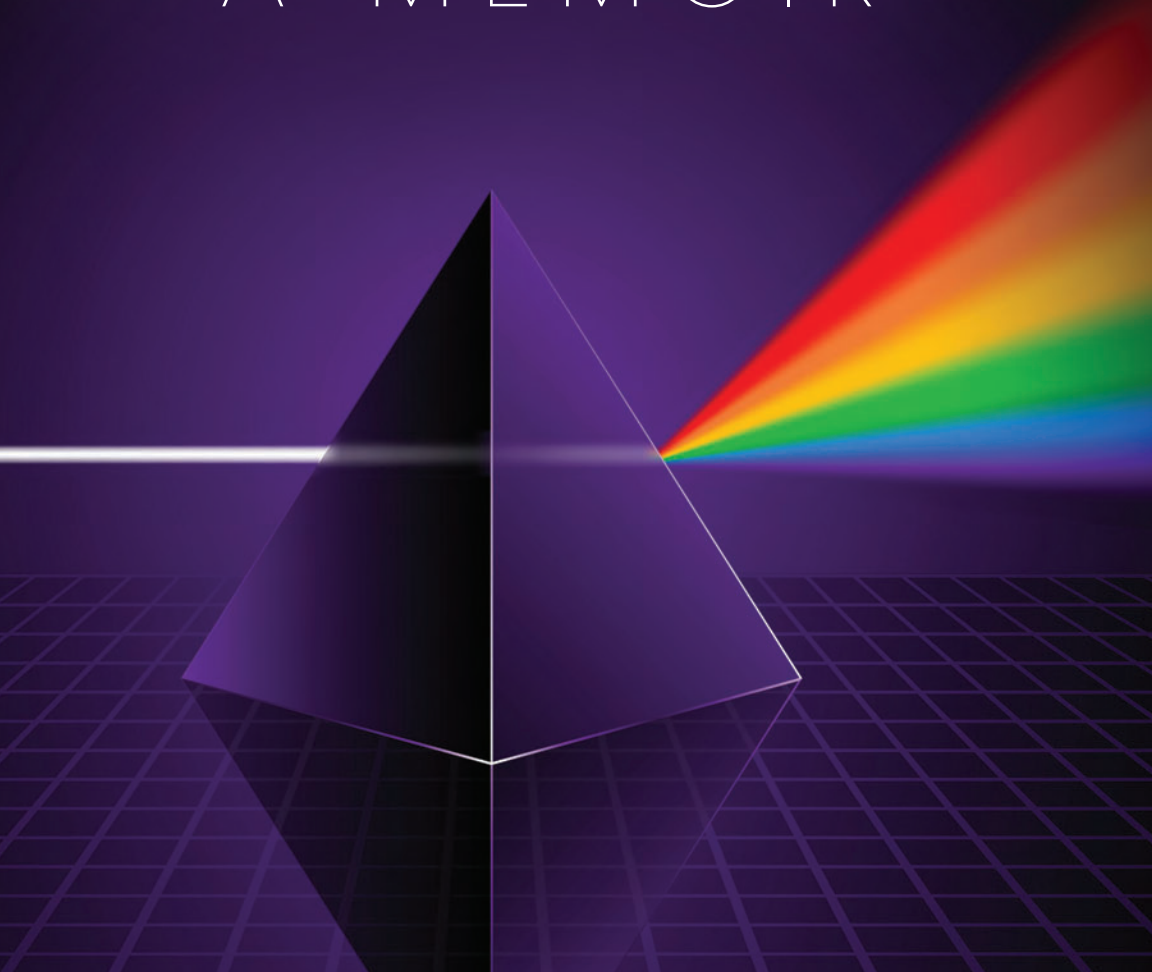


MACHAELLE WRIGHT

PIAOT

A MEMOIR



PIVOT

Machaelle Wright

E-BOOK EDITION

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PIVOTS

A PIVOT OCCURS WHEN a person who has been traveling on a familiar, well-defined life path makes a sudden voluntary or involuntary turn that untethers the individual from that path and propels him or her onto a new and often unrelated path that uproots the individual from his or her previous world.

My first pivot was involuntary and occurred when I was fourteen years old. Involuntary pivots may result from a tragedy where life as the person previously knew it no longer exists. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes and floods can force an involuntary pivot. Manmade disasters such as war or abandonment, imprisonment or slavery can also force a pivot. Often involuntary pivots are closely linked to survival. To understand the extent of the uprooting caused by the pivot that I was forced to take, you need to understand something about my life that led to Pivot One.

Chapter 1

Upperco, Maryland

1950–1960

UNTIL I TURNED FOURTEEN, I had a life that appeared to fit easily and seamlessly into the immediate world that surrounded me. As far as I know, we weren't viewed as outcasts or overly odd. Okay, it's true that there were times in school when I was touched by anti-Semitism from a few teachers and a handful of students. But my father, who was raised an Orthodox Jew, was so focused on assimilating that he forgot to tell me I was from a Jewish family. As a result, I recognized people were sometimes being mean or made strange accusations without provocation, but I didn't understand why. (I'm looking at you, fellow third grader who shall remain nameless. When you came up to me in class to call me a "dirty kike" and shouted that the war was my fault, I actually didn't understand what the hell you were talking about. So I wasn't insulted or wounded in the way you had hoped. Just deeply confused and embarrassed. But in response to the only word I understood—"dirty"—I used more soap in my bath that night. Do hope you grew out of all that nastiness.)

I came from a well-to-do family. I heard that Isadore (my father) was making \$90,000 a year. This was the late 1950s. Translated into 2017 dollars, he was earning \$736,583 annually. Looking back I'd say we lived very comfortably. But at the time I didn't think we were rich. As I said, we fit into the immediate world that surrounded us. We lived in Upperco, Maryland, horse country. This pricey world absorbed money and kept horse owners from living the kind of ostentatious, glittery lifestyle that we associate with the word "rich" today.

My father, all of my parents' friends and most of my classmates had horses. We all rode, trained, hunted and show-jumped. I started riding around age six or seven. I began competing in hack classes (walk, trot, canter classes) around age nine. My father trained me with an eye toward making me into a steeplechase jockey, even though that was something I did not want to do. I went to school with kids who won national championships on the horse show circuit. Isadore had a horse that won Maryland's Triple Crown one year: champion hunter, champion green hunter and champion show jumping. That horse was loaned out to a rider on the U.S. Equestrian team another year. The four walls in our den were filled from ceiling to about three feet from the floor with lines upon lines of ribbons that my father won—awards for first place, second place, third place and fourth, plus championship and reserved championship ribbons. Our dining room decor included multiple displays of silver trophies (all needing polishing every few weeks), and we had an oil portrait of the horse that won the Triple Crown hanging in our living room. You could say there was a horse motif in my home.

Isadore gave me my own horse when I started to ride at age six—a big, standardbred bay that stood 16-1/2 hands tall. (One hand equals four inches. From the top of his shoulder to the ground measured sixty-six inches.) I named him Freedom. I'll let you come up with all the psychological implications behind the name on your own. But before you get too far down that road I'll just say that, at the time, I thought it would be clever if horses from the same stable had related names. We would start with Freedom and perhaps the next horse could be named Liberty, the next Democracy, and so on. No one else saw the cleverness in my scheme so it stopped at my horse with the name "Freedom." The horse that won the Triple Crown? His name was "Himbo." I liked my idea better.

Freedom was well-trained (Isadore trained him), loved to jump (he'd jump the pasture fence on his own when he wanted to join me on the lawn) and had an endearing, nutty personality. I loved him and I feel certain he trusted and liked me back. He was my pal. He was voice trained, which meant that when riding I only

needed to tell him what I wanted him to do and he'd do it. And he had a calm, quiet, consistent disposition. Except for his size, he was a perfect horse for a young rider. Isadore started me on such a big horse because kids who began their riding career on ponies invariably had difficulty adjusting to the strides and gaits of a larger horse when they outgrew the pony and had to trade up. Isadore avoided that awkward stage and the subsequent loss of training time with me by putting me on Freedom first. During the first few years while I was learning to ride I was in constant fear that I was going to be killed if I fell off this horse. It was a long way down to the ground.

Nothing about horseback riding felt like a fun sport or hobby to me. Fox hunting season covered the fall/winter weekends and horse show season lasted from spring through summer and into early fall. During the week, horses needed to be worked out, kept fit and trained. We would travel to horse shows as far south as South Carolina and north to Madison Square Garden in New York City and Toronto, Canada. Then there were the fall awards dinners and winter after-hunt parties. To be honest, it felt like a profession. A serious and sometimes dangerous profession. Bones were broken, skulls were cracked and horses were injured. Isadore had two serious jumping accidents. In one he broke his collar bone when Himboyl lost his footing going into a jump, flipped over in mid-air and landed on his back on top of Isadore. In the other he broke both his arms. (You don't want me to describe that one.)

The first jump I ever took was over a four-foot-high gate. For a first jump, that's high. Normally a rider in training starts with a little two-foot-high jump to get the feel for it. On the day of my first jump, we were trail riding miles away from home. When we came up on a fence and gate that blocked the trail, Isadore didn't feel like getting off his horse to open the gate, as was his usual habit. He told me we were going to jump it. I froze. He instructed me to "Just sit up there, give the horse his head and let him take the jump. He's smarter than you anyway." Isadore jumped his horse over the gate first ensuring that Freedom would follow. He was right about Freedom knowing exactly what to do. However a 1,600-pound horse landing from a four-foot-high jump is a little

jarring. Since I had not jumped before I wasn't expecting such a hard jolt, but I managed to stay with him. I was exhilarated. First, I survived. Second, I discovered that jumping a horse was fun. To literally feel Freedom focus his attention and collect his body in preparation for that jump was amazing and something I can still recall today. I spent the rest of the ride feeling proud of myself.

I competed in my first show a few weeks after my first jump. It was a local affair and primarily for young riders. Isadore entered me in the beginners class, a hack class. About thirty competitors were in the ring at the same time following the judge's shouted instructions. We were to walk, trot, canter, then stop. Back our horses up about six or eight steps, stop again, walk, then hand gallop (a speedy canter). Stop, turn around and do the same routine in the other direction. We were judged on riding and horse skills.

Much to my surprise, I made it past the elimination round and into the top ten. We were then put through an abbreviated version of the earlier round. When it came time for the final canter, I had Freedom's reins too long and he couldn't pick up what lead I wanted him to take. (I know, I've got you staggering around in horse-talk tall grass. But I'm not going to describe any of this rudimentary riding stuff any more than this. If you care, Google "English horseback riding, cantering lead.") Anyway, Freedom began his canter on the wrong lead. I passed Isadore about halfway around the ring and heard him say in a low voice, "Wrong lead." After two or three strides, Freedom automatically switched his lead to the correct one.

When the awards were announced, Freedom and I came in second. I was thrilled. I was beat out by a seventeen-year-old kid who had been competing on the national circuit for years. Second place seemed pretty good to me. After all, it was my very first class and I got a ribbon. But when I looked over at Isadore, I could see that he was not pleased. When the judge pinned the ribbon on Freedom's bridle, he admonished me for making that mistake with Freedom's lead. He said I should have known better. My first class and I was the recipient of an embarrassing public dressing down by the judge.

This was the moment when I realized that in everyone else's eyes I was Isadore Small's daughter. I felt an air of expectation and responsibility surround me. Apparently as Isadore's daughter, I had a reputation to uphold. People expected me to meet some pretty high standards when it came to riding because I was Isadore Small's daughter. Isadore was a well-respected horse trainer and riding instructor. Riders from all around consulted and trained with him. He primarily dealt with experienced riders. I was the only person who had started training with him from the beginning. Obviously the last person to make such a rookie mistake in a class was Isadore's daughter. (Two hack classes later I beat that guy.)

There's nothing cheap about having horses on this level. Back then probably the least expensive thing was the horse. These people trained their own horses for hunting, show jumping and sometimes flat and steeple racing so they didn't have to pay big bucks for an already-trained horse.

To give you an idea of what I'm talking about: Isadore paid \$50 for Himboy. He watched the horse racing at a nearby track one afternoon. As Himboy was coming down the home stretch he suddenly bolted, threw his jockey and jumped the inside rail. Isadore liked the way the horse took that jump. So he offered the owner \$50 to take Himboy off his hands and the owner was grateful to finally get rid of that "impossible" animal.

As for the cost of a well-trained horse: Freedom had never had a saddle on him when Isadore bought him for \$100. Several years later, a woman came up to me at a horse show where we were competing and offered \$36,000 cash for Freedom. (That's \$294,633 in today's economy.) She was an older woman and wanted a quiet horse with a good temperament for fox hunting. My father told her the horse was mine and the decision was up to me. I told her no. I loved my horse.

Aside from buying horses, there's the land for grazing and training, the stables, the feed, the bedding straw and hay, the tack (saddles, bridles, halters, shanks, lunging lines, special girths, special bits, special stirrups...), the vet bills, the farrier bills, the riding clothes and boots imported from England, the membership fees

for fox hunting and entrance fees for showing, the training rings and jumps, costs for transporting horses to and from shows and hunts and, if you were lucky, a stable boy to clean out the stalls. We were lucky. My father had a stable boy. (Actually, I was lucky. I didn't have to clean out the stalls.)

So I went through these early years steeped in the world of horses and not wanting for anything material. With a \$2 weekly allowance, I personally was not drowning in money. However, if I felt I needed something, I was expected to sit down with Isadore, present my case and convince him that this was a legitimate need. Once he agreed, he tended to go big. He worked in the clothing industry and dealt in large volume. Once I requested socks and he gave me 12 dozen pairs of quality white cotton socks. (That's not a typo. He actually gave me 144 pairs of socks.) I asked for a jacket and he gave me five car coats—six if you count the reversible car coat as two. One year I said I needed pencils for school and he gave me a box of twelve dozen #2 round, yellow pencils. I looked at the boxes and figured I would never live long enough to get through all those pencils.

Being an only child, I had my own room complete with a double bed, two lamp tables, a big dresser, an even bigger chest of drawers, a desk, three chairs, two windows, a blue shag carpet and a framed charcoal, limited-edition drawing of a white stallion rearing up on its hind legs while lightning streaked across the night sky behind him. The picture was my mother's idea of what one hangs in a girl's bedroom. I found it scary, even threatening. Maybe it was actually prescient.

We had a maid who stayed with us during weekdays for a couple of years after we moved to Upperco. I adored her. We used to sit in the kitchen together eating fried chicken. She would eat the chicken—bones and all—and tell me the bones were good for you. Something about the bone marrow.

I didn't realize until years later that my parents had a racist streak and they allowed me to disrespect this woman. I wasn't a brat around her, but my parents had a strict rule that I was not allowed to call any adult by their first name. Even when family friends encouraged me to use their first name, my parents would

jump in and say that I was to address them properly: Mr. or Mrs. with their last names. (“Ms” didn’t exist then.) This rule extended to every adult—except our maid. I was told to call her “Elsie.” Just plain “Elsie.” If she didn’t feel I was disrespecting her it was because I was only five or six years old and she was a truly fine and understanding person. She gave me a pass on my questionable manners. (For the record, I’d like to publicly apologize to you, Miss Elsie, for my rudeness. I’d love to show you the full respect you deserve and call you by your proper name, but I don’t think I ever knew your last name. The best I can do now is “Miss Elsie.” I know you’ve passed on but I feel it’s never too late to apologize.)

If we stopped this picture of my early years at this point, I think we’d all agree that I had an easy, well-structured life. But there was also an underbelly of cruelty and abuse that came with this life.

THE PATH TO PIVOT ONE

My mother, Dorothy, was an alcoholic. Back then I didn’t know the word “alcoholic” so I just saw her as a drunk. She began drinking socially when I was about four years old. Then she went from part-time social drinking to full-time drinking when I was five and we moved out to Upperco. She drank from mid-morning until she stumbled to bed at night.

She was an angry drunk. From my perspective, there was nothing funny or charming about her when she was drunk, which was daily. She often smelled like a combination of stale booze mixed with a sour body odor, her eyes were always blood-shot, her speech was slurred, she was erratic in her behavior and actions, she could be sarcastic and mean, and she lied constantly. She seemed to enjoy humiliating or hurting others by playing odd pranks on them. Everything about her drinking screamed *wrong* inside me. She embarrassed me. I felt deeply that this was not the way a mother should act. This was not the way a woman should act.

She hated children and being a mother. Since I was her only child I became her primary target by default. I don’t recall her ever

speaking to me about anything other than the day-to-day chores she wanted me to do. There were no mother-daughter conversations. There was no laughter between us. I didn't tell her about my day nor did she ask about it. I also didn't ask about her day. I don't recall ever overhearing her having a discussion with a friend about life, ideas, differing opinions or current events. Her preferred subjects were any and all gossip and TV soap operas. I honestly do not know if this woman was intelligent. She had a quick temper and she was impatient, especially with me. Periodically, while I was in school, she would amuse herself by tearing apart my room looking for my diary and any damning evidence she could use to prove to Isadore what a terrible child I was.

She also didn't like me to touch her and would always tell me my hands were too cold and clammy. Actually, I don't remember her ever hugging me. We didn't do typical mother-daughter things together like shopping because she didn't enjoy being around me. She would go shopping by herself or with a friend and purchase the clothes she wanted me to wear. I had to wear them whether I liked the clothes or not. Sometimes I lucked out and I'd get some nice wool skirts or a sweater. (But then there was that frilly blue printed dress that I truly couldn't stand and had to wear to school fairly often.)

She hated cooking. Each meal was accompanied by a chorus of slamming cabinet doors, banging pots and pans and cursing. The odd thing is that she was a good cook. When she finished cooking a meal, she served it by slamming the plate down in front of me. I'd like to say I was able to calm her down by helping her prepare meals but she wouldn't allow anyone else in the kitchen.

It was my job to wash the dishes each night and clean the kitchen. Normally this was fairly uneventful since she sat in the living room drinking while I worked. At one point in one of my classes, I had been taught how to "properly" wash dishes. (Dishwashers weren't available yet so washing dishes in a sink full of sudsy water was still a human endeavor.) Glasses were to be washed first, next silverware, next plates, and then pots and pans last.

One night Dorothy walked in and saw that I had changed my routine to match what I had learned in school. I don't know why

but she exploded with anger. From what she was yelling, it sounded like she was personally offended that someone had taught me another way to wash dishes. She seemed to be taking it as some sort of personal attack or insult. To punctuate her point, she picked up a large cast-iron skillet that was sitting next to the sink waiting to be washed and hurled it at my head. I managed to duck, thus saving my head. But the skillet hit the oven door knocking off a sizable chunk of enamel and leaving a large dent.

I didn't say anything to Dorothy and she stormed out of the kitchen. I picked up the pan and got back to washing the dishes my way. But as I stood at the sink I could feel that things had changed. She meant for that heavy pan to hit my head. I now knew for sure that I could be in serious danger. I was eleven years old and I could have died that night.

She got a perverse kick out of abusing me during meals. She would tell me to put my hand over a steaming hot plate of food to feel the heat and then when I did that she'd slam my hand into the food. Or she would tell me to smell the food and then shove my face into the hot food. If I hesitated or resisted she'd insist, even threaten. She yelled at me if I made a face or said ouch. She yelled at me if I showed her that I had gotten burned. She yelled at me for eating too slowly, then she'd yell at me for eating too fast. She forced me to eat everything she served on my plate even if it was too much food. When I had to eat more quickly, I would stuff food into my cheeks to chew and swallow (or throw away) later. If she spotted me doing this she would reach over and squeeze my cheeks to force the food back into my mouth saying, "Eat, dammit." Sometimes I had to leave the table to throw up.

Often she'd serve food that she knew I didn't like. I am lactose intolerant but she always gave me a big glass of milk with meals, which made her feel like a good mother but made me nauseous. I hated the smell and taste of anchovies but she always threw them on top of my salad. And I couldn't stand braunschweiger liver sausage sandwiches but she couldn't stop serving them to me. I once made the mistake of feeding the sandwich to my dog, Chris. Apparently she didn't like it either and dropped the sandwich out

in the open for Dorothy to see. I was chased up the stairs to my room and beaten with a hairbrush.

She extended her abuse beyond meals. When I finished riding I would lie down on the living room floor to relax my back. Dorothy would sometimes sneak up, step on my hair so that I couldn't move my head and spit in my face. And then there were the many times when I'd be walking through the house, usually on my way to my room, and Dorothy would jump out of nowhere to put me through some physical or verbal test. If I reacted or didn't pass her tests according to her standards, I was sent to my room for the rest of the day.

And where was Isadore while all this was going on? He was working in Baltimore or traveling. He took frequent business trips that kept him away during weekdays. When he was around, Dorothy continued drinking but she somehow managed to not smell, look or act as drunk. When not on a trip he would come home from his office, change his clothes and go to the stable until dinner. Everyone knew that if they wanted to see Isadore, don't bother stopping at the house first. Just go directly to the stable. Even with him around, Dorothy was still pretty angry about that cooking thing, but she managed to move around the kitchen a little more quietly. As far as I know, Isadore never asked why the enamel was missing from the dented oven door. He had one requirement: Put dinner down in front of him on time. If she met this requirement, all was well.

I had fears and concerns about Isadore, as well. Generally, he was a strict disciplinarian. Around the horses, he had lots of rules: I was never to ride by myself. I was not to sit on a horse without someone present. I was not to fool around when riding or tending the horses. I was *always* to wear my riding helmet. There were more rules but you get the idea. We didn't talk unless he was giving me riding instructions. If I looked frightened about something or I looked like I was going to cry, he would say, "Keep it up and I'll give you something to cry about."

And then there was his infamous "Isadore Small dumb-shit look" that he used on people whenever he decided they were being stupid. His friends talked about getting hit with Isadore's dumb-

shit look. As a child I tended to live up to his definition of stupid rather frequently. His stare was cold, intense and threatening.

At other times he made comments about my physical appearance and changing body for the amusement of others, which I found humiliating. At night, if I was lying on the couch watching television, he would walk by, grab my knee and squeeze tight with his fingers causing sharp pain. My whole leg would go numb. I don't know why he did that, but he did it fairly frequently and always thought it was funny.

And then there was the strange unease I felt around him. Except for when I was riding, there was always this weird icky vibe that I picked up from him. I never felt safe or comfortable in the house with him. I kept as much distance as possible and for as far back as I can remember I always made sure I was fully dressed around him. Years later I found out he had sexually abused his daughter from a later marriage.

How did I respond to this abusive environment? Avoidance. Since Isadore was away working or at the stable so often, my main concern was with Dorothy. I tried to avoid her as much as possible. With both Dorothy and Isadore, I made a point to behave, follow orders and remain quiet. I didn't talk back or yell or strike out. My goal was to keep my head down as much as possible. Be invisible. Family friends commented to my parents about how well mannered, well behaved and quiet I was.

I had a second response that was equally important: *I endured*. I endured Dorothy, Isadore and their abusive environment. According to the dictionary, "endure" means "to tolerate, bear or put up with without giving in or up." I may have felt confused, frightened, intimidated, under attack and in danger—but I also felt a strong sense of my own existence that was not connected to these two people. Internally I felt my own presence and from this I could feel strength. The attacks were like glancing blows—sometimes serious glancing blows—that landed on the surface but did not sink in or compromise what I felt about myself inside. I could feel strong pain, anger and fear but these feelings didn't consume me nor were they absorbed by the person inside. I don't know how else to describe this but suffice it to say that my parents never took away

what I felt inside. I did not give them permission to diminish me. I realize now that to endure is a natural part of my personality. It must have been included in my “birth package” and is just there inside me to draw on when needed. When I’ve had to deal with something or someone unpleasant, endurance automatically provides the underlying foundation for my response.

I didn’t think to reach out for help or talk to anyone about my situation because both of my parents insisted that our home life was no one else’s business. I followed orders, remember? But how my friends described their family life didn’t match my experiences at all. Consequently I didn’t want to talk about what was going on in my home. I was young, I wanted to fit in and I didn’t want to seem too weird.

SCHOOL PROVIDED RELIEF and I poured everything I had into it. It gave me a predictable schedule and there were kids I could talk to and laugh with. Just as importantly, I didn’t feel danger lurking around every corner. I don’t know how the schools in Baltimore County were rated as a whole back then, but the two schools I attended in Upperco (elementary and junior-senior high school) seemed to be quite good.

Not all my teachers in elementary school were anti-Semitic, and those who weren’t provided support and encouragement. They must have seen some leadership qualities in me because in third grade I was appointed to the safety patrol (a year ahead of the other kids), and in fourth grade (two years ahead of previous appointees) I was given the job of heading up the school’s Red Cross program to put together and provide aid boxes for overseas school kids. In both endeavors I tried my best but generally felt I was in over my head and only managed to hit the mediocre mark with the kind help of a couple of teachers.

My junior-senior high school had more students, larger classes, more activities and more opportunities to spend time away from home. I joined the band, I played sports and I joined the cheer-leading squad. (Yes, I was a junior varsity cheerleader.) My major

school fear was not being able to open the combination lock on my locker (which caused recurring nightmares for years).

Classes were challenging and I had to put a lot of time and effort in to keep my grades up. I consistently got As and Bs and one C. The C drifted around my report card from class to class. I wanted to make the Honor Roll in high school, but to do this I had to get rid of my roving C. It took five years for me to finally catch that sucker and beat it into a B.

Gradually I noticed something about school that raised questions for me: I seemed to be working a lot harder than most of the other kids in my class who were getting the same or better grades. I couldn't figure out what secret they knew about learning and taking tests. I always felt like I had somehow missed the introductory class where kids were told how to successfully navigate through school. It was frustrating and sometimes seemed unfair that I was never able to discover "the secret." I had no choice but to keep working hard. Twenty years later I found out I am dyslexic.

Back when I attended school, teachers weren't trained to recognize or to help kids with learning disabilities. I certainly didn't know anything about it and the term "learning disability" was not something I would have thought to apply to myself. Because my teachers and I assumed I was "learning able," I was left to figure stuff out on my own. Like so many kids who have struggled with dyslexia, I wanted to be invisible in class. I kept repeating silently, "Don't call on me....Don't call on me....Don't call on me." I confused letters and words and I read more slowly than my classmates. I also confused my right/left directions, had a terrible memory and would go completely blank when taking a test.

By necessity I leaned more towards out-of-the-box thinking, so I considered various ideas for overcoming class challenges. I had trouble maintaining focus on whatever I was trying to learn. I played around with this problem and found that if I added a little extra challenge to the exercise, making it slightly more difficult, it would be easier for me to hold focus. Essentially I made things more interesting. For example, I was placed in an advanced algebra class in eighth grade. Numbers and letters were floating and swirling all over the place—across the blackboard, my textbook

He who knows and knows not he knows:
he is asleep—wake him.
He who knows and knows he knows:
he is wise—follow him.

Confucius

Learn from the mistakes of others.
You can't live long enough to make them all yourself.
Eleanor Roosevelt

I WAS PROBABLY THE ONLY KID in my school who did not look forward to summer vacation. From mid-June until the first Tuesday in September, avoiding Dorothy became my full-time occupation and preoccupation.

During those three months Dorothy drank, sunbathed, drank, weeded her flower beds, drank, crashed her way through the kitchen while fixing dinner, then drank some more while watching television. I don't know when she went to bed but it was pretty late.

Isadore maintained his normal schedule: drive to his office each day or leave for the week on a business trip, come home, change into his "stable clothes," go to the stable for a few hours, come back to the house for dinner, watch television, fall asleep on the couch, wake up and go upstairs to bed.

I was expected to go to bed before Isadore. When Miss Elsie was still with us, I would ask her to come with me in the bathroom while I washed my hair. I wasn't allowed to take a shower so I had to lean over the tub and stick my head under the faucet. That meant that my back was to the door and I couldn't hear anything because my head was under the running faucet. I always had the creepy, scary feeling that Dorothy was going to sneak in and hold my head under the faucet until I drowned.

Logically, now that I've gotten older, wiser and more experienced, I don't see how that would work. The water would have to come out of the faucet with the volume and force of a fire hose. But I was a kid living with a drunk and I was convinced Dorothy could pull off the deed. So Miss Elsie would sit on the toilet, towel

in hand and talk to me. I lost my protection after she left us and I had to come up with a new plan. The bathroom door didn't have a lock so I started propping things against the door that would be knocked over with much noise if someone tried to sneak in. Problem solved. To label me paranoid only works if I wasn't in actual danger and this fear was all manufactured in my head. The point is, I was in danger and I knew it. I just never knew which direction the danger would be coming from.

The key to spending long summer hours alone with Dorothy was to stay out of sight as much as possible—avoidance. I got up around 10 A.M. By then, if he wasn't on a trip, Isadore had left for work and, with a little luck, Dorothy was outside working on her suntan and having her first round of drinks of the day. Before she left, Miss Elsie taught me how to scramble eggs. Each summer morning I would add toast and voilà, I had breakfast. There was always a pitcher of orange juice in the refrigerator but I dared not drink it. Dorothy added vodka in with the juice.

After breakfast I got on with the task of disappearing. Living in the country meant long hours of solitude. There wasn't a neighborhood full of kids to melt into. We only had two neighbors' houses within sight. In one house lived an older couple whom I barely knew and felt shy about visiting. The other house had a gaggle of kids—six to be exact. One girl was in my class but during the school year we socialized in different groups. It was an active, chaotic home and when I felt up to handling the chaos, I would go there for a few hours. The kids laughed a lot, ran around the house (literally), yelled at one another, gossiped, called their parents by their first names—and ate cold pizza for breakfast. Sacrilege.

Most of the time I stuck to myself. I stayed in my room and read books or wrote in my diary. From the time I had learned to write I kept a diary. Along with recording my thoughts, ideas, dreams and fantasies, writing became my substitute for parental guidance. Granted I was talking to myself but the exercise made the issues and challenges I was facing clearer. If I had a particularly tricky problem to solve, I drew a vertical line down the paper and labeled one column "yes" and the other column "no." Then I would list all the benefits and good points I could think of in the yes column.

The problems were listed in the no column. Whatever column was the longest and had the most points listed was my answer.

I hid my diary and its key to keep Dorothy from finding it when she tossed my room. She was in search of any and all damning evidence but mostly she wanted to find that diary. My most successful hiding spot involved one of my foam-rubber pillows. I discovered that when I poked a small hole into the side of the foam rubber, the opening would lead to a series of “tunnels” that wove throughout the pillow. I could stretch out the hole, stick in my diary and move it through the tunnels to the middle of the pillow. I changed my own sheets so Dorothy didn’t notice that my pillow was heavier or lumpy. For extra security I hid the diary key inside the hem of my window curtain.

In the early afternoons, I headed outside to wherever Dorothy wasn’t. I liked climbing trees and observing the world from on high. I frequently pretended I was an Indian scout on the lookout for soldiers en route to attack my village. (I had no idea why I came up with this scenario. Back then most kids would choose to be the soldier on the lookout for marauding Indians.)

And I invented a game that could keep me occupied for hours. The challenge was to move through our woods without making a sound. No leaves crunching or twigs snapping. My goal was total silence. After hours upon hours of practice I reached my goal. A lot of that success had to do with how I put each foot down and rolled it slowly sideways. It was perhaps an odd little game but I liked the challenge. You just never know when you’ll need to move silently through a woods.

I later learned two things that perhaps explained my summer obsessions: (1) Native American children had a game where they would spot a deer and try to move through the woods silently to get close enough to tap the deer on the butt. It helped them develop hunting skills. (2) I found out that I was one-quarter Native American. Dorothy was half Hopi. Her mother was full Hopi. Because my grandmother died giving birth to Dorothy (she was sixteen pounds at birth), and because my grandfather travelled all over Arizona to make a living as a well driller, my mother had to live with her Hopi relatives on their reservation. When she was five, my grandfather remarried and came back for Dorothy.

As an adult my mother spent as much time and effort distancing herself from her childhood as my father spent distancing himself from his Jewish background. She rarely talked about her experiences, and the tiny bits of information I did learn I picked up from overheard conversations she had with friends. I first found out about her Hopi background accidentally when I ran across an old photo of an Indian woman with an infant in a cradleboard on her back. Written on the back of the photo was “Dorothy—4 months.” I asked Dorothy about the picture and she confirmed the child was her. That’s about the sum total of what she told me about her Hopi childhood. I, on the other hand, thought that being one-quarter Native American was great and special and magical.

When I wasn’t practicing my Indian deer-hunting skills, I spent a lot of time with Freedom. In secret I challenged Isadore’s rules. I wasn’t supposed to groom a horse by myself. But during the summers, I groomed Freedom nearly every day. To save steps, when I finished with one side of him, I’d duck under his belly to get to the other side. This isn’t an unusual move for those who work around horses but for me it was forbidden. It could be dangerous if a horse kicked out while I was crossing beneath him. With Freedom I felt I could take a chance.

But I would have really gotten in trouble if Isadore knew what else I was doing. After Isadore left for work, I would go to Freedom’s stall to see if he was still sleeping. This horse was so laid back that if he was lying down in the straw I’d pat him a little. He’d raise his head to look at me then rest his head back in the straw. I would slide on top of him until he stirred a little to let me know he wanted to get up. Listening to the sound of his breathing and feeling its rhythm was comforting.

Once he got up I’d feed him a little, talk to him while I groomed him and then lead him out to the pasture. I found that little touch of rebellion and my flirt with potential danger exciting, even if it was with the world’s safest horse. Neither Freedom nor I ever tipped off what shenanigans we were up to when Isadore wasn’t around. A couple of times when he commented on how good the horse’s coat looked, I just said, “You’re right. Must be that new feed he’s getting now.”

The summer when I was eleven or twelve, Dorothy told me that she needed to get some money to buy seat covers for her car. She decided she would collect the glass bottles lying in the roadside ditches. The idea was to cash them in at the grocery store for two cents a bottle. I was enlisted to help by driving the car—something I didn't know how to do—while she sat on the hood looking for bottles. When she spotted one she'd shout "Stop" and I'd hit the brake, usually so hard that it propelled her off the hood. I actually didn't do that on purpose. Really. I had just never operated a car before. (Okay. If I'm to be totally honest I'd have to admit that I didn't mind seeing her fly off the hood.) After a few days I got the feel for the brake and steering wheel. She was able to slowly slide off the hood and land on her feet and I was able to keep the car on the road. Luckily it had an automatic transmission. When we collected enough bottles, she'd drive to the grocery store, cash them in and come out with a whopping \$2 to \$3 for her efforts. I came out of the summer knowing how to drive—something that was soon to come in handy.

I later overheard her telling a drinking pal about her bottle collecting. It was clear the endeavor had nothing to do with seat covers. She was trying to embarrass Isadore by letting people see her cash in the bottles. She'd tell them that Isadore was no longer giving her any money and she needed the bottle money to put food on the table. Of course, none of this was true. When the story got back to Isadore, he clearly was not pleased. She told him that this was nothing more than an experiment to see how much people gossiped, how quickly it was passed around and how quickly it would get back to Isadore. The story that Isadore heard did not include that I now knew how to drive.

Dorothy's drinking intensified. The summer between seventh and eighth grades she changed my routine. Now each day she dropped me off at the swimming club that was about ten miles away. I met new friends, I swam, I ate hot dogs. It was great. She spent the day in some bar with her drinking buddies and at the end of the day she'd return to pick me up. As soon as I saw her sitting in the car looking at me I knew she was drunk. All the way

home I paid attention to her driving and let her know when she was heading off the road or going too fast.

One evening after she picked me up she drove to a restaurant instead of going home. Well, it was a restaurant with a bar and a bunch of her friends. I had dinner at a table by myself while she and her friends drank and had a boisterous time. I saw a side of her I had not observed before. She was clearly enjoying herself and everyone seemed to be totally charmed by her.

We headed home about 11 P.M. She drove down a quiet, country back road that crossed some railroad tracks. As we were nearing the tracks, I could hear a train coming with its whistle sounding full blast. The closer we got the faster she drove. I told her to slow down, that we needed to stop. But that only made her go faster. The train was starting to cross in front of us and still the car picked up speed.

I looked at what was happening and suddenly realized that she was deliberately aiming to crash into the train in order to kill us both. I had to try to stop her and the car. The long, front bench seat gave me unobstructed access to her side of the car. I reached over with my foot and found the brake pedal. Her foot was on the gas pedal and I had to get her out of the way quickly. So with all the strength I had, I punched her in the face one time with my fist and knocked her out. Then I kicked her foot off the gas, slammed on the brake and grabbed the wheel. We stopped about ten feet from the tracks and I sat there staring at the train as it finished passing by. I got out and walked around the car shouting and shaking with an anger and fear beyond description.

Once I stopped shaking, I just wanted to go home. I pulled and pushed Dorothy across the seat to the passenger side, got behind the wheel and drove home. When we arrived Dorothy was still out so I left her in the car, went upstairs to my room and cried myself to sleep.

The next morning Dorothy was dressed and ready to drive me to the swimming club as usual. It was as if nothing had happened. I suspect she didn't remember anything about the night before and that she assumed the large welt on her face was caused by another one of her drunken accidents. I don't know what went through

her mind when she woke up and found herself in the car in our driveway. In all these years, I have never changed my opinion that she was aiming to kill us both. Because I had no idea what triggered her that night, I increased my protective vigilance when I was around her.

AS THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR BEGAN, Dorothy's erratic behavior became more public. Fox hunting season started and with that the weekly after-hunt parties that my parents hosted at our house resumed. My job at these affairs was bartending. I sat behind a table with the liquor bottles lined up and filled drink orders. It wasn't difficult. They all tended to drink Scotch on the rocks or Canadian Club and ginger ale on the rocks. Any drink more ambitious than this the people had to fix themselves. I didn't mind the parties or bartending because it gave me a chance to people watch up close.

I don't know how Dorothy felt about those parties. She seemed to enjoy most of the company, but some of the people, along with their children, clearly annoyed her. Keeping her under control could be tricky especially since Isadore expected her to cook the meal for the fifteen to twenty guests each week. The food wasn't elaborate—usually spaghetti or chicken cacciatore, which she started in the morning in the slow cooker and let simmer until it was time to serve. Still, I knew how much she hated cooking.

Things started to unravel quickly at one of the parties. Dorothy was about three hours late serving the meal. A friend of hers went into the kitchen intending to help but she made a big mistake: She asked Dorothy when dinner might be ready. I don't know what Dorothy had been doing up to that point (besides drinking), but she exploded as soon as the question was asked and flung her martini glass across the kitchen. A remarkably obnoxious, spoiled seven-year-old kid was standing at the kitchen doorway checking to see what the commotion was about. The martini glass hit him in the head. I have no idea if that was on purpose or just collateral damage. She hated that kid.

She continued screaming and started running through the house knocking over and tossing furniture. Isadore chased after her and

managed to catch a dining chair in mid-air that was headed toward the glass doors of a large cabinet that held some of Isadore's trophies and the family china. He finally caught up to her as she was headed back into the living room. By this time everyone had gathered their coats and were heading to their cars to escape the wrath of Dorothy. Isadore tackled her and the two of them landed on the floor in the living room in front of where I was sitting.

She was screaming insults at him and, to control her flailing attempts to hit him, he sat on top of her and pinned down her arms with his knees. She was calling him every name a sailor could think of, and he was bleeding from some face scratches and crying. I sat on the couch frozen from fear and shock, staring at the scene just in front of me.

I had no idea what to do. Isadore sat on top of her until she passed out while I continued to sit very still on the couch. I must have gone into shock because I have no memory of what happened next or how the night ended. I know I woke up the next morning in my own bed remembering what Dorothy did and the scene of both of my parents on the living room floor in front of me. When I went downstairs for breakfast it wasn't hard to notice that there was a new level of tension between Dorothy and Isadore. Outwardly our daily rhythm returned to "normal" and neither one of us ever mentioned that night.

Two weeks later they both sat me down and announced that they were divorcing. They asked if I understood what they were saying and I said yes. End of discussion. No further details or plans were given me.

However, not long after their announcement I overheard them arguing about me and where I would live. They weren't fighting about who wanted to keep me or who loved me more. They each 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 had to work and wouldn't know what to do with me so she had better take me. This went on for about a half hour while I sat at the top of the stairs trying to absorb what I was hearing as I cried silently. It both broke my heart and confirmed what I already suspected about how they felt about their daughter.

Shortly after their announcement, the day before Thanksgiving to be exact, Isadore got a call from his attorney. Dorothy was in his office demanding to sign the divorce papers. Isadore told him to let her sign them. And with that, Dorothy disappeared and never returned to Upperco. Isadore was left with the task of figuring out what to do with his thirteen-year-old daughter. I guess this was Dorothy's way of winning the argument.

For me, life returned to fairly normal rhythms. Isadore hired a woman to clean the house and cook weekday dinners. I continued going to school and riding. The only thing missing was Dorothy's drunken presence, abuse and anger. Although I had no idea what might happen next or where Dorothy was, I now felt relief. I still had my home, my room, my horse, my dog and my school schedule. I figured if I just let the divorce dust settle a bit, life would go on and all would be well.

Within the first month of our new life, Isadore decided to farm me out. I was sent to live with a classmate and her family. I wasn't overly upset by this turn of events. Life with Isadore was beginning to feel oddly quiet and lonely, and I looked forward to being a part of a "real" family.

Unfortunately I moved into another mess. The husband and wife were estranged but living in the same house. The four kids had sided with the mother and no one was speaking to the father. He ate dinner with us while the rest of the family ignored him at the dining table. Then he retired to the den and read for the rest of the evening.

Sometimes I joined him in the evenings. He was an engineer, he was smart, he talked about interesting things and he seemed pleased to have my company. He'd tell me his stories and teach me about things from his world. I never figured out what was going on between him and the rest of the family but towards me he was very kind.

I lived with this family for a few weeks and was beginning to feel settled in. One Saturday Isadore showed up unexpectedly (to me at least) and told me to pack my stuff right away. He was taking me back to our house. When I asked him why, he just told me to go upstairs and pack my things. That's when I looked around and

noticed something really odd. Normally there was all sorts of activity going on around the house, especially on Saturdays. Now everyone had disappeared. It was like the place had suddenly become a ghost house. I suspected the relationship between the wife and her husband was about to take a significant shift but because no one was around to explain or even to say goodbye, I left feeling I had done something wrong.

No matter the reason, I was grateful to be back home and back in my room. But that only lasted a week or two before I was farmed out again. This time it was to friends of Isadore's. He fox hunted with the husband. The wife had been an elementary school teacher but was now a stay-at-home mom with an infant son.

I wasn't sure why they agreed to my moving in because the house was rather small and they had to give up the only spare room to me. I found out that Isadore was paying people room and board for taking me in so I figured this was a way for the couple to have extra income now that the wife wasn't working. Because she had been a teacher and liked kids, I had great hopes that whatever I had done wrong at the first house would not be a problem for her. I was determined to succeed in this new home.

It took a couple of weeks but eventually I began to relax. They bought ice cream in five-gallon buckets and I was encouraged to eat as much as I wanted. Dorothy rarely had ice cream in our freezer so I thought I had now entered heaven. I still went to the same school but I had to stop my extracurricular activities in order to ride the bus to my new home. About every two weeks Isadore would call to see how I was doing and if I needed anything. The conversations were always utilitarian, short and to the point.

All seemed to be going well until one weekend when the wife traveled with the baby to visit some friends. That left me in the house with the husband. He spent the evening drinking and, long after I had gone to bed, he entered my room and began sexually molesting me. When he first started kissing and touching me I was asleep. But I woke up pretty quickly. At first I was confused and tried to figure out what was happening. I could tell from his breath and slurred speech that he was drunk, and I thought he may not know what he was doing. It even crossed my mind that he was

confused and thought I was his wife. No matter what, I knew I had to stop this man before he raped me. I didn't try to fight him. Drunk or not, he had the physical advantage over me so I felt slugging him or trying to push him off me was just going to make matters worse. Instead I talked. I tried to engage him in a conversation in the hope that he would realize what he was doing and stop. I talked about his wife and baby, but he continued to molest me. I kept talking until finally I persuaded him to leave my room. When I could no longer hear him moving around in his room, I figured he was asleep—and I felt I was temporarily safe as long as I stayed awake and alert. I spent the rest of the night feeling both ashamed and frightened. I couldn't figure out what I had done to encourage this man.

When the morning finally came and I collected enough courage to walk out of my bedroom, I found that the husband had disappeared. That day I wrote a long letter to a close friend telling him what happened and asking what I should do. The wife returned from her trip in the afternoon and in the evening the husband acted as if nothing had happened. I took my cue from him and pretended all was well despite my heightened levels of concern and vigilance. Having the wife back in the house gave me a little confidence that I was safe.

My friend wrote back right away. He had discussed my situation with his mother and together they felt the best thing to do was get a lock for my door and tell my father what happened. I didn't do either, at least not right away. Instead I started piling things against my door at night knowing that the clatter alone would wake up everyone in the house should he come in again. I refocused on my classes and spent the evenings studying in my room—and eating ice cream. The only time I saw the husband was during dinner. He avoided eye contact and only spoke to me when necessary.

The wife must have noticed a change in me because one afternoon while I was at school she went into my room looking for clues and answers. I had left my friend's letter on the dresser and she read it. There was enough information in that letter to tip her off that something had happened while she had been away. When I got back from school that afternoon, Isadore and the wife were

waiting for me. They told me to sit down. It was clear they were not at all happy with me. Isadore was holding my friend's letter. One thing I had hoped to avoid was an embarrassing public confrontation about this mess. That now appeared unavoidable.

The wife told me that she read my friend's letter and wanted me to explain what this guy was referring to and why he was telling me to get a lock on my door. I had barely begun speaking when she abruptly stopped me, left the room for a few minutes and came back with her husband. I could tell when he looked at me that he was really angry. His wife said I was to start over and to say what I had to say directly to his face.

I didn't think this situation could get worse. Everything I feared and hoped not to have to face was right in front of me. Now I had to describe in detail a scene that I found deeply embarrassing and I had to do it in front of my father, this wife and her husband, the perpetrator. When I started speaking again I could not make eye contact with anyone and I started to shake. Once I got the whole story out the husband stood up and declared in a rather loud, forceful voice that I was a liar. Then he stomped off. Isadore told me to pack my stuff. I was going home.

When I got in the car, I didn't know if the wife or Isadore believed me. Nothing was said by either one. Once again I felt defeated and like a failure. But at least I was going home again and would be back in my own room. After unpacking, I curled up in bed wishing I could disappear forever. I certainly never wanted to leave my room again.

Later that evening the husband stopped by. Apparently Isadore wouldn't let him in the house so they stood talking at the front door. I sat by an upstairs window listening. Isadore told the husband that he had contacted his lawyer to determine what should be done. The husband begged him to not take it any further. His marriage was shaky and his wife was pregnant again. Isadore told him the lawyer advised that he not press charges because at the trial I would be expected to testify. That ordeal may just "add to my trauma." It was clear from how the husband groveled, pleaded and apologized that he knew exactly what he had done. When it was over, he thanked Isadore and left.

I now knew two things: Isadore believed me. And he stood up for me: He got me out of that house immediately, he called the lawyer and he told the husband not to come to our house again. Suddenly, I could feel a shift. Instead of dealing with strong head winds I now had the wind—well, a gentle breeze—at my back.

The next day I still felt like I wanted to hide and wanted to stay in my room instead of going to school. I just needed a little time to gather my courage to face the world again. But that morning I discovered that I now had a new challenge to deal with. While I was being boarded out, Isadore was busy getting back into the dating game. His newest love came into my room to tell me I needed to get up and get dressed. It was better if I resumed my normal schedule right away. Since I already found the whole situation confusing, I had to consider that maybe she was right. She was an adult and a woman and surely she might know something about such matters. So I reluctantly got up, got dressed and caught the bus for school. I said nothing to my teachers and friends about what had happened.

Isadore's new love was barely an adult. She was just six years older than me. So it wasn't so much that I was looking at a potential mother replacement as a new sister. And that was fine with me. She was friendly, young, perky and, despite her youth, maybe she could help create my new family. She moved into Isadore's room that day and began taking on the role of mistress of the house.

It didn't take long for me to see that there was a problem. This girl didn't want to create a new life that included any of the pieces left over from Isadore's old life. She wanted Isadore all to herself, she wanted to create her own family with him and she wanted his money. I needed to go. She began a campaign to get Isadore to see me as a devious liar and someone set on making the two of them unhappy.

I could regale you with the details but suffice it for me to say that Isadore may have been brilliant when it came to equestrian and business matters but with people and family relationships he was an idiot. When she told him I was saying things I hadn't said and doing things I hadn't done, he believed her without question—no matter what I said in my own defense. I felt like I was back in

the house with a sober Dorothy. I had learned how to deal with Dorothy and how to anticipate her craziness. This girl was a mystery. When it came to me, she lied, manipulated, yelled, argued, pouted and demanded that Isadore do something about me. When it came to the two of them as a couple, she was sweet, sexy, lively, coquettish, gave him much pleasure and she made him laugh.

He didn't spot anything in her conduct that would verify what I was telling him about her. (I would not call Isadore a proficient observer when it came to people. Years later when I questioned him about Dorothy's drinking, he said he hadn't ever noticed her drunk.) When I tried to talk to him, he would just accuse me of having a lousy attitude that needed changing.

Dorothy had this weird little passive-aggressive game she played on Isadore each morning at breakfast. She didn't have to cook anything for him because his breakfast consisted of a single chocolate-frosted donut. I used to look at that donut with great desire and envy. It was his morning coffee that was her target. He only drank half of whatever volume of coffee she poured in his cup each morning. If she filled the cup full, he drank half and left the other half. If she poured half a cup, he drank a quarter. No matter what she poured, he only drank half. It was their odd daily breakfast routine.

Well, I started using a variation on this game with Isadore. I could see I had no standing or sway with him, thanks to his girlfriend. He blamed me for everything that was wrong, especially for the trouble I was causing with his girlfriend, and told me I had to change my lousy attitude. I was on to the girlfriend and I knew I wasn't causing the problems. So I decided to see just how far he was going to go with this. Every time he accused me of having a lousy attitude, I would up my game and make sure there wasn't anything even remotely lousy about my attitude. I became a textbook example of a model kid.

The immediate upside was that I could see that the girlfriend had to work much harder to discredit me. Each time Isadore confronted me, I would figure out how to raise my game even higher. The whole situation was crazy and seemed unstoppable.

Finally, when I was about an inch away from sainthood, Isadore upped his game. Along with telling me I had to change my lousy attitude (I swear to you this was the only term he used), he began threatening to take something away from me if I didn't change. Now I wasn't only being admonished for something I hadn't done, I was also being punished for the phantom offense. I was never able to convince him that I was not the one causing the trouble and that I was not doing or saying the things I was being accused of. In the era of my young years, children had little, if any, credibility in the eyes of adults.

Life staggered on. Isadore continued courting his girlfriend while I avoided them as much as possible and finished out my school year. Between my horse, my dog, my studies and my room, I was relatively content. I had my world and I tried not to look at Isadore acting like a teenager who was discovering girls for the first time. Geez.

Isadore's difficulties about me with his girlfriend were escalating. From what he was saying, I could tell he had decided that I was the cause of it all. He told me that if he could get me out of the house long enough for them to get married and to get settled, all would be well. Then I could rejoin them.

Even at my ripe old age of fourteen, I knew his plan was nuts. He never understood how much she didn't want me standing between her and his money. At the time, I didn't know how much money he was making. I just knew we were "very comfortable." However, the girlfriend had been his secretary (ahhh...the plot thickens) and she knew about his plans to purchase the company he was currently working for. This promised to bring in loads of new money. She really needed to get me out of the way.

A week before school ended, Dorothy popped back into the picture. Isadore told me that he had talked to her on the phone and she now wanted me to come live with her. For six months she had not contacted me and I had no idea where she had gone. I was under the impression that Isadore also didn't know where she was. Now he was telling me she was living in Ocean City, Maryland (a resort town where we used to go on vacation) and wanted me to live with her. I was to leave for Ocean City right after school ended.

I didn't believe Dorothy wanted me to live with her. If she did, it was most likely a passing phase. She probably sobered up enough to realize that she had abandoned her daughter and was now feeling guilty about it. But it's also quite possible that Isadore knew where she had been all along and called her to say he needed her to take me off his hands. It is possible that heart-breaking argument I overheard when my parents fought about who was going to be forced to take me after the divorce was still playing out and this was Isadore's way to win. I never found out who initiated that call. I asked Isadore if she sounded drunk when he talked to her and he assured me that she sounded fine.

THE DAY I LEFT UPPERCO was beautiful—a warm, sunny, mid-June day. I was to be driven to Ocean City by one of Dorothy's old drinking friends. While I waited for her to arrive, I walked around the property with Chris. My most vivid memory of that day is the colors: the different greens of the pasture grasses and tree leaves, the clear blue of the sky and the bright white of the few fluffy clouds. It sounds romanticized, doesn't it? But I remember thinking to myself: *What an unusually perfect day.*

Freedom was grazing in the pasture so I headed over to the fence to say goodbye. He came to me and stood there while I rubbed his head and told him what was happening, that I had to leave. I was about to tell him that I would be back when I literally felt a new reality descend and surround me. Suddenly, without any doubt or question, I knew. I looked out across the pasture and said softly, "I'm never coming back here." I leaned against the fence and watched Freedom grazing near me until my ride arrived.

Isadore helped me load my stuff in the car: one suitcase large enough to hold both summer and school clothes and a large box with a framed picture, a photo album, books, the metal box with the quotes I had collected, a small record player, several LP albums including my four favorites (Benny Goodman, Andrés Segovia, Gershwin's *American in Paris*, the soundtrack from *Oklahoma*) and the encyclopedia set that my grandparents had given me. (I left behind 134 pairs of socks, four car coats and ten-dozen pencils.)

He handed me a slip of paper with Dorothy's address written on it and a \$20 bill, "Here. In case you need anything for the trip." I thanked him, gave Chris one last pat and that was it.

As we drove down the driveway, the scene I saw beyond the car window was surreal. I had ridden up and down that driveway for years. We passed by the ring where I had schooled horses nearly every day. Now it suddenly all looked and felt as if these places had never been a part of my life. I didn't belong. I was leaving a stranger's house that I had just been visiting for a while.



PIVOT ONE



Chapter 2

Ocean City, Maryland

1960

FOUR HOURS AFTER LEAVING Upperco, we arrived in Ocean City, Maryland, a resort town located on the Atlantic Coast. In 1960, its hotels and motels extended from the southern inlet to about forty blocks north. Beyond that the dunes and beach stretched undeveloped to the Delaware line. Dorothy's apartment was on 36th Street, the northern edge of town.

Dorothy greeted us as we drove up. She looked the same except for her frosty-blue lacquered fingernails. And now she had a boyfriend trailing behind her. She didn't seem drunk so I allowed a little hope to rise, thinking maybe she wasn't drinking as much and maybe she actually had changed her mind about having a daughter. The boyfriend helped me haul my suitcase and box into the bedroom that Dorothy indicated would be mine, and I unpacked my stuff while she caught up on the Upperco gossip. After a couple hours of laughing, drinking and boasting to her boyfriend about her "beautiful, wonderful child" (which embarrassed me to my core), the party broke up. My chauffeur headed back to Upperco, and Dorothy announced that she and the boyfriend had a dinner date. If I got hungry, there was food in the refrigerator that she had picked up for me that day. As the two of them left, she told me she'd be home early and I was not to let any strange men into the apartment. She did not return to the apartment that night. In fact she disappeared again for over three months.

With that, I was fourteen years old, alone and faced with the task of figuring out how to survive.



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SPECIAL NOTE TO *PIVOT* READERS

We have posted photographs for *Pivot* on our website. Had we included them in the book, they would have added quite a number of pages to an already big book and increase the price considerably. The *Pivot* Gallery on our website is our way of getting around this. Be sure to go to:

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pivot

['pɪvət] verb (pivots, pivoting, pivoted)

A pivot occurs when a person who has been traveling on a familiar, well-defined life path makes a sudden voluntary or involuntary turn that untethers the individual from that path and propels him or her onto a new and often unrelated path that uproots the individual from his or her previous world.

This is a beautiful memoir. Certainly one of a kind. And it is inspiring. It inspires me to continue to allow life to unfold and surprise me. It makes me think more about what I need to be doing to carve my own way.

—Maggie Neiss, South Chester, PA

With this memoir, Machaelle pulls back the curtain and gives us a unique look behind the scenes, and an even more expanded view of the bigger picture.

—Emily Dobson, Decorah, IA

Pivot is all about having the courage and confidence to meet life on its own terms.

—Michael T., Canton, OH



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