INTRODUCTION
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One of the very first patients I worked with was a young athletic trainer who bore a striking resemblance to Robert Redford. At first glance, I couldn't imagine what could be troubling to such a handsome and graceful young fellow, although I was soon convinced that he was indeed in need of my help, as he was plagued by recurring depressions. This surprised me, because his youth and robust appearance gave him an air of confident well-being. However, as he began to describe his life to me, I became convinced that he had every reason to be depressed. He had been raised by cold and uncaring parents who appeared perfectly normal to those outside of the family. His mother kept a clean house and served well-prepared food, but behind closed doors she demonstrated little interest in or emotional attachment to her son. She spent every afternoon watching soap operas, and my patient soon learned not to disturb her when he came home from school. He spent much of his time in his room building plastic models of ships and planes. Similarly, his father appeared on the surface to be a good father, in that he was both dependable and a good provider, yet he was almost completely unresponsive to his son's emotional needs. My

patient characterized his childhood experience as like living in a "private and secret orphanage." He assumed that his parents ignored him because he had some defect that was obvious to them, and as time passed he felt more and more inferior and self-conscious.

When he reached his teenage years, his father announced that he would teach him about the outdoors. This surprised my patient, since up to this time his father had behaved as if his son barely existed. Father and son went hunting and fishing, but instead of enjoying the unusual attention focused on him, my patient recalled these "lessons" as sheer torture. He was already ill at ease with both parents because the years of emotional rejection made him extremely sensitive to criticism, since he assumed he was somehow "damaged goods." His father was an expert woodsman, but instructed him very sparsely—but still expected his timid and fearful son to know what to do under pressure. For example, when they went deer hunting, his father would follow his progress in the woods from several yards back, critiquing his skills by clapping his hands if he did something wrong. Every time he stepped on a twig that made a noise, it would be followed by a loud handclap. The mounting pressure from his silent and critical father made him so nervous and self-conscious that when he finally sighted his first deer, he was paralyzed by the fear that he would make another mistake. His hands began to tremble so severely that he could not even lift his gun. His father began clapping his hands and the deer bounded off in the distance. Similarly, when fishing from a small boat, he panicked when he hooked his first fish, not knowing which way to crank the fishing reel. He looked to his father for help and saw a man whose face was red with rage and frustration. His father began clapping his hands again, and my patient, filled with fear, threw the fishing rod into the lake.

The fishing incident convinced his father to abandon all attempts to usher his son into adulthood. Soon after, his father handed him a carefully worded letter that said that he was a great disappointment as a son, and that he would no longer take him hunting or fishing. Nothing was ever mentioned verbally about the letter and the "family" continued on as if nothing had happened.

As a young man, he went to college and excelled both academically and athletically. Not surprisingly, his social life was constricted and unsatisfactory, as his sense of inferiority made him exceedingly shy around women of his age. He was jealous of his roommate and friends who had normal and easy relationships with women. He assumed that they were successful because of their physical "builds," so my patient began a program of bodybuilding. His increased musculature did little to attract female students, so he concluded that his lack of success was due to a clique that deliberately excluded him. He had no ability to see that his painful shyness and envy were felt by his peers and caused his social failures.

After graduation, he decided to see the country before starting his job as a athletic trainer. He joined an organized cross-country bicycle expedition with twenty-five other similarly adventuresome peers. He considered the three-month trip to be a complete success, yet my patient decided to purchase a home right next door to his parents' house soon after he began working that fall. Not surprisingly, the proximity to his parents had terrible consequences, as he was drawn into their increasingly frequent arguments. Typically, he would return home from his job and begin preparing dinner, only to be interrupted by a "distress signal" from next door. His mother would flash the living room lights on and off and my patient would drop everything and run to help her. The battle between my patient's parents finally culminated in his mother's threat to move next door—to my patient's house—in retribution for the verbally abusive treatment she was receiving from her husband. Ever since my patient left home, his father's critical focus had been turned on his mother, who had become a social isolate and constant television watcher. My patient's role in this sad family scenario was to make peace between his embittered and resentful parents, a task which usually took several hours. By the time he was able to return to his own home he would be too upset to finish his dinner. This constant gut-wrenching involvement in his parents' battles, and his stalled life (how could he bring a woman home with the possibility of a battle next door?) provoked the frequent depressions that led him to seek therapy.

After he described his childhood, I asked him with exaggerated curiosity just how it was possible that the most interesting house he saw on his three-month bicycle trip *just happened to be right next door* to his parents' home? He had no explanation other than the fact that he wanted to visit his mother for breakfast. His decision ignored the reality that he had recognized—long before he bought the house—that his parents had become disagreeable to each other and to him.

This clinical example illustrates a classic psychological scenario that is repeated all too frequently: an attractive, educated, and capable adult who was poorly nurtured and is consequently unable to separate from the very parents who neglected him in childhood. This book will address the question of why some young adults are able to launch themselves confidently into life while others remain at home, hardly venturing out, fearful of the world, and discontented with their lives—yet completely unable to change. We all know examples of bright and attractive young adults who, despite all the advantages of education, cannot leave home and start a family of their own. Nearly every family has one middle-aged relative who is still living with his or her elderly parents and despite obvious unhappiness is unable to separate and live on his or her own. In other cases, the young adult manages to leave the family home but remains a slave to their parents' every opinion, often calling home daily or visiting for meals, while neglecting other adult relationships. Our culture often labels immature male adults who are overly attached to their mothers as "mama's boys"—however, either gender can become unhealthily mired in their family of origin.

Leaving your family, particularly if they failed to meet your childhood needs, is the hardest psychological task in adult life. The paradox that this book will explore is the unexpected observation that children who are loved and nurtured in childhood have a relatively easy time leaving home and starting their own families, while children who were ignored, neglected, or even abused are much less able to leave the very home that failed them. Adult logic would suggest that the reverse would be true: that the loved child would remain close to his or her parents in order to continue to

enjoy the rewards of relating to loving parents, while the neglected young adult would flee and avoid his depriving parents at all cost.

Giving up on one's family, no matter how negative, is not an action that is received well in our culture. We are told by pop psychology books to "make peace with our parents" or to "forgive" them for what they did to us when we were young and vulnerable. Many organized religions tell us to respect and honor our parents regardless of how they treated us as children. As we will see, the apparently simple act of choosing to separate from one's family of origin is seen by many as an offense against our social and religious fabric. Many opponents will condemn the individual who takes this action, even when it is taken in adulthood. Most prominent of the naysayers will be the neglectful parents themselves, who will feel enormously threatened when their adult child begins to separate. Many will use the shopworn cliche that "blood is thicker than water" as an attempt to avoid any change that would alter long-term dysfunctional patterns.

Giving up our attachment to our hurtful family means giving up both our hope for and our guilty concern about our family of origin. The individual who takes this self-protective action exposes himself to an enormous taboo, and I intend this book to serve as a source of support for those who choose this path. Separation from one's dysfunctional family is essential for the mental health of the individual, as it signals the transition from childhood to adulthood. I hope to offer a clearly reasoned and logical pathway to freedom to adults who are ensnared by their negative family. The alternative is to remain attached to the family, either in actuality (by remaining single and living in the family home) or symbolically, through the re-creation of similar abusive, rejecting, and demeaning adult relationships. Sadly, both choices leave us in a state of suspended animation, forever waiting to start an authentic new life of our own.

The purpose of this book is to outline a quiet and reasonable program for the reader who is interested in separating from his or her family. I hope to demonstrate the essential and life-saving nature of this task, as well as the steps that help one to succeed at this difficult psychological endeavor. Conversely, this book is not designed

to encourage the reader to engage in endless dramatic (and ultimately futile) recriminations against his or her failed parents. We currently have many popular psychology television programs that urge their guests to detail every memory of neglect or abuse. Often, these recitations of victimization become an end in themselves, as they offer temporary empathy from a sympathetic audience, but they do not promote moving on in life. Rather, they encourage the individual to become a professional "victim" whose most important achievement in life is the retelling of the original abuse.

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I am first going to look at the issue of destructive human attachments from the very beginning of the first human relationship: the child's relationship to the mother and father. Many of the "classic" self-help books enter a complex and lengthy drama in the third act (that is, adulthood) and try to guess what happened in the opening act. My approach begins by examining faulty emotional attachments from their foundation in childhood, and then connect that early faulty pattern of relating to the adult's inability to separate from the same family that failed to meet his needs in childhood.

The Psychological Foundation of *Leaving Home*

This book, despite its clear and understandable language and its lack of jargon, is based on a longstanding psychoanalytic model that has existed since 1940 and has grown in importance over the last twenty years. The field of psychoanalysis is not a single model or theory, but rather comprises a group of similar theories that compete with one another and are based in "schools" or analytic institutes that specialize in one model or another. The closest analogy is Protestantism: a group of churches that share fundamental beliefs, but that differ in emphasis and religious ritual.

All psychoanalytic theories (there are five major schools of thought) originated with Freud, who was the titan of the field. Each of the models evolved and moved away from Freud's concepts, but they all share the view that the human unconscious is the primary motivator of human behavior. They differ widely in their understanding of how the unconscious develops and operates. The psychoanalytic model on which *Leaving Home* is based is called "Object Relations Theory," which is a model that evolved out of Freud's original writings, but that differs markedly with most of Freud's theory (currently referred to as "classical psychoanalysis"). Freud's model was an instinct or "drive" model—he assumed that all human motivation originated in primitive instincts that were based on either sex or aggression. He called this fundamental human motivation "libido," and he assumed that it operated from birth. The sexual motivation felt by the infant toward his or her mother would now be called tenderness or pleasure from reduction of hunger. Freud referred to the mother of the infant as the "sexualized object" and over the years, the careful study of relationships between mothers and infants began to be referred to as "object relationships." This is the origin of the name of the branch of psychoanalysis that this book is based upon, an unfortunate name because humans outside of ourselves are referred to as "objects."

Freud lived at the dawn of the scientific revolution and he freely borrowed concepts from Darwin, the most successful scientist of his time. Prior to Darwin, the only "model of man" was religious creationism, and Darwin challenged all of religion with his discovery of evolutionary biology. This shift of concepts away from religion and toward scientific explanation of humankind was far greater than anything we have seen in our generation. Freud was so impressed with the power of science and the view of humanity that Darwin's theory offered that he incorporated Darwin's concepts into his psychological model. In Freud's model, primitive instincts were given the central role as providers of all human motivation. These instincts were the psychological equivalents of Darwin's concept of our humanoid ancestors that existed before modern man. Freud gave life to these primitive ancestors in our mental life by

assuming that they still existed in the humans of today. He pro-
posed that each of us contained a mental construct that he called
the "id," which is an unconscious cauldron of drives that pressed
upward, seeking conscious expression. Thus Freud's id was the psy-
chological equivalent of Darwin's primitive early man, and he as-
sumed that it was the power source for the entire personality. No
child could survive in its family with only the ruthless behavior that
characterizes the id, and Freud solved this problem by introducing
his second personality structure, the "ego." Freud's ego was a part
of the id (the original power source), but it modified itself and de-
veloped into a "go-between," mediating between the unconscious
id and the society's demands. The ego was not a "self" as we now
understand the concept of a multifaceted human identity, but
rather a puppet that served the primitive needs of the id while try-
ing to remain within the confines of cultural demands. The funda-
mental conflict in humankind according to classical psychoanalysis
is always the same—a constant struggle between the id's aggressive
and sexual motivation and the restrictions imposed by society.
Freud also accounted for the "higher" characteristics of hu-
mankind including altruism, love, religious conviction, and social
responsibility with his third psychic structure, and the last one to
develop in the child, which he called the "superego." Freud postu-
lated that the superego evolved from "internalization" of the atti-
tudes and standards set forth by the child's parents and others who
conveyed the rules of society. The development of the superego was
the point in Freud's theory from which Object Relations Theory de-
veloped. Had Freud been consistent in his theory building, he
would have insisted that the superego evolve out of the ego, since
his model was purely "instinctual." All his psychological structures
should have evolved from inherited biological instincts. But Freud
erred and created a "mixed" model, akin to welding the front of a
Ford and the rear of a Plymouth together. The origin of his super-
ego emerges from a different (noninstinctual) and competing
process. That is, an alternative view of personality development is
that our sense of self or identity evolves from social interactions
that are stored in memory. This view produces a very different, and

in many ways an *opposite* psychological model. Taken further, the "internalization" model of personality development sees the formation of the human personality not as the unfolding of primitive drives, but rather as the accumulation of memories of one's parents in relationship to oneself, which eventually forms a "self."

The process by which this second psychoanalytic model developed took many years and was begun by Melanie Klein, a loyal follower of Freud. Klein did not realize that she was offering the world an alternative psychoanalytic model that would ultimately overtake classical Freudian thought. Klein was a German analyst who fled fascism to England. She considered herself a classical Freudian, but her writings emphasized the role of "internalized objects," that is, memories of the parents who both populated and exerted control of the child's developing personality. She saw the influence of these internalized objects as coexisting with Freud's drive theory. Again, this was a mixed model, but at the very dawn of psychoanalysis those in the field were so excited by the unfolding possibilities that pointed criticism of their model building was ignored. Klein's model exists today as one of the five major psychoanalytic models.

The next theorist who contributed to the development of Object Relations Theory was Ronald Fairbairn, and his theory of personality development is the model upon which this book is based. Fairbairn was a Scottish philosopher, physician, and psychoanalyst who wrote a series of papers outlining his model of the human personality in the 1940s. He took Klein's ideas a step further by eliminating all notions of biologically inherited drives and replaced them with a purely relational model. Fairbairn saw the human personality as constructed from thousands of conscious and unconscious memories of the child in interaction with his or her "objects," that is, his or her parents. His model is elegant, powerful, and completely understandable, and it highlights the critical importance of early childhood experiences. Fairbairn's unconscious is central to his model, but it is a very different unconscious than Freud's. Freud's unconscious had to remain repressed because it was too antisocial and violent for modern man to accept—it was,

in other words, the primitive man within us. Fairbairn's uncon-
scious was populated by memories of actual events: failures in par-
enting, hurts, and instances of abandonment that the child could
not consciously tolerate. Thus both Freud and Fairbairn placed the
unconscious at the center of their models, but the role and contents
of their respective unconsciousnesses differ greatly.

The most important concept that Fairbairn proposed was the
concept of "attachment to bad objects," which describes the
abandoned, abused, or neglected child's intense loyalty to the very
parent or parents who failed him or her. Fairbairn developed this
concept in the years between 1927 and 1935, while he worked in
an orphanage in Edinburgh. His model focuses on the plight of
children who are completely dependent on parents (as we all were)
who failed to meet their legitimate developmental needs. He noted
that these children defended their abusive parents at all costs and
could not wait to return to their physically abusive homes.

Fairbairn also enhanced our understanding of the Freudian
concept of "repetition compulsion," the observation that humans
paradoxically relive and re-create painful situations from their
childhood in their adulthood relationships. Freud observed these
same patterns, but his model of pleasure seeking (libido theory)
had no way of explaining "pain seeking." He attempted to do so
late in life with the drive concept of "thanatos" or the death in-
stinct, which turned out to be his least accepted concept. Fairbairn
understood repetition compulsion as the inevitable replay of the
painful relationships that populate our unconscious. We seek oth-
ers to act out roles that we took in our family of origin, or those
that were originally taken by one or the other of our parents. Rep-
etition compulsion is neither pain seeking or pleasure seeking, but
rather a re-creation of our original family that has become the in-
ternal template of human relations that we have not been able to
escape. We re-create the only relational world that we have ever
known—one that is often biased toward frustration, longing,
anger, and despair.

The positions that are taken in this book have a solid foundation.
Fairbairn's observations are not "secrets" that are limited to the

rarified world of psychoanalysis, but rather observations that have been independently noted by writers, essayists, and students of human behavior, many of whom I quote. The process of separation from one's family of origin for many adults raised in an atmosphere of neglect is both painful and difficult, but it is simultaneously an essential and life-affirming quest.

A Note on Confidentiality

This book contains many clinical examples taken from actual experiences from my twenty-six year career as a clinical psychologist. All the clinical conflicts that I describe are real; however, I have changed many of the personal characteristics of the patients in order to protect their privacy. Some examples are the result of mixing the characteristics of two patients together, while others are not. In some cases, I have obtained permission to use the material with little or no changes, and these are mixed in with others that have been modified. The goal is to give the reader a vivid and accurate window into the private world of psychotherapy without compromising the privacy of those who have participated in the change process.