Book review

Godfrey Hounsfield: Intuitive Genius of CT.

S Bates, L Beckmann, A Thomas, R Waltham.
London, UK: The British Institute of Radiology; 2012.
276 pp. £14.99

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Just as it is often claimed that the immediate post-World War II era of represented a quantum leap forwards for modern medicine, with the mass production and clinical application of antibiotics, we now find ourselves in an age where medical imaging affords us staggering insight into the management of disease. Unmistakably, medicine is currently in the age of radiology, arguably initiated by the development of CT. This year, Bates et al put to press their historical opus, *Godfrey Hounsfield: Intuitive Genius of CT*, which aims to capture not only the life of the inventor Godfrey Hounsfield, but also the personality behind the self-taught diagnostic revolutionary. The authors quickly dispel the illusion that successful genius must come from privilege or regimented academia, depicting Hounsfield as a farm boy of little means. With the same stroke, they illustrate the importance of the liberties and intellectual freedoms afforded to him during his upbringing. Although he struggled with many compulsory subjects in school, Hounsfield was encouraged by a supportive family to continue to experiment in the scientific method, as he had done virtually out of instinct as a child.

The narrative makes it abundantly clear that Hounsfield was a balanced individual who channelled his gifts in myriad ways. While he is remembered in the

annals of history for his prowess in mathematics and physics, Bates et al show us that he was also an adept illustrator, a cinephile and a jazz musician. The book is complete with excerpts from school report cards, correspondence from family and friends, and a wealth of vivid photography and schematics; the reader is free to follow the coalescence of an artistically minded scientist's virtuosity. This thorough chronicling demonstrates how Hounsfield persevered in the face of systematic and financial adversity, while still employing collegiality, determination and a multifaceted personal life.

Were I to ask anything more of the book, it would be to provide further exploration of Hounsfield's paradoxical personality. The authors list many fascinating contradictions between his beliefs and his behaviour, and I would have appreciated additional opinions and insight. Moreover, these observations are placed immediately before the discussion of Hounsfield's death, which interrupts an otherwise excellent narrative. The chapter on his death is also followed by another chapter containing only historical documents, which may have been better suited to the appendix.

The authors succeed not only in meeting their stated goals of acquainting the reader with the background, motivation and personality of Godfrey Hounsfield, but also in encouraging this particular reader to dream of contributing to the age of radiology in unprecedented ways.

A A DMYTRIW
Dalhousie Medical School
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