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Because Ideas Matter...

The faculty and staff of Butler University's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences presents

Recommended Readings

*Can't Remember What I Forgot: The Good News from the Front Lines of Memory Research*


Reviewed by Ulf Goebel

Alzheimer's disease (AD), feared more than cancer, leaves us strangers to ourselves.

Sue Halpern's father showed every sign of AD, but his doctor said normal aging caused his dementia. Puzzled by this, she decided after his death to discover all she could about aging and cognitive decline. To get through "the hyperbole and hype and promises and platitudes that now attend most public discussions about memory," she sought "to find out what the molecular biologists and cell biologists and biochemists and geneticists knew."

She spent "time in brain-scanning suites and chemistry labs and mice nurseries and hospitals and pharmaceutical companies, and attending scientific meetings," and she subjected herself to brain scans and "neuropsych" tests, scouring the literature, but her research was basically structured around interviews with Scott Small, a cognitive neuroscientist whose main interest is the hippocampus, seat of short-term memory, where deterioration of the dentate gyrus causes "normal dementia" of the entorhinal cortex, AD.

Brains destroyed by AD are choked with plaques and tangles, but rather than causing the disease, they may actually be the brain's defense against it. Small is looking deep within the cells for possible triggers of AD, hunting down molecules and sorting genes.

Except for aerobic exercise, nothing so far seems to help slow down aging. Drugs like Aricept are stopgaps. Resort to herbal remedies is an act of faith. But why not. Eating a couple of handfuls of blueberries a day may be our "version of Pascal's wager." At my age I'll try anything.

- Ulf Goebel is a German instructor at Butler University.