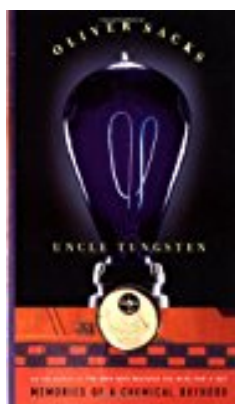


[PDF] Uncle Tungsten: Memories Of A Chemical Boyhood

Oliver Sacks - pdf download free book



Books Details:

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Description:

Oliver Sacks's luminous memoir charts the growth of a mind. Born in 1933 into a family of formidably intelligent London Jews, he discovered the wonders of the physical sciences early from his parents and their flock of brilliant siblings, most notably "Uncle Tungsten" (real name, Dave), who "manufactured lightbulbs with filaments of fine tungsten wire." Metals were the substances that first attracted young Oliver, and his descriptions of their colors, textures, and properties are as sensuous and romantic as an art lover's rhapsodies over an Old Master. Seamlessly interwoven with

his personal recollections is a masterful survey of scientific history, with emphasis on the great chemists like Robert Boyle, Antoine Lavoisier, and Humphry Davy (Sacks's personal hero). Yet this is not a dry intellectual autobiography; his parents in particular, both doctors, are vividly sketched. His sociable father loved house calls and "was drawn to medicine because its practice was central in human society," while his shy mother "had an intense feeling for structure ... for her [medicine] was part of natural history and biology." For young Oliver, unhappy at the brutal boarding school he was sent to during the war, and afraid that he would become mentally ill like his older brother, chemistry was a refuge in an uncertain world. He would outgrow his passion for metals and become a neurologist, but as readers of *Awakenings* and *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* know, he would never leave behind his conviction that science is a profoundly human endeavor. --Wendy Smith

From Publishers Weekly Sacks, a neurologist perhaps best known for his books *Awakenings* (which became a Robin Williams/Robert De Niro vehicle) and *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, invokes his childhood in wartime England and his early scientific fascination with light, matter and energy as a mystic might invoke the transformative symbolism of metals and salts. The "Uncle Tungsten" of the book's title is Sacks's Uncle Dave, who manufactured light bulbs with filaments of fine tungsten wire, and who first initiated Sacks into the mysteries of metals. The author of this illuminating and poignant memoir describes his four tortuous years at boarding school during the war, where he was sent to escape the bombings, and his profound inquisitiveness cultivated by living in a household steeped in learning, religion and politics (both his parents were doctors and his aunts were ardent Zionists). But as Sacks writes, the family influence extended well beyond the home, to include the groundbreaking chemists and physicists whom he describes as "honorary ancestors, people to whom, in fantasy, I had a sort of connection." Family life exacted another transformative influence as well: his older brother Michael's psychosis made him feel that "a magical and malignant world was closing in about him," perhaps giving a hint of what led the author to explore the depths of psychosis in his later professional life. For Sacks, the onset of puberty coincided with his discovery of biology, his departure from his childhood love of chemistry and, at age 14, a new understanding that he would become a doctor. Many readers and patients are happy with that decision. (Oct.)Forecast: This book is as well-written as Sacks's earlier works, and should get fans engrossed in the facts of his life and opinions. Look for an early spike on the strength of his name, and strong sales thereafter.

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