

Honoring the Body
The Autobiography of
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<i>1958-1970: The Language of the Body; Love and Orgasm; Betrayal of the Body; Pleasure: A Creative Approach to Life</i>	

1972-1980: *Depression and the Body: The Biological Basis for Faith and Reality; Bioenergetics; The Way to Vibrant Health: A Manual of Bioenergetic Exercises* (with Leslie Lowen); *Fear of Life*
1984-1995: *Narcissism: The Denial of the True Self; Love, Sex, and Your Heart; The Spirituality of the Body: Bioenergetics for Grace and Harmony; Joy: The Surrender to the Body and to Life*

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PART ONE

The Challenge of Healing the Mind-Body Split

In the 1910s, the streets of Harlem brought me pleasure and refuge. Books at the public library opened me to worlds beyond my parents' unhappiness. Adolescence had moments of ecstatic excitement and frustration. The challenge of the life of the body vs. the mind was set in motion. Wilhelm Reich provided the direction of my life. My sessions with Reich centered around having me *breathe, breathe and breathe*. Reich's strength of personality and my own therapy became the means for how I found my path; it set the basis for Bioenergetic Analysis.

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Childhood and City College

I was born in New York City on December 23, 1910, to Jewish parents from Russia who had immigrated around the turn of the century. My father was the youngest and last of five siblings to come to the United States. My mother had a younger sister living in the city. I never knew my grandparents.

I remember being a baby, and the memories are not all pleasant. The overall sense of my early life for the first five years is mixed. Although I have no memory of it, I believe that I was breast-fed for no more than nine months, and I was not a happy baby. One picture shows me lying on my belly and looking up with sad eyes (see Part II: Pictures from my Life). My earliest memory is of sitting on the floor in our kitchen while my mother was busy. I also remember crawling around with another baby, a girl cousin, when I was almost a year old. I have no memory or feeling of being held by my mother, but I have warm feelings about my father, who played with me as I grew up.

When I was four and a half, my mother delivered twin girls at home. I did not know that my mother was pregnant or that when one of the babies died, it was a tragedy. There was no sense of dying, just sudden activity. People were standing around the door, and I sensed that something important had happened, although it was not a joyful occasion.

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I was just left to stand at the door. I do not know who else was there, perhaps relatives. I had no feeling of my sister's being gone, and I have no picture in my mind of her face. I had a general feeling that something was going on, and then everything was stable again. My father was there, so I wasn't alone. I do not think that it was significant, which is why I do not go too deeply into it.

My father had a hand laundry business in Harlem. After my sister's birth, we moved from our small apartment behind the store to an apartment above the store. In the early days, my mother worked in the store with my father. I have several pleasurable memories from those early days—gathering flowers in the park for my mother and her sister and building sand castles with my father on the beach.

My mother was a small woman. When she sat on a chair, her feet did not reach the floor, so she always sat at the edge of the seat with a very straight back. My mother's rigidity was associated with a need to control. In one incident when I was three or four years old, we were sitting side by side on the edge of a bed. She seemed to be having difficulty dressing me because I was restless—maybe she was lacing my high-top leather shoes that children wore in those days. She turned toward me and pinched the flesh of my thigh, giving it a twist. It was very painful, but I did not cry. I never forgot the feeling that my mother could be cruel if I resisted her.

To this day, if someone makes a movement of the hand as if I might be struck, I shrink back. She told me from a young age, "Stop crying, stop crying." I had trouble crying and did not cry, because I did not want to give in to weakness. I never saw my mother cry or heard her sing or laugh—life was a very serious affair. I don't ever recall seeing her engage in any playful or pleasurable activity. She was always busy in the home except when we visited her sister. I never saw my parents dance, but one day when I was four or five, I opened the bedroom door and saw them together. They were very embarrassed and quickly closed the door.

My father was just the opposite—a soft person, easy-going, and pleasure-loving. On Sundays in winter he took me sledding, and in summer he played ball with me. When I was five, one Sunday afternoon while we

were living at the beach, he took me to an amusement park that had rides, games and confections. As we walked down the boardwalk and approached the amusement park, I heard the music and saw the glittering lights. I was overwhelmed by the excitement. I felt that I was in a fairyland—it felt unreal.

My relationship to my mother was all too real, too involved with the raw functions of eating, eliminating and sleeping. Her idea of a good mother was one whose child ate well and was fat. Throughout my childhood, she was after me to eat all the food on the plate and told me stories about starving people in China to make me feel guilty about wasting food. Whether I could not eat all the food she served me or whether I had to resist her domination of me, I do not know—to this day, I cannot clean my plate. On the other hand, if I liked a food, she never gave me all I wanted, and this pattern continued throughout the years I lived at home. Even when I was a young man, she would bring orange juice to my bedroom and would insist that I should not drink it until I had brushed my teeth.

I have memories of wetting my bed and later using a potty under the bed at night when I must have been about two years old. One memory from that period is that I peed in my shoe instead of the potty, as an unconscious rebellion to get back at my mother. As I got older, my mother would stand me in front of the toilet and say, “Pee, pee, pee, try, try, try.” Then she would turn the faucet on and say, “Make, make, make.” She never allowed me to be free, always controlled.

My mother was even more compulsive about the function of defecation. She would examine my stool every day to see if it was “normal.” Of course, my bowel movements were not normal, and I suffered from constipation and bellyaches. If laxatives, like horrendous castor oil, did not do the job, I got an enema. I even remember my mother chasing me with a glass of milk of magnesia down the street. She had absolutely no faith in the body’s ability to regulate its own functions. Every cold called for her intervention. When I had a running nose, the nose drops of Argyrol made me sneeze a horrible-looking, black mucous and greatly