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Body, Mind & Spirit

Returning to My Mother's House: Taking Back the Wisdom of the Feminine
Gail Straub
High Point
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The metaphor of an “unbounded flame” ignites the interest of readers of Gail Straub’s autobiographical novel about discovering the light of feminine wisdom. Straub defines wisdom in the form of authenticity, awareness, and transcendence—all of which are revealed through breaking the chains of the “intense speed of outer life” and freeing the “intuition, stillness, and contemplation” of inner life. Gail Straub is a codirector of the Empowerment Institute, and the author of several books including *Circle of Compassion* and *Connecting Within Society*. She also partnered with UNICEF to create Earth Run, a remarkable event for the United Nations’ Year of Peace in 1986. Straub has traveled around the world to countries like China, Russia, and Bali, leading seminars that help both men and women release their own flame of feminine wisdom.

The book begins by uncovering Jacqueline Walsh's (Gail's mother) life in the early 1930s in Denver, Colorado. She was an artist living as a bohemian, embodying creativity and passion which followed her into life as a married woman and parent. Gail revisits fond memories of extravagant art projects, adventurous nature walks with her sister, and fruitful conversations at the dinner table. This serene life soon dissolves as her mother's desire to belong to a prestigious community in Wilmington, Delaware, consumes their family. The passion and creativity they once had burns out, and repetitiveness and pseudo-sophistication rule instead. Gail enters her teen years confused by this dichotomy and begins her quest for meaning, fulfillment, and empowerment. Later, Gail identifies herself as flower child of the 1960s' peace movement and begins her travels outside of the United States in search of something more. She travels across Europe, staying in Paris, and then on through Africa; her trip culminates with a spiritual pilgrimage across the Sahara Dessert. These foreign journeys prepare her for her own struggles with the "archetypal powers" of reason, emotion, critical insight, and articulated awareness.

Gail Straub challenges the reader to look closely into one's life to discover, through inward reflection, the "unbound flame" that is in us all. She does this by opening the window into her complex, private, and deeply compelling stories. Straub shows that life is not just about the daily task of existing through the empirical senses, but searching for authenticity and gaining feminine wisdom through exploration of inner realities.