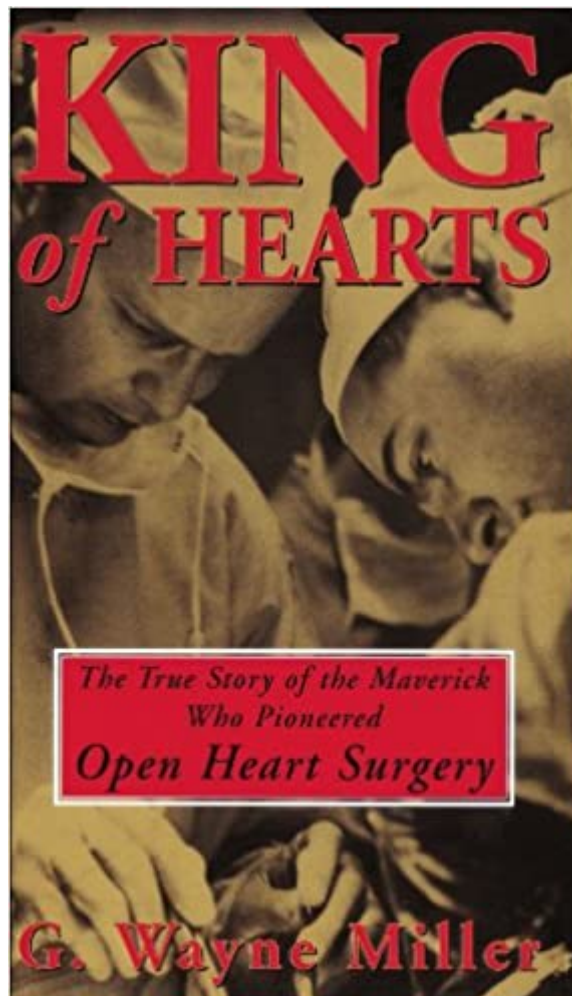




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# King Of Hearts: The True Story Of The Maverick Who Pioneered Open Heart Surgery



## Synopsis

Few of the great stories of medicine are as palpably dramatic as the invention of open-heart surgery, yet, until now, no journalist has ever brought all of the thrilling specifics of this triumph to life. This is the story of the surgeon many call the father of open-heart surgery, Dr. C. Walton Lillehei, who, along with colleagues at University Hospital in Minneapolis and a small band of pioneers elsewhere, accomplished what many experts considered to be an impossible feat: He opened the heart, repaired fatal defects, and made the miraculous routine. Acclaimed author G. Wayne Miller draws on archival research and exclusive interviews with Lillehei and legendary pioneers such as Michael DeBakey and Christiaan Barnard, taking readers into the lives of these doctors and their patients as they progress toward their landmark achievement. In the tradition of works by Richard Rhodes and Tracy Kidder, *King of Hearts* tells the story of an important and gripping piece of forgotten science history. From the Hardcover edition.

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## Customer Reviews

The surgeon-as-rock-star mystique seems like it must have come straight out of Hollywood, but the myth had to begin more concretely. A good candidate is Minnesota's Dr. Walt Lillehei, the hard-working, hard-playing father of open-heart surgery, whose life is told in garish color in *King of Hearts* by journalist G. Wayne Miller. From his early brilliance, recovery from deadly lymphatic cancer, and dramatic repair of seemingly hopeless heart cases to the disintegration of his career at its peak thanks to an army of personal enemies and conviction on tax evasion counts, his story is

consistently surprising and engaging. Fast cars, hard drinking, and plenty of women filled his time when he wasn't turning lives around with a few strokes of his scalpel, and the reader will find the surgeon's actions almost unbelievable--rarely endearing, but occasionally saintly. Combining this melodramatic biography with the fascinating story of the struggle for open-heart surgery, considered impossible little more than a generation ago, Miller makes a compelling case that the daring scientist was simply another side of the arrogant, absent-minded playboy. No ordinary biography, *King of Hearts* is breathless reading--you'll find yourself surfacing every few chapters to remind yourself its nonfiction. --Rob Lightner --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Open-heart surgery is now almost routine in the United States, but just a few decades ago the idea of repairing cardiac defects by cutting into a living human heart was almost unthinkable. Yet thanks to the efforts of a talented few who refused to believe it couldn't be done, open-heart surgery became a reality in the 1950s. Chief among its pioneers was the intense and flamboyant Minnesota surgeon Dr. C. Walton Lillehei, whose story Miller tells here in thriller style. Miller, a staff writer for the *Providence Journal*, re-creates the anxieties and excitement of an era poised on the brink of astonishing technological advances but stymied by a disease that killed more than 625,000 Americans annually. Lillehei was convinced that open-heart surgery was the answer--but how to divert blood from the heart and still keep the patient alive? Lillehei's first attempts, in 1954, used a complex and risky donor-patient blood exchange. Several of his first patients died; behind his back, nurses began calling him "murderer." By 1955, however, Lillehei and his colleague Richard DeWall perfected a simplified heart-lung machine made with beer hose and plastic tubing ("a high school science fair project was more complex," Miller observes) that finally allowed Lillehei to achieve his dream of "bringing advanced open-heart surgery to the masses." Lillehei's innovations revolutionized cardiac surgery; many believed he would win a Nobel prize. Instead, the surgeon was disgraced when he was found guilty of tax fraud in 1973. Miller's fast-paced and scrupulously researched account reveals both the exhilaration and the tragedy of Lillehei's story. Agent, Kay McCaulay, Pimlico Agency. (Feb.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

As a native Minnesotan I grew up knowing a bit about the Minnesota surgical program. I attended med school there 1972-1976, and did my surgical residency at the local trauma center, Hennepin county medical center. The stories recounted ring true; I heard some of them from my chief, Dr. Claude Hitchcock, mentioned in the book, and a mentor, the most facile surgeon I have ever known,

Dr. Hovald Helseth, a favorite of Dr. Varco in his cardiac fellowship. I had the privilege of meeting Walt at the wedding of my cousin and his nephew. What a gracious individual.

Dr Walt Lillehei was a fraternity brother of mine at Phi Chi fraternity, University of Minnesota, whom I recall with pleasure. Being two years ahead of me, we met mainly at the occasional Fraternity functions. But certainly he and his wife Kaye were well-liked. I recall a year or two later, meeting his wife Kaye with several girl friends in a downtown restaurant; and learning then that they were having a dinner to celebrate Walt's survival of extensive surgery for a throat cancer. I also felt somewhat close to Walt because his younger brother Richard was in my class. We became fairly close friends, from both being in a Medical ROTC encampment by the Brooke Army Medical Center, San Antonio, Texas one summer. Dr Richard Lillehei ranked number 1 in our class, He also became a surgeon at the U of Minnesota; and there did the first successful liver transplant..

Just buy the book to find out how truly amazing Dr. Lillehei was.

Great story for everyone involved in (pediatric) cardiology and/or thoracic surgery. A wonderfully written, and completely non-fiction, story about the quest for the premises to perform open heart surgery. A great insight into the scientific progress embedded in the post-war time frame; marked by dare and sacrifice.

Having worked in the man's lab for a couple of years in the early '60s, this was extremely well done. Brought back some fantastic memories of a lot of these people with whom he worked. Top Grade read !

Two years ago on 2/11/11 we had a little grandson born with congenital heart disease. (DORV, ASD, VSD, PDA, Transposition of Great Arteries, etc). He had his first open heart surgery when he was 7 days old on 2/18/11. The second surgery was done on 6/15/11 at 4 months old. Happily, he came through both surgeries successfully with a good repair of the problems and a bright future. This book was of particular interest to me as it tells the story of how the heart bypass machines used currently were developed. My little grandson is alive because of the efforts of courageous heart surgeons like Dr. Lillehei (sp) who is featured in this book. I'll be forever grateful!

Miller is not a doctor, but he is an excellent writer and he has done his homework. The book

chronicles the post-WWII early work in open-heart surgery, told from the perspective of the pioneers and their patients. Miller introduces us to various characters, and we feel like we know them, and are saddened when bad things happen and rejoice with their good. I am not a doctor, but was easily able to understand the doctor talk, because the author explained them well. He also uses a lot of figures of speech, which makes for a better read.

Mr. Miller's style of suspense keeps us reading to see what happens next. He vividly portrays the progress of open heart surgery, step by painful and bloody step. The reader suffers with the parents and doctors with each failed operation on each child, but watching as each technical problem is solved makes everything ok in the end. The reader learns about various congenital heart diseases of children, the symptoms, the physical descriptions, and the outcomes. Mr. Miller explains the procedures very well so no prior knowledge of surgery, medicine, or heart physiology is required. My favorite part is the race with the Mayo Clinic to perfect the heart-lung machine. The Mayo Clinic not only loses, but loses almost comically. Another favorite part is how the pace-maker was invented. This story along with the heart-lung machine story make this book worth reading. If you are interested in medicine, surgery, heart problems, medical history, medical technology, or just want to learn, then you will appreciate "King of Hearts."

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