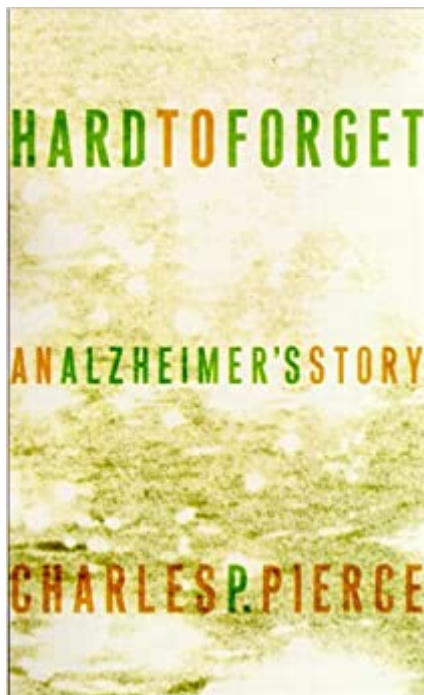


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Hard To Forget: An Alzheimer's Story



Synopsis

In this remarkable book, Charles P. Pierce intertwines two dramatic stories-the scientific race to discover the causes of Alzheimer's and the moving experiences of the Pierce family as they struggle with the disease. More than four million Americans develop Alzheimer's every year, just as Charles Pierce's father did-horribly and genetically-and in *Hard to Forget*, Pierce takes us deep into the country of this disease, to explore how it affects both the body and a family. When his father is diagnosed with Alzheimer's, the author goes on a quest to discover everything he can about the disease. He discusses here Dr. Alois Alzheimer's work early in the twentieth century, then shows how Watson and Crick's announcement of the double-helix structure of DNA opened up the field of Alzheimer's research and led to discoveries by the "genome cowboys"-Dr. Allen Roses, Dr. Peter Hyslop, and others-of the genetic components of the disease. At the heart of this book, too, is the powerful, emotional story of how the Pierce family coped with Alzheimer's and with the threat that the author-and his children-might also inherit it. Elegant and richly informative, *Hard to Forget* is a unique and provocative book.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

One day Pierce's father, John, left his home in Massachusetts on an errand. He wound up three days later in a Vermont jail. The police assumed from his confused state that he was intoxicated. In actuality, he was suffering from Alzheimer's disease--a fact that both Pierce (a writer-at-large for *Esquire* and a regular contributor to National Public Radio) and his mother long refused to acknowledge: "I felt the truth bending inside me, turning the last three mad days into some familiar

shape, and I realized what I was feeling was the comfort of denial." Pierce makes a notable contribution to the growing literature on this affliction by combining a family memoir with an overview of Alzheimer's history since its discovery in 1906 by Alois Alzheimer and of the state of current research into the genetic causes of the disease. Among the scientists whose work Pierce covers are Allen Roses and Peter Hyslop, whom he labels the "Genome Cowboys" and who, Pierce claims, failed to receive due credit for their discovery of an early-onset gene because of rivalry in the scientific community. The author poignantly describes how he detached himself emotionally from his father's worsening condition and how this detachment affected his wife, Margaret, and children. Margaret was the sole family member who accepted her father-in-law's disease and tried to combat her mother-in-law's consistent denial. Pierce himself is at great risk for Alzheimer's--in addition to his father, three uncles died of the disease--but, as yet, he admits, he has not been tested. He has, however, overcome his resistance to the truth and in so doing has crafted this excellent memoir. Author tour. (Apr.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Shortly before Memorial Day in 1985, Pierce's 70-year-old father went to the florist to buy flowers for the family graves. Three days later, he was found by police sitting in his car in Montpelier, VT, 250 miles away from his Massachusetts home, unable to remember his name or telephone number. Soon afterward he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's--a diagnosis that the family, especially Pierce's mother, refused to accept. Beneath the author's denial lurked the fear that he, too, would become a victim of the disease--his father's four brothers also died from it. A writer for *Esquire*, the *Boston Globe*, and *GQ*, Pierce used his journalistic skills to learn everything he could about the disease's history and prognosis and the search for its genetic links--while witnessing his father's decline. His book is a fascinating account of the fierce competition among the "genome cowboys" (the cutting-edge scientists racing to be first to identify new Alzheimer's genes). Although his genetic explanations are somewhat murky, Pierce's writing talents and his revelations of the darker side of genetic research and of families struggling to make sense of this devastating disorder make for a refreshing change from most feel-good, first-person Alzheimer's accounts. Highly recommended for aging collections.-Karen McNally Bensing, Benjamin Rose Inst., Cleveland Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Wonderful book; part information and history, part personal experience and family stories. Charlie Pierce is a great writer and this book should be on everyone's "to-read" or "to-own" list. Touching, heartbreaking but IMPORTANT all at once. Alzheimer's Disease will probably touch each one of us

somehow, some way, some day; we can only hope and pray that prevention and/or cure are somewhere in the pipeline.

Excellent book. Charles Pierce is one of my favorite Esquire authors and this book details some experiences with his own family. .Highly recommend if you have had anyone in your family suffer from a neurological disorder like Alzheimers or similar conditions.

A very moving Story! I wonder how the author is doing...

Pierce's instinct is to tell a story. He sets a scene, he gives us characters and conflict and dialogue, and makes reading about dementia an adventure. He begins one story, "The man made it all the way across the country, and nobody asked him why he was still in his pajamas." He opens the story of Frau Auguste D, the famous patient of Alois Alzheimer, by writing, "Something had to be done with the woman. She was screaming in the streets." Immediately, although I already know about Frau Auguste D., I want to hear her story again, and in detail. From the early pages of the book--where we learn that the author's father was born in 1915, the same year Alois Alzheimer died--it's clear that the Pierce will interweave his own story with a history of the disease and the scientists struggling to understand and treat it. The science is presented dramatically--and underlying these sections, adding to their power, we are told the story of the author's father and his siblings. Pierce writes of his grandmother: "Mary Ellen Pierce had had five children, and all five of them would develop Alzheimer's disease. All four of her sons would disappear and then die. One of them was my father. He died without remembering her. He died without remembering me."The topic of dementia is vast, and hits home for me personally. I've read a great many books about Alzheimer's (thirty, at least), and *Hard to Forget*, because of its lucid prose and well-told stories, is one I read with enormous interest. There's plenty of information here about the disease, all readable and engaging--and the book is lit up by a closely-considered danger: the possibility that the author himself could come down with what has become a family disease. And the author has children. It's a good thing those scientists are hard at work.

Well written, as is usual for this author. I'd read a restaurant menu if he wrote it. Lots of good information in here.

Packed with reliable and meaningful information, yet eminently readable.

I decided to read this book based on a review in The New York Times book review, and the recent knowledge that a family member's symptoms have been tentatively diagnosed as possibly early signs of Alzheimer's. I found the story gripping, but the execution sometimes got in the way for me. I suspect that a more interventionist editor might have forced Pierce to drop some of the unnecessarily detailed place descriptions and reorganized the order of presentation to be more coherent. As it is, however, the book provides lots of interesting and useful information, mixing the history of research on the disease with the personal memoir of Pierce and his family coping with the disease as manifested in his father, uncles and aunt. It is not an easy read, but it is worth the effort.

This book is a bit technical in places yet provides an eye opening look into the competitive work of medical research. This shouldn't be the first book one reads about Alzheimer's. There are more helpful books for those in the trenches.

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