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Lizard  
way

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*This book is dedicated to my brother, Lloyd Helms, and sister, Laura Murphree. I dedicate it also to my wife, Carolyn Helms, and my son, Dave Helms, who years ago coined the phrase "the lizard way." All four of them helped me keep the lizard way open for many years.*

# Contents

Preface.....	1
When Feathers Fly .....	3
Taking Jesus Along .....	5
String Theory .....	7
The Power of Ten.....	9
Just Walk Away.....	12
What Would Jesus Do? Send a Puppy, of Course.....	14
Laughing Gas .....	17
Lessons Learned .....	19
Alternate Universe.....	22
Finding Your Good Stuff.....	25
Two Things God Overdid.....	28
The Angel.....	30
The Lizard Way .....	32
Death Be Not Proud .....	36
Cheque, Please .....	39
We, the Living.....	42
Code Word—Mountain Dew.....	45
Exit 296 .....	47
My Magic Rock.....	50
Caution: Horses .....	53
Jesus in a Bottle.....	55

Losing my Voice, Finding my Center .....	57
A Light Unto My Path .....	60
A Funny Story.....	63
The Cost of Kindness .....	64
ANT Problems.....	66
Bibliomancy: Remembering the Eagles.....	68
Star Stuff .....	71
The Gospel According to Waffle House .....	73
But Don't Forget Your Bucket!.....	76
Remembering Maggie .....	80
Finding Inner Joy .....	86
Tombstone Territory.....	88
Emotional Resources .....	91
Ordinary Wonder.....	94
Connections.....	97
Kyrie Eleison .....	99
4'33" .....	101
Acknowledgements.....	104

# Preface

My thirteen-year-old son and I had been talking about getting a dog for some time. Finally, during mid-December of 1994, we went to the Chattanooga Humane Society to get a dog. My son had said for weeks, “I don’t want no girl dog.” He was capable of better grammar, but that’s what he said (later he graduated from Georgia Tech and Purdue University). The gentleman who showed us through the kennel led us to a cage where all we saw was a lump of black fur. He picked up one of the dogs to reveal that there were two dogs in that pile of fur, a male and a female. Was it her eyes, one blue and brown, and the other sky blue? Or was it those beautiful brown and white markings on her jet-black body? I don’t know, but it was the “girl dog” that we left with. We paid our \$25, signed some papers stating that we would take good care of her, and took Maggie home. After we bathed her (twice) we laid her on my bed for her to take a nap. Over the next weeks and months, she grew into the most beautiful mixed shepherd that you can imagine. And her quiet and gentle disposition was noticed by friends and strangers for years to come. You can read all about that in my essay, “Remembering Maggie.”

In 2007, Maggie developed a brain tumor behind her right eye. After giving her the best year possible, the day came to have her put to sleep. On March 13, 2008, after the veterinarian performed that awful task, I stayed with Maggie a few minutes, then left. The veterinarian’s office took care of her remains. What follows are stories, “essays” that Maggie inspired in me. It is my highest hope that in reading my experiences and my innermost thoughts and feelings, you will not only enjoy my journey, but also find meaning for yourself. You can read my essay, “4’33”” for more on that. The book I wrote and the book you read are entirely different books. Each story represents some experience, some memory, some idea, some feeling that is uniquely mine, but these words will trigger totally different memories, ideas, and feelings in you. Maybe you will be

inspired to write your thoughts and feelings, too. No one can write your stories but you. In a few years, I look forward to reading each one. “The Lizard Way” is one of my stories that you will find here. It is perhaps the most significant. I think that you may discover that you have many lizard ways of your own.

So get a cup of coffee, a glass of tea, a glass of wine, or whatever helps you to relax. Settle down in a comfortable chair and enjoy my journey. I know writing these stories has been one of the best parts of my pilgrimage. To quote a friend of mine who says this often as he starts his truck, “Here we go.”

# Acknowledgements

In the fall of 1971, I was a freshman at Enterprise State Junior College in Enterprise, Alabama. In freshman composition, Mr. Smith told me that I could write. I've been writing for the pure pleasure of writing ever since.

This book would never have come to be without the encouragement of my good friend Lynelle Mason. She has had several books published and encouraged me to do the same. I want to thank my cousin, Nancy Helms, who, after reading my blog, said, "David, you have become one of my favorite authors." I could never get "author" out of my head. This acknowledgement would not be complete without thanking the composers Mark McKenzie and Z. Randall Stroope. Quite often I was listening to their beautiful music while I was writing. I want to thank John Pierce and Lex Horton, who are both editors with Nurturing Faith. When I got off course, they both steered me in the right direction. I owe both of them a debt of gratitude.

I want to thank my blog readers who have already read most of this and encouraged me every step of the way. My friend, Peggy Posey, often told me, "Just keep writing!"

I want to thank my wife, Carolyn, for her time and dedication to this body of essays. Besides the many helpful corrections and suggestions, she typed and retyped every word on every page. I can't thank her enough. Finally, thank you to all of my family and friends who have encouraged me over the years to find my voice with words on a page. They encouraged me to be myself, tell my stories, and to write from my heart. This book is theirs just as much as it is mine.