wasn't qualified to be in charge of my own life. I came away from my father's house with two skills, thanks to our maid. I could scramble eggs and iron handkerchiefs. What I didn't realize was that my years of surviving in the pressure cooker my parents had created had forced me to develop exactly the skills I needed for the stage I was about to enter. I didn't have the external wherewithal to survive—that could be picked up and learned as I went along—but I had the internal strength, the internal makeup to give myself the motivation from inside to survive.

From *Behaving as if the God in All Life Mattered* »