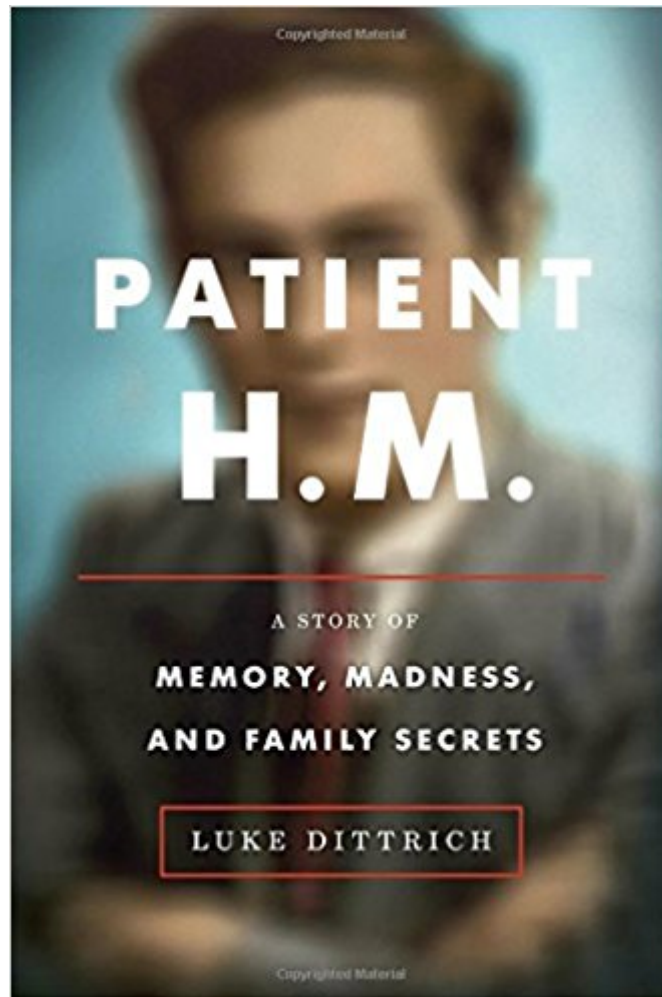


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Patient H.M.: A Story Of Memory, Madness, And Family Secrets



Synopsis

“Oliver Sacks meets Stephen King” in this propulsive, haunting journey into the life of the most studied human research subject of all time, the amnesic known as Patient H.M., a man who forever altered our understanding of how memory works—and whose treatment raises deeply unsettling questions about the human cost of scientific progress. For readers of *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* comes a story that has much to teach us about our relentless pursuit of knowledge. *Kirkus Reviews (starred review) In 1953, a twenty-seven-year-old factory worker named Henry Molaison—who suffered from severe epilepsy—received a radical new version of the then-common lobotomy, targeting the most mysterious structures in the brain. The operation failed to eliminate Henry’s seizures, but it did have an unintended effect: Henry was left profoundly amnesic, unable to create long-term memories. Over the next sixty years, Patient H.M., as Henry was known, became the most studied individual in the history of neuroscience, a human guinea pig who would teach us much of what we know about memory today. Patient H.M. is, at times, a deeply personal journey. Dittrich’s grandfather was the brilliant, morally complex surgeon who operated on Molaison—and thousands of other patients. The author’s investigation into the dark roots of modern memory science ultimately forces him to confront unsettling secrets in his own family history, and to reveal the tragedy that fueled his grandfather’s relentless experimentation—experimentation that would revolutionize our understanding of ourselves. Dittrich uses the case of Patient H.M. as a starting point for a kaleidoscopic journey, one that moves from the first recorded brain surgeries in ancient Egypt to the cutting-edge laboratories of MIT. He takes readers inside the old asylums and operating theaters where psychosurgeons, as they called themselves, conducted their human experiments, and behind the scenes of a bitter custody battle over the ownership of the most important brain in the world. Patient H.M. combines the best of biography, memoir, and science journalism to create a haunting, endlessly fascinating story, one that reveals the wondrous and devastating things that can happen when hubris, ambition, and human imperfection collide. Praise for Patient H.M.—“An exciting, artful blend of family and medical history.”—*The New York Times* “In prose both elegant and intimate, and often thrilling, Patient H.M. is an important book about the wages not of sin but of science. It is deeply reported and surprisingly emotional, at times poignant, at others shocking. . . . A scintillating book, infused with humanity.”—*The Washington Post* “Spellbinding . . . The fact that Dittrich looks critically at the actual process of scientific investigation is just one of the things to admire about Patient H.M.”—*The New York Times Book Review* “Patient H.M. tells one of the most fascinating and disturbing stories in the annals of medicine, weaving in ethics, philosophy, a personal saga, the

history of neurosurgery, the mysteries of human memory, and an exploration of human ego.â Sheri Fink, M.D., Pulitzer Prize winner and author of *Five Days at Memorial* â Dittrich explores the limits of science and the mind. In the process, he rescues an iconic life from oblivion. Dittrich is well aware that while we are the sum of what we may remember, weâre also at the mercy of what we can forget. This is classic reporting and myth-making at the same time.â Colum McCann, author of *Let the Great World Spin*

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Customer Reviews

10 Stars. Luke Dittrich has written a wonderful, heartbreaking story about the life of Patient H.M., real name, Henry G. Molaison. During the time of Walter Freeman and his lobotomobile, there was also a man named Dr. William Scofield. Scofield, was a popular neurosurgeon and lobotomist of the day. Henry, due to his frequent seizures, became Dr. Scofield's patient and was liberally operated on and subsequently suffered horrible amnesia which prevented him from enjoying life, except for one moment at a time. Patient H.M became the most studied research subject in history. With the invention of the lobotomy and subsequent brain study, doctors who previously only had their data from simian experiments could actually use patients from asylums to study the brain. This story is a journey of the brain and those who pioneered in the experiments to find out what part of the brain controls which human function. Naturally, the lobotomists thought that severing those frontal lobes did wonders for their patients-over time this became questionable. In Henry's case, Dr. Scofield went a little deeper into both lobes rendering him a complete amnesiac who could eat two meals

having never remembered eating the first. This book pays tribute to Henry as he selflessly gave his time for scientific study. This story is a fascinating study of Henry and those who controlled him, and it is an unveiling of hidden family secrets laid bare by the writing talents of Luke Dittrich. While some of the situations in this book are not for the squeamish, I highly recommend reading this book-this is the most interesting book of the year. I can imagine Mr. Dittrich unearthing the knowledge inside this book over time-it must have been an amazing albeit troubling journey.

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