

[PDF] At Home In The World: A Memoir

Joyce Maynard - pdf download free book

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Author: Joyce Maynard

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Description:

Joyce Maynard's memoir *At Home in the World* is an attempt to make peace with herself. At times, however, it's hard not to see it as an act of war--on her parents and, most notably, on J.D. Salinger. Maynard's account of her year-long relationship with the reclusive writer is the centerpiece of the book and the publicity pivot on which it turns. And how not? She first encountered Salinger when he wrote her a fan letter following her world-weary but not necessarily wordly wise *New York Times Magazine* cover piece, "An Eighteen Year Old Looks Back on Life." He was then 53 and, as Maynard paraphrases, wanted her "to know that I could be a real writer, if I would just look out for myself, as no other person is likely to." By the time she was 19, she was living with the increasingly controlling Salinger and doing her best to adhere to his regimens, from homeopathy at any price to a mostly macrobiotic diet heavy on frozen peas. (Lamb burgers, formed into patties and then frozen--before being cooked at a dysentery-friendly 150 degrees--also figure heavily.)

What's worse, he does his best to turn the hugely driven young woman into a mistrusting, publicity-shy prig, not to mention helping her perfect her already anorexic bent. Maynard is such a skilled writer that it's hard not to take her side as the relationship falters. In fact, even when it's going well, it's not easy to sympathize with a man whose idea of an endearment is, "I couldn't have made up a character of a girl I'd love better than you." But Maynard is as hard on her younger self as she is on the great man. Though she had published intimate essays since her early teens, and long been feted for her "honesty," it has taken the overachiever many years to realize that she had carefully left out her most personal burdens--her father's alcoholism, her mother's nighttime "snuggling" and overwhelming intrusions, the distance between her and her older sister.

Still, *At Home in the World* is more than a clearing-house for past parental and amorous wrongs. It's a cautionary tale about using language and the pretense of truth to obscure key realities. One of the many curiosities in this discomfiting book? Salinger dreamt that he and Maynard had a child together: "I saw her face clearly. Her name was *Bint*." The World War II veteran then looks up the word. "What do you know," he says. "It's archaic British, for little girl." Maynard never, even now, has questioned his definition. In fact, it's slang, used especially in World War II, for *prostitute*. When Salinger forced the 19-year-old to clear her things out of his New Hampshire house, she was still unaware of the word's force. "On the window of Jerry's bedroom, where the glass is dusty, I write, with my finger, the name of the child we had talked about: BINT." --*Kerry Fried* --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

From Publishers Weekly Maynard, novelist (*Baby Love*; *To Die For*) essayist, columnist and Web-page chatteuse, was a freshman at Yale in April 1972 when the New York Times Magazine published her cover article, "An Eighteen Year Old Looks Back on Life." Of the hundreds of letters she received, one from the reclusive J.D. Salinger, then 53, praising her talent and warning her against the dangers of early success, struck a particular chord. Maynard quickly wrote back and, following a summer of letters, phone calls and visits to Cornish, N.H., she dropped out of Yale and moved in with him. Maynard's observant, straight-faced presentation of what are nonetheless often hilarious events chez Salinger has to be one of the shrewdest deflations of a literary reputation on record. What's plain and most damaging is the nature of Jerry's interest in Joyce, who looked about 11 and who arrived for her first visit in a dress almost identical to one she wore in first grade. Maynard poignantly describes her alienation and isolation, which Salinger reinforced before cruelly discarding her. Unable for legal reasons to quote Salinger's letters, Maynard nevertheless makes the reader see why his words so captivated her: "I fell in love with his voice on the page," she says. Once she moved in, however, Jerry began to sound like an aging Holden Caulfield, abrasive and contemptuous. Maynard takes too long setting up her family history pre-Salinger and far too long recounting her life since, inadvertently revealing why Salinger and others seem to have wearied of her. But her painstaking honesty about herself lends credence to her portrayal of Salinger as something worse than a cranky eccentric. This will be a hard story to ignore. First serial to *Vanity Fair*.

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