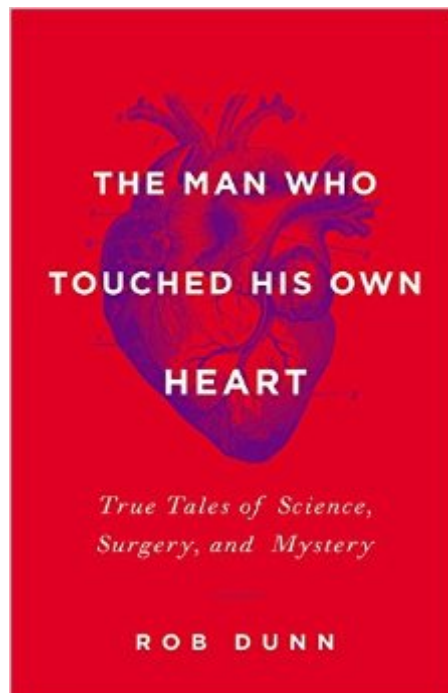


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The Man Who Touched His Own Heart: True Tales Of Science, Surgery, And Mystery



Synopsis

The secret history of our most vital organ--the human heart
The Man Who Touched His Own Heart tells the raucous, gory, mesmerizing story of the heart, from the first "explorers" who dug up cadavers and plumbed their hearts' chambers, through the first heart surgeries-which had to be completed in three minutes before death arrived-to heart transplants and the latest medical efforts to prolong our hearts' lives, almost defying nature in the process. Thought of as the seat of our soul, then as a mysteriously animated object, the heart is still more a mystery than it is understood. Why do most animals only get one billion beats? (And how did modern humans get to over two billion-effectively letting us live out two lives?) Why are sufferers of gingivitis more likely to have heart attacks? Why do we often undergo expensive procedures when cheaper ones are just as effective? What do Da Vinci, Mary Shelley, and contemporary Egyptian archaeologists have in common? And what does it really feel like to touch your own heart, or to have someone else's beating inside your chest? Rob Dunn's fascinating history of our hearts brings us deep inside the science, history, and stories of the four chambers we depend on most.

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Customer Reviews

One in three adults in the modern world dies of a cardiovascular disease, and heart diseases are the most common congenital diseases in children. In *The Man Who Touched His Own Heart*, evolutionary biologist Rob Dunn explores all aspects of this vital organ: how it functions, how it malfunctions, and the factors affecting its functioning. The scientific information is fascinating, but

the book is also unusually entertaining for a treatment of such a serious and weighty subject. Each chapter has lively, relevant, and informative stories of how science has been done through the ages, describing the zeal and even recklessness with which the heroes of scientific inquiry pursue their goals. The title *The Man Who Touched His Own Heart*, for example, refers to Werner Forssman. In 1929 Forssman became convinced that damaged hearts could be repaired by inserting a tube into a patient's arm and running it to the heart, where the problem could be diagnosed and fixed. Faced with objections about the dangers of trying such a procedure, Forssmann stood by his conviction of its practicality by performing the procedure on himself, without even trying it on a cadaver first. Fortunately, he lived to write up his results. The tales are especially clever at pointing out how a scientist's personal life facilitated his work. A good example is the renowned medical scientist Galen, who was born in AD 129 and was the first person to take a patient's pulse and use it as a gauge of health. Galen was a physician to gladiators, and their gruesome wounds enabled him to see the internal workings of the human circulatory system almost 2000 years before modern imaging techniques allowed less invasive peeks into our inner workings. In another chapter I was intrigued by Dunn's hypothesis of the influence of the parents of Argentinian doctor Rene Favaloro, a founder of bypass surgery, on their son. Favaloro's mother was a seamstress and his father a artful carpenter, and Dunn describes him as operating "with a carpenter's strength and a seamstress's subtlety." Author Rob Dunn is not a physician or a physiologist but an ecologist and evolutionary biologist at North Carolina State University, and I think the book benefits tremendously from this broader perspective. He does not limit his attention to humans but also describes the insights we have gained from other animals, ranging from chimpanzees, whose hearts are so similar to ours that in 1964 a chimpanzee heart was transplanted successfully into a human patient, to the lowly sponge, which has the simplest circulation system of any living organism. We even learn that cannibals might be expected to be at a slightly lower risk of atherosclerosis than other meat-eating humans, although Dunn does not suggest research to test this possibility. As Dunn points out, one of the reasons heart disease is considered such a modern problem is that in earlier times most people simply did not live long enough to get it. He comments, "May your children live long enough to worry about heart disease." And may there always be scientists like the ones he describes who will be looking for better ways to treat and prevent it.

I hate hospitals and hate being sick so I attend my healthy happiness by doing everything possible to stay healthy which happen to be SPORTS, DIET and LESS STRESS. I am well educated about

human machine but after this book, after the amazing stories and accomplishment by those geniuses, I have to admit that I look at my heart considerably different. They should make a documentary with this book. Great knowledge and info. Bravo.

Today, one in three adults will die of a disease of the cardiovascular system. Our hearts are our weakness. Dunn takes us through the fascinating history of studying the heart and curing its ailments. This is an engaging book. Readers who liked *The Emperor of All Maladies* or *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* will enjoy this one. It is well written, very readable, and flows as well as a novel. Dunn starts with the first heart surgery in 1893 (and actually an unpublished one in 1891) and why the heart had not been touched before that. He takes us back to Galen, physician to gladiators, observer of human anatomy and prolific writer. We then travel through the Dark Ages, DaVinci and the age of knowledge and beauty, then Vesalius and his anatomy studies. We read of Forssmann, the first man to insert a tube up a vein in his own arm, pushing it until it reached his right atrium, the first man to touch his own heart. (1929) Surgeons in Germany thought the act outlandish and Forssmann was relegated to ordinary and obscure medical work. Americans pursued the technique, however. He must have been shocked when he, along with two American doctors, received the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine in 1956. Dunn continues with the development of the heart-lung machine, pacemaker, transplant experiments, artificial heart, finding that atherosclerosis is ancient, bypasses, angioplasty, the role of cholesterol, the tetralogy of Fallot operation, hibernation and longevity, and the future. This is a very interesting book. I was amazed at how recent effective heart treatment is, basically in my own lifetime. Well written and very informative, I recommend this book to anyone interested in the history of heart treatment. I received a complimentary galley of this book from the publisher for the purpose of an independent and honest review.

As a doctor I found the book absolutely fascinating. It describes historical episodes which lead to advances in cardiology and then supplies the science which advances the discovery. Typical is the opening chapter which describes a lowly German physician who passes a urinary catheter up his arm vein into his heart and then walks to the radiology room to take an x ray and prove that it had been done. Foolhardy and courageous he opens a whole new technology of cardiac catheterization which revolutionizes treatment of heart disease. The writing is "as clear and simple as the truth." I rarely give 5 stars to any book but this deserves all five.

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