



He Wanted the Moon: The Madness and Medical Genius of Dr. Perry Baird, and His Daughter's Quest to Know Him

Mimi Baird , Eve Claxton

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Soon to be a major motion picture, from Brad Pitt and Tony Kushner

A Washington Post Best Book of 2015

A mid-century doctor's raw, unvarnished account of his own descent into madness, and his daughter's attempt to piece his life back together and make sense of her own.

Texas-born and Harvard-educated, Dr. Perry Baird was a rising medical star in the late 1920s and 1930s. Early in his career, ahead of his time, he grew fascinated with identifying the biochemical root of manic depression, just as he began to suffer from it himself. By the time the results of his groundbreaking experiments were published, Dr. Baird had been institutionalized multiple times, his medical license revoked, and his wife and daughters estranged. He later received a lobotomy and died from a consequent seizure, his research incomplete, his achievements unrecognized.

Mimi Baird grew up never fully knowing this story, as her family went silent about the father who had been absent for most of her childhood. Decades later, a string of extraordinary coincidences led to the recovery of a manuscript which Dr. Baird had worked on throughout his brutal institutionalization, confinement, and escape. This remarkable document, reflecting periods of both manic exhilaration and clear-headed health, presents a startling portrait of a man who was a uniquely astute observer of his own condition, struggling with a disease for which there was no cure, racing against time to unlock the key to treatment before his illness became impossible to manage.

Fifty years after being told her father would forever be “ill” and “away,” Mimi Baird set off on a quest to piece together the memoir and the man. In time her fingers became stained with the lead of the pencil he had used to write his manuscript, as she devoted herself to understanding who he was, why he disappeared, and what legacy she had inherited. The result of his extraordinary record and her journey to bring his name to light is *He Wanted the Moon*, an unforgettable testament to the reaches of the mind and the redeeming power of a determined heart.

He Wanted the Moon: The Madness and Medical Genius of Dr. Perry Baird, and His Daughter's Quest to Know Him Details

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From Reader Review He Wanted the Moon: The Madness and Medical Genius of Dr. Perry Baird, and His Daughter's Quest to Know Him for online ebook

Josh Caporale says

When shopping at River Road Books in Fair Haven, New Jersey, I came across some promising books in areas that I was certain would interest me. Then I came across *He Wanted the Moon*, read the back, and knew that this was something I had to buy. It was a remarkable decision! This is a text that left me thinking about the content beyond the text and as I write this, I am thinking about ways regarding the approaches I take to engage in further research about what Dr. Perry Baird was working on with his research on manic depression (now known as bipolar disorder) and in general, learning more about the condition at hand.

Mimi Baird writes about her father, Dr. Perry Baird, who was a dermatologist that was a gifted, brilliant student that became inclined to do research on the condition that was bringing him down in manic depression. Unfortunately, his condition led to multiple visits to institutions that would cause he great decline, losing his family (his wife, Gretta, and his daughters, Mimi and Catherine), his license to practice, his professional connections, his ability to research, and so much more. The way that this book was structured was spot on, for I really like Mimi's decision to begin with her father's very own account of being institutionalized and the events that took place from his instatement on February 20, 1944 and the months that succeeded this particular entry. Dr. Baird discusses the cruel treatment of being tied up in a straightjacket or in packs on random instances, his interaction with others that were also institutionalized, and gives us a firsthand account of what it is like to be in his shoes. Some of the things he said and did may sound like they are hard to believe, but he was straightforward and said things exactly as he felt, portraying the actions of both himself and those working in the institution with brutal honesty.

In the second part of the book, Mimi tells her story about what life was like without her father, her struggles between that and how her mother and stepfather developed an emotionally cold atmosphere for her and her sister (though Mimi was affected much greater), and the way things happened from her perspective. Years after her father's death and after marrying and having children, Mimi always wanted to learn more and was able to get in touch with relatives, doctors, and other sources in finding out so much of what she needed to know about her dad. Dr. Perry Baird's greatest feat was his pioneering research that he did on manic depression, where he was trying to find solutions to his condition. Unfortunately, in America, the solution to treat manic depression was through lobotomies, developed by Portuguese neurologist Egas Moniz, which was the treatment used on Dr. Baird. While it eased emotional issues, it had greater side effects and Dr. Baird was never the same, having died from a seizure that was a result.

I could not think of any rating to give this book besides a perfect five stars. This is something I feel that everybody needs to read and something that everybody needs to know about, for it will develop a greater understanding for bipolar disorder and those that are affected by it. I could not think of a more perfect arrangement than the one put together here with how we learn about Dr. Baird through his accounts and then through Mimi's research and I really liked how we got Dr. Baird's account first, for it really fit in a chronological sense. There are moments in this book that are dark and show some of the things Dr. Baird did that would be deemed as immoral, but the things that Dr. Baird had to endure throughout his life and in the institution were certainly immoral as well. One has to look at Dr. Baird's determination in everything he wanted to get accomplished and how all he really wanted was a greater opportunity to be understood.

It is hard to imagine how it has only been within the last fifty some odd years where we began to develop a greater understanding for those with disabilities, especially mental and learning disabilities. In many cases, these people were locked away from society and instead of being treated properly, they were tortured perpetually. This torture was not limited to direct tactics ranging from electric shock to restraints, but one that was interior, where others wanted nothing to do with those with disabilities or saw them as complete incapables. *He Wanted the Moon* reminds us that there is so much more we need to learn about any given individual before we can determine what their legacy shall be. While one could write Dr. Baird off as a madman, I see him as an important attribute to global medicine and a champion in going forward with the development of understanding bipolar disorder to a greater degree. While he never got to complete his research, his efforts are priceless.

A film adaptation is being made for this book where Tony Kushner is writing the script, while Brad Pitt is being slated to star in the leading role. This will definitely be something that brings me back to the movie theater if this takes place.

As for the book, I feel this is the book I wish more people were discussing and exploring. So many people I brought this up with were convinced to read it and to those people and everyone else, by all means pick it up and read it!

Here is my video review of this book from Literary Gladiators: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2xdU...>

W. Whalin says

This compelling read has two clear parts. The first portion uses first person diary entries from a successful dermatologist Dr. Perry Baird who suffers from manic depression. The disease ends his medical career.

The second portion tells the inside story of a daughter's search (the author Mimi Baird) to know and understand her father. I found both the first part and the second portion a page-turner experience.

The title for this fascinating book comes from a neighbor who described Dr. Perry Baird to his daughter saying, "Your father, he couldn't help himself. You know, Mimi, he wanted the moon." (Page 208). I highly recommend this book.

Pam Mooney says

A beautiful and tragic story pieced together by the doctor's daughter. Very much a primer for doctors, friends, and family members of those with mental illness. You are able to read the physician patient's manuscript along with the medical records from the hospital. Coupled with the daughter's account this gives a rare insight to the lack of understanding and unimaginable treatments of those with mental illness within this era. You may be able to conclude if only through his physician friends that perhaps this tragic end to a brilliant man contributed to the strides made in medical care since.

Rebecca says

I reviewed this book, and, for a while, I didn't see much audience for it. A brilliant manic-depressive doctor's journal from the 50's. Hmm. The man's daughter received these writings years and years after her father's death. She had never really been told where he had gone when she was 6 (to the mental hospital). I am mildly interested in bipolar disorder and mental illness, but these pages were heartbreaking in their honesty or not (I guess you don't really know). What a sad story. We have come a long way since our barbaric treatments of the 50's (tightly wrap patient in icy bedsheets and leave him for several days?!) We still need to look at mental illness like we do a physical disease and not stigmatize victims and their families so much. Very interesting read.

Kara says

Note: In composing this review, I have assumed the reader to have read the summary provided on the page on which this is posted, or, regardless of what information this page does or doesn't provide, or to have found out this book's general topic.

I was very excited to read *He Wanted the Moon: The Madness and Medical Genius of Dr. Perry Baird, and His Daughter's Quest to Know Him*, and I was fortunate enough to win an advance edition (publication expected in February) through the LibraryThing Early Reviewers monthly giveaway program. Having finished the work, I have to say that author Mimi Baird met and then exceeded my high hopes; my five-star rating at the top of this review understates the value of this reading experience in my view.

In fact, I think Baird has created a vitally important work that should be among the books everyone should (hope and try to) read at some point in life. I found ideas presented and questions raised in this text that would make it especially valuable reading for any professional engaged in critical services to diverse populations -- doctors, lawyers and teachers come first to my mind. In sum, this book imparts rare wisdom the ignorance of which tangibly impoverishes our society and limits the quality of human life.

Given my wholehearted belief in the value of this read, I was somewhat surprised when to find *Kirkus* presenting a very different perspective in the recently published review of this book. The highlighted excerpt chosen to showcase the review's conclusions evidenced a much more circumscribed view of the value to be found in these pages: "For Mimi Baird, the book serves as closure; for general readers, it's a sobering account of how little we knew and how much we still have to learn about mental illness—especially how *not* to treat it." This link connects to the complete review: <http://goo.gl/36vUrh>

Contrary to the implications of that assessment, Mimi Baird's book is more than an insightful discussion of a personal quest. The text consists in large part of her father's own writings; his story is not just uncovered as a set of events that document the behavior that typified the illness for which he was hospitalized, the medical "treatments" he received, and details of the staggering professional and social losses he experienced after hospitalization. As it turns out, Dr. Baird was not only an outstanding practitioner of medicine with peerless academic qualifications for his profession, he was a gifted writer who possessed rich insight into his experiences as a mental patient. His papers provide straightforward, clear and rational descriptions of manifold elements of his life during his hospitalization. I found that Baird never dramatized the hardships he experienced, but he did not soften dismal conclusions about the terrible circumstances that arose directly from his mental illness diagnosis and the medical establishment's conception of what that illness entailed.

Despite the rational presentation of Dr. Baird's observations to which the reader is privy, his attempts to relate details of his psychological experience in order to improve knowledge of the disease and find a path to better treatment were unsuccessful. In speaking of his own experience, this brilliant man was not credited by either his treating doctors or his friends and former colleagues in the medical profession. Catherine Mackinnon once wisely observed that power inheres in the ability to speak your truth and have it taken seriously by the wider community (unfortunately, I do not have the direct quotation available right now). There is an increasing amount of scholarship on the persistent powerlessness and substantial life limitations experienced by the mentally ill. Systemic flaws in the perspective on mental illness, present in society as a whole as well as within the medical/psychological professions, collectively create phenomena that have come to be described as sanism. This first-person narrative of sanism at work can do more to raise awareness about the warped perspective on mental illness that exists today and throughout Western history than any academic theory or historical review. However, I think a broader truth is to be found here, and this is what provides the basis for my belief in the great impact this book could have if read widely. Specifically, it seems everywhere I look people who can be found near either end of various spectrums of given human qualities and experiences, are routinely misunderstood and their truth is silenced. It's not always a minority that meets with this effect; I think the persistence of sexism for example is rooted in a similar social process, at least in part. This story of a great genius ignored by everyone has much to teach about the grievous harm that can be done when we fail to pay close attention to human differences -- whether in personal relationships, classrooms, courtrooms, or mental hospitals.

This is just one key reason why I heartily encourage others to read this book. The fact is it's a quick read that is packed with stories and insights that are rarely available, let alone in such a convenient way. Thanks for reading my thoughts; I hope they are helpful to you in some respect.

Barb says

This book is a love story and tribute to the author's father and a heartbreaking first hand account of his experiences as a patient in a mental hospital. The author has combined her father's writings, his medical records and her personal memories to create a loving tribute to a brilliant but mentally ill man.

Anyone with an interest in mental health will find this a worthy read. Perry Baird's descriptions of his physical and emotional isolation from friends and family who might have offered some support and the cruel and barbaric treatment he received from so-called medical professionals at the time make this a difficult story to read.

Some of Perry's descriptions about himself reminded me of James Fallon's descriptions of his inner thoughts and perceptions of his own truthfulness in his book 'The Psychopath Inside'. Baird's account of events and the contrasting accounts from medical personnel offer very distinct experiences of the same reality. He also describes his understanding of the way his mental illness was impacting his relationships with people he had once been close to. He writes 'The accumulated superstitions of our civilization in regard to insanity are very much still with us all and they can breed a devastating effect upon friendships...'

Interesting that Perry Baird's father-in-law suffered with bi-polar disorder, was confined to a mental hospital and became a family secret that wasn't discussed in the same way he did.

I'm happy Mimi Baird was able to research her father's experience, gathering records and collecting his personal writings but maybe even more importantly that she was able to meet and talk with people who

remember him as "the best [doctor] in town", and said "We all thought he had this giant personality, he didn't hide the fact that he was a Texan, a bit of a wild man. He enjoyed his reputation - he could get a little crazy, but people loved him for it. Your father once rented a whole floor of the Copley Plaza for a party - that was the talk of the town." This book is a success in that Baird has been able to piece together a glimpse into the life of the man, who was for her, a lost connection and a family secret never discussed.

Thank you to the Amazon Vine program and Crown publishers for the advanced reader copy given in exchange for an honest review.

Cathy says

A Harvard educated dermatologist Dr. Perry Biard, develops bipolar disorder, is institutionalized resulting in the loss of his family, friends and practice. It is 1944 and his disappearance is never explained to his six year old daughter, Mimi. For years denial and silence were maintained until a chance discussion with a doctor leads to information and opens the extraordinary journey Mimi takes to uncover what she can about her father.

He Wanted the Moon is written in two parts. The first from a long lost manuscript Dr. Biard wrote about his hospitalization, annotated with parts of his medical record. You can watch the progression of his illness as the manuscript changes from understandable to chaotic and back again.

The second part describes Mimi's years long quest to find out as much as she can about her father. She received the copy of the handwritten manuscript, kept by a cousin, when she was in her 50's. It took another 20 years for her to complete her search and publish the book.

For me the most striking aspects of the book are that although treatment of people with major mental illness has come a long way there is still a long way to go and that the stigma of mental illness Dr. Biard experienced is still prevalent today

Marjorie says

Dr. Perry Baird's daughter, Mimi Baird, has put together a fascinating and heart-wrenching book chronicling her father's struggle with bipolar disease in the 40's. The book consists partly of her father's own writings while in a mental institution and partly her efforts to learn more about her father's life.

I commend this author's achievement in bringing her father's story to publication. He had wanted his story told but was never able to due to his illness. The fact that his daughter, so very many years after his death, was able to research and pull this story together is amazing.

Dr. Perry Baird had such a brilliant mind and if it weren't for his illness, he could have achieved so much. Even while in the midst of battling with his manic depressive state, he was able to make a significant scientific discovery. His own story that he wrote while hospitalized is a powerful and moving one, telling of his despair at all the losses his illness was inflicting on him. The treatment he received in an effort to cure him was truly horrific.

The story of his daughter's search for the truth about her father was also heart breaking. It wasn't until she found her father's notes when in her fifty's that she began to piece the puzzle together. Up until then, her mother had done her best to hide her father's illness from her and her sister. Her determination to find out

what had happened to him and to regain some part of the father that she had lost as a child never failed.

A remarkable book and one that opens a window of knowledge into the world and life of a person with bipolar disorder.

I received this book from Blogging for Books for this review.

More Info

Author Bio

Stacy Cook says

The story of Dr. Perry Baird, a doctor suffering from Manic Depression (aka Bipolar Disorder) and his quest to find a cure before the disease over takes his own life. I won this book from both Goodreads and Librarything and applied to win at both websites because I too live with Bipolar Disorder. I could really sympathize with Dr. Baird and his horrific struggles in mental hospitals. I took notes, highlighted and post-it noted this book to death. I could not believe the "remedies" these doctors tried to inflict on Dr. Baird! The restraint tactics alone, that the state hospital used, only increased the strain on his already compromised mental condition! I thought about listing some of them here to give you an idea of what he experienced, but it makes me sick to even think about it let alone write it down. It was barbaric!

The book is taken from Dr. Baird's own diaries on his experiences in the hospitals he resided in for months at a time making it all the more real. He was obviously an educated man, having graduated with top honors from Harvard and his writing is both eloquent and engaging. His daughter, the author of the book spends the last quarter of the book talking about her father's research on the subject of his illness and just how close he was to finding a cure or better yet being cured (or perhaps stabilized is a better word) if only he was born at a different time. Timing is everything, is it not. The book also explores Mimi's (the daughter) relationship, or lack there of, with her father and why she felt compelled to write her father's story.

I believe this book is for anyone who lives with Bipolar Disorder, know someone with the illness or works with people with the illness. The book is not as depressing as I may have made it seem. It is also a story of hope and how far we have come with the treatment of mental illness. I will be recommending my local library purchase this book upon publication.

Raven Haired Girl says

A mid-century doctor's raw, unvarnished account of his own descent into madness, and his daughter's attempt to piece his life back together and make sense of her own.

Baird's impeccable journal account of his descent into the depths along with his institutional stays are well detailed. His brilliant mind citing the cruel mistreatment by staff, barbaric treatments administered. His feelings of loneliness and isolation heartbreaking. As his disease appears and fades, his many losses are felt, his heart heavy.

“And so I put down the telephone receiver with a heavy feeling in regard to the consciousness of a great loss, just part of the price to pay for this type of illness. The mentally ill patient is often treated like a criminal. His imprisonment and his case have many parallels to the situation of a criminal. Also he pays a similar price when he returns to society. He finds many things changed. With patience and courage he can earn back what he has lost, if time and circumstance do not operate too forcefully against him.”

His relentless desire to learn more regarding mental illness propels him on the path of research where his suspicions are confirmed. Sadly darkness overshadows his research and his initial findings silenced, however, thankfully noted. His intellect utterly halting.

Stripped away of her father at a young age Mimi Baird, craves to fill the void of her father. Questions silenced, his disappearance vaguely acknowledged. Decades later Mimi discovers her father’s journal/manuscript broaching his illness, institutionalization as well as his research on mental illness. Finally Mimi pieces the puzzle of the man she remembers as she comprehends the full story of her father and his ongoing fight with manic depression. Mimi’s loss is heartbreaking proving the ravages of manic depression extend to family, especially family disguising mental illness.

A story of two people searching for answers. A painful account of mental illness, the stigma attached. A topic of compelling nature, Baird shares her father, hopefully demonstrating knowledge in the hopes of removing the stigma attached. Touching story.

Find this and other reviews at <http://ravenhairedgirl.com>

Dena (Batch of Books) says

Dr. Perry Baird was a brilliant man with a promising career ahead of him. He was bright, charismatic, and full of energy. He had a beautiful wife and two little daughters that he loved dearly. He also suffered from manic depression. In the high manic phases, he had an abundance of energy and stamina. He was also violent, destructive, and unpredictable. The first part of *He Wanted the Moon* is Dr. Baird’s own account of his illness and the treatments of the day. It’s fascinating, horrifying, and spell-binding. I couldn’t put the book down once I picked it up. I finished the book the same day I started it.

The second half of the book is the account of Dr. Baird’s daughter, Mimi and her quest to uncover her father’s story. As she learns more about the man he was, she discovers more about herself and her childhood. Questions she’s held onto for decades are finally answered as she discovers the father she barely knew.

This is a riveting book. It’s not a difficult read, as both Mimi and her father prove to be excellent writers. Dr. Baird’s recordings are particularly interesting; often humorous, and often horrifying. I would highly recommend reading this book to anyone that enjoys nonfiction, history, biographies, or good books.

Content: A few comments of a sexual nature (no sex), and cruelty.

Source: I received a copy of this book through the Blogging for Books program in exchange for an honest

review.

My blog: Batch of Books

Kathleen Nightingale says

Really a 4.75 but we aren't allowed to do fractions on Goodreads.

This book was the most disturbing and profounding moving book I have read this year. Baird's account of how he endured strajghjackets, cold packs, insulin induced comas, electric shock therapy and humiliation he soldiered on with his manic depression. It wasn't until Baird received a lobotomy and shock therapy that he was totally broken down and subsequently died. How unfortunate. Baird, as the author states was one of the first, if not the first to research manic depression as a bio-chemical imbalance.

A read for anyone wanting to discover why and how medical professionals practiced their craft in a totally different fashion than today.

Diane S ? says

A daughters quest to understand the father that literally disappeared from her life. In 1944, Doctor Percy Baird was confined to a mental institution after a sever episode of mania. Mimi was only six when he was no longer in the home and was only told by her mother, that he was away.

The first part of the book are all in her Father's writing, he penned down his experiences with his illness and his treatment at the institutions to which he was committed. What was amazing to me was how much he remembered, even while in his manic states. His brilliant mind was constantly at work.

The second half of the book was how his disappearance effected her life. Of what her and her sister and mothers life was without him. How she decided to find out more about him and the actions she took. The situation itself was heartbreaking but the book was not written emotionally. It was very clear and concise.

This was in 1944 and the treatment at these institutions were many times barbaric. Even if they didn't have the treatments available that we do now, it still seems to me that common sense would prevail and the realization that ice cold baths would not accomplish much medically. Although treatments help many today, the brain is still the area that is difficult to understand. The stigma about mental illness itself still prevails though there is small progress in that area. Though their are many new treatments it is still a hit and miss approach and many are still without treatment or at least effective treatment.

A very good book for those looking for a better understanding of the bi-polar, as reading Baird's own words about a brilliant man with a brilliant mind in the midst of mania are informative. Only by sharing these experiences by those effected, as Mimi does, will the stigma of mental illness be removed.

ARC from librarything.

AJ says

He Wanted the Moon is a captivating account of Dr. Perry Baird's mental illness as recounted by his restored memoir and by his daughter. The book is split into roughly two parts, the first composed of Dr. Baird's painstakingly reconstructed manuscript and the second more autobiographical about the author and her father.

Dr. Baird's account of his manic-depressive illness in the mid-1940s is honest, compelling, and absolutely horrifying to read. It saddens me so much to think of how poorly people with mental illnesses were treated and the stunning amount of ignorance in not only people without mental illnesses but also among the very people caring for mental patients. Dr. Baird was subject to all sorts of horrifying "treatments" from restraint, cold packs, and finally, a lobotomy that led to his early demise in his mid-50s.

Dr. Baird had a brief career as a notable dermatologist and a medical research scientist hoping to find a cause or a cure for his illness. Unfortunately, his career was held back and ultimately ended by his illness. It's heartbreaking to think that, had he become ill a few decades later, he could have benefitted from mood stabilizing medications such as lithium. But either way, his "treatment" in several mental hospitals certainly helped to provoke relapse and worsen his symptoms and disease.

The author, Mimi Baird, grew up mostly not knowing her father, as the culture of silence pervading mental illness in the beginning of the 20th century led her mother and other family members to refer to her father as being "away" and leaving it at that. This book catalogues her attempt to get to know her father posthumously, to preserve his genius and make sense of his illness.

I would highly recommend this book to anybody interested in mental illness, as the first-person account of Dr. Baird's treatment is, although absolutely horrifying and breathtakingly sad, probably one of the best accounts of early-mid 20th century mental illness "treatment" that I've read.

Pam ?Because Someone Must Be a Thorn? Tee says

HE WANTED THE MOON is an amazing book that has stuck with me months after I read it. I found the book to be educational --in an entertaining way-- and at times simply horrifying.

Now I rather imagine that you, like me, have run across some textbook entries or articles about the Manic-Depressive state. I don't know about you but I feel that Depression is the easier part of that equation to understand. Depression-alone is a common enough ailment. Manic though is not common. Yet, I thought I had a handle on it.

Wrong.

I have to tell you that in all my reading the authors never truly conveyed to me the imminent danger that the patient was in, nor how a person's reasoning was effected. Dr. Baird's writings were like was a sound slap up-side the head. I had an aha-moment which left me feeling pretty embarrassed about how ignorant I had been**.

**[I'm in no way claiming to understand the spectrum of manifestations that these diseases might express;

only that I'm a little less clueless.]

The book begins with an introduction by the doctor's daughter. Mimi Baird then gives us her father's writings, each section introduced with a brief entry that puts the records into context. Through this story telling I feel we readers are given a unique view into the Manic-Depressive state, as well as an idea of how the disease was treated and socially handled in the past.

Much of the writing demonstrates how the disease colored Dr. Baird's sense of reality. He talked at one point, for example, about how honest he was. Just after he wrote about how he had lied.

In other places he writes about how he was treated by family and friends, doctors and staff. And some of this was pretty horrific. I will never understand how anyone could think that waterboarding a patient would be helpful. Nor how being tied in a straight-jacket could be a cure. It just amazes me at how primitive, and dare I say, sadistic, physicians could be. Being retained in a room, yes. Being straight jacketed and then wrapped in sheets dipped in cold water is just evil.

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In reading this book I tried to imagine who might like it best. This is not your usual sort of read but something very special. And I very much appreciate and thank Mimi for sharing how her father 's life was destroyed by this disease, and how it ultimately effected her life. This is a remarkable set of records that I think might appeal to those with an interest in disease and medicine, and those with an interest in history and unusual biographies.

_review copy
