



On the Move: A Life

Oliver Sacks

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An impassioned, tender, and joyous memoir by the author of *Musicophilia* and *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*.

When Oliver Sacks was twelve years old, a perceptive schoolmaster wrote in his report: "Sacks will go far, if he does not go too far." It is now abundantly clear that Sacks has never stopped going. From its opening pages on his youthful obsession with motorcycles and speed, *On the Move* is infused with his restless energy. As he recounts his experiences as a young neurologist in the early 1960s, first in California, where he struggled with drug addiction and then in New York, where he discovered a long-forgotten illness in the back wards of a chronic hospital, we see how his engagement with patients comes to define his life.

With unbridled honesty and humor, Sacks shows us that the same energy that drives his physical passions--weight lifting and swimming--also drives his cerebral passions. He writes about his love affairs, both romantic and intellectual; his guilt over leaving his family to come to America; his bond with his schizophrenic brother; and the writers and scientists--Thom Gunn, A. R. Luria, W. H. Auden, Gerald M. Edelman, Francis Crick--who influenced him. *On the Move* is the story of a brilliantly unconventional physician and writer--and of the man who has illuminated the many ways that the brain makes us human.

On the Move: A Life Details

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From Reader Review On the Move: A Life for online ebook

Laurie Anderson says

SUCH a great book, such a tremendously gifted man. While I have a few quibbles with the jumping and occasionally confusing chronology, this engaging, edifying book, makes me want to reread all of Sachs' work that I already own, and run out and get books of his I haven't read yet. He examines the science of the brain, the humanity of the mind, and leaps between family, friends, love, and the simple joys of a good life well-lived. So glad I read this!

Jane says

I love Oliver Sacks, so I was incredibly disappointed to realize more than halfway through that I couldn't stand this book. It made me sad as well, for these are the last words of a dying man whose accomplishments and writings have made this world a more enlightened and decent place. This memoir is rambling and tedious. It has some good moments, such as when he describes coming to terms with his brother's mental illness and his own homosexuality. But then he cuts off the discussion and moves on to something trivial. Pay tribute to Oliver Sacks by going back and reading his earlier books, or listening to him on Radio Lab, or re-watching "Awakenings."

Brendon Schrodinger says

Inspired by 'Gratitude' and the feeling that I had ignored Oliver for far too long, I delved into 'On the Move' with enthusiasm and the feeling like I had remembered an old friend.

'Uncle Tungsten' takes care of his early life (it's been years since I have read that one too), and 'On the Move' picks up with an adult, recently graduated Dr. Sacks. Most of the book concentrates on his early career, through 'Awakenings' and into his further books, but it compresses his later life. It is a biography of what he did more than what he thought, but there are snippets of personal feelings and relationships. This may be representative of how he lived his life, though he does say that he was a loner. But it isn't impersonal. He just doesn't go in depth into the why of his actions too much.

I guess it feels a little rude saying he didn't open up enough. There are plenty of places where he opened up about his sexuality and his relationship with his family. But there were many more times when something intriguing was mentioned offhandedly and then never explored or explained.

But I feel I know the man a lot more than I did. And there were many wonderful stories of his friends in here. I did enjoy it, but not as much as his other writing.

Wanda says

This was a GoodReads first reads giveaway, which I won in April. The publisher provided an uncopy-edited proof.

I will admit that I have heard of Oliver Sacks, but have never read any of his other books and I entered this giveaway on a whim. (I did, however, see the Robin Williams film Awakenings based on Sacks' work with postencephalic patients.) So I have no points of comparison, to be able to judge Sacks' writing in this book vs. his other works.

I was surprised at how little self-analysis went into this autobiography—for a man who was able to interpret the lives of people with major brain dysfunctions, he seems to be either unable or unwilling to observe his own life in the same way. For instance, he mentions repeatedly that he identifies people by their voices, rather than their faces, but he doesn't connect this lack of facial recognition with his own fascination with neurology. It would seem to me that this would be a major motivator in his interests, to understand one of his own foibles.

Nevertheless, it is a fascinating story—Sacks' parents were interesting people in their own right with thriving medical careers and he was obviously extremely fond of them and the rest of his family. It is a shame that he felt that his homosexuality separated him from them in important ways. The lack of acceptance of such a fundamental part of his being seems to have been the motivating force that kept him “on the move” for the majority of his life. I don't think that it is coincidental that he has finally found a stable relationship after the death of his parents—it seems unlikely that his mother would ever have been accepting of such a situation. [This reminds me a bit of Canadian author Robertson Davies, who claimed he was unable to write novels until his parents were gone].

Sacks had adventurous interests—motorcycles and weight lifting, in addition to venturing into medical areas that others avoided. Also a swimmer and a walker, he seems to have had a very balanced life in the sense that he had a vigorous intellectual life with an equal emphasis on physical challenges. He also balanced science and the arts, with an acute appreciation of music and literature.

Although I enjoyed this memoir, I think I would probably have appreciated it more had I read some of his other books first. Still, it is an interesting life review by a man now facing his mortality due to cancer. Although he has not followed an easy path in life, he has achieved a great deal.

Petra X says

Oliver Sacks died today, 30th August 2015..

Back in the 50s/60s in California he was Dr. Sacks, a neurologist all week, but a gay, leatherclad biker called Wolf at weekends. That is when he wasn't on Muscle Beach going in for weightlifting competitions!

Oliver Sacks great accomplishment to me was to show us the people of the cases he describes as quite separate from their disorders. Not schizophrenics, but people with schizophrenia, not autistics or even autistic people, but people with autism and all of them appreciated by Sacks as suffering from their

symptoms but not, in any basic way, being them. One of Sacks' brothers had schizophrenia and needed care almost his entire life so Sacks knew mental as well as neurological disordered thinking and never confused the person with the problem.

Essentially, Sacks was as interested in the person as he was the disorder and never thought of his patients as just 'cases'. He treated his patients as co-researchers into their symptoms and gave them a new perspective, one that, as might be said, was healthier than thinking they were sick and needed to find a doctor to cure them.

Sacks life was made more difficult by the fact he had prosopagnosia, face blindness. It's a terrible disorder. No one knows you have it when you don't recognise them in the street. They think you are snobbish and can't be bothered to acknowledge them. They talk to you and you are kind of cool because you don't know who they are. It didn't happen with everyone he met and it didn't happen all the time. It's a disorder that comes and goes and you have no idea when you have it and just not recognised someone. Add to that shyness, and this great author and neurologist had a lot to overcome with his patients himself. Probably it made him much more empathetic. I have prosopagnosia too, and I'm shy.

For most people Oliver Sacks will forever be Robin Williams who played him in the film Awakenings based on his book of the same name. His most famous book is *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* and *Other Clinical Tales*. A brilliant book as a lot of his books were, but none as good as his last book, his autobiography *On the Move*.

I will miss Oliver. After reading this book I feel he is "Oliver" to me. He was truthful, vulnerable and didn't cover up either his faults, his rather unusual and only semi-legal hobbies - drugs for instance, or was falsely modest about his great achievements. I would like to have known him. A lovely man, an innovative scientist and doctor and an enjoyable author. This has been by a long way the best book of 2015.

Oliver, Alav haSholem, RIP.

Update This piece, Sabbath is the last piece Oliver Sacks wrote. It's an essay written just two weeks before he died. If you are a fan, you will enjoy this. If you come from an Orthodox Jewish community in the UK, you will identify with it, nodding your head perhaps at the traditions, perhaps at how he deserts it, perhaps at both, as I did. It is worth reading though.

(view spoiler)

Nicole~ says

I am a storyteller, for better and for worse. I suspect that a feeling for stories, for narrative, is a universal human disposition, going with our powers of language, consciousness of self, and autobiographical memory.
(On The Move: A Life - Oliver Sacks)

Oliver Sacks was the youngest of four boys born in England to a family in which a medical career seemed to

be a hereditary trait: his father, mother, older brother, uncle and three first cousins were all doctors. At age 6, he and his brother were sent to boarding school during the Blitz, where they were often severely punished by a sadistic headmaster. Such abuses could easily be interpreted as psychological scarring and the origin of the thinly developed self confidence and awkwardness of his teenage years and young adulthood; a reservedness exacerbated by the awakening of his homosexuality at a time when in the UK this was considered a sex crime mandatorily treated by chemical castration, the likes of which Alan Turing suffered. Sacks recalled his mother reacting terribly to the reality of it: "You are an abomination," she said. "I wish you had never been born."

*Seeking their instinct, or their poise, or both,
One moves with an uncertain violence
Under the dust thrown by a baffled sense
Or the dull thunder of approximate words.**

At 22, vacationing in Amsterdam , he was determined and later successful in losing his virginity in a drunken one night stand, not remembering for a minute if he liked it or not. Though Sacks might have been disinclined to do anything impetuous while living in England, he transformed over the years since his move to America. He became fascinated by racy motorbikes, exchanging the professional physician's white coat by day to bikers' gear by night.

*In goggles, donned impersonality
In gleaming jackets trophied with the dust,
They strap in doubt – by hiding it, robust –
And almost hear a meaning in their noise.**

He became drawn to the weightlifting crowd on Muscle Beach and trained almost obsessively, setting a record for squat lifting 600 pounds, earning him the nickname 'Dr. Squat.' Bodybuilding was just one of many ways of overcoming his timidity and fears; he challenged and experienced life's great bounty with gusto from experimentation with recreational drugs, or speeding perilously at 100 mph on his motorbike at night through Grand Canyon, exhilarated with freedom and the sense of being "poised motionless above the ground , the whole planet rotating silently beneath [him]," to creating a unique niche in the field of neuroscience by developing unorthodox clinical, analytical and documentary approaches to his patients' cases, which when coupled with a commendable gift for prose, have eruditely and harmoniously merged Science and Literature.

*They scare a flight of birds across the field:
Much that is natural, to the will must yield.
Men manufacture both machine and soul,
And use what they imperfectly control
To dare a future from the taken routes.**

In his practice, Sacks showed anything but the disassociated, aloof manner a physician generally presents to his patients; genial and devoted was he to getting to know and understand them, to listen and process what they were experiencing into a cohesive picture. Information from clinical treatments, observations and conversations with patients burdened by some of the most unusual case histories were oriented and presented in narrative form with great care and sensitivity, yet still garnered from his critics harsh accusations of unethical behavior and exploitation. For the most part, his patients contributed generously, without reservation, and actually enjoyed their tales being told, in a sense, because someone compassionately took the time to listen.

Scene from Awakenings starring Robert De Niro and Robin Williams as Dr. Oliver Sacks, courtesy independent.co.uk

Sacks's memoirs read in much the same way he took notes all his life: from feverishly scribbled sketches, vignettes and anecdotes jumping back and forth in time, to emerge into a coherently constructed self-examination, his life as a case history qualified by voluminous introspections, insights and the poignancies which tend to flash clearly into view upon approach to one's end. The book's photo illustrations at the end tell a satisfying story of family, friends and the newly found love in the last decade of his fully lived life.

*A minute holds them, who have come to go:
The self-defined, astride the created will
They burst away; the towns they travel through
Are home for neither bird nor holiness,
For birds and saints complete their purposes.
At worst, one is in motion; and at best,
Reaching no absolute, in which to rest,
One is always nearer by not keeping still.**

Oliver Sacks (1933-2015)

*Excerpts from the title-inspired poem On the Move by Thom Gunn - poet, writing mentor and friend (1929-2004); poem in its entirety @ <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/...>

Works by Dr. Oliver Sacks:

Migraine (1970)
Awakenings (1973) ****
A Leg to Stand On (1984) ****
The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat (1985) ****
Seeing Voices: A Journey Into the World of the Deaf (1989)
An Anthropologist on Mars (1995) *****
The Island of the Colorblind (1997)
Uncle Tungsten: Memories of a Chemical Boyhood (2001)
Oaxaca Journal (2002)
Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain (2007) ****
The Mind's Eye (2010) *****
Hallucinations (2012) *****
On the Move: A Life (2015)****

I've been exploring the world of neuroscience and all its unfathomable intricacies, wonders and anomalies through Dr. Oliver Sacks from a professional aspect since the 1980's, and in a more personal level since the 1990's as my son entered his toddler years showing delays in neurodevelopment. His books feature some of the most unusual cases in Neuropathology evidenced in the world, written in a readable way with empathy and understanding for the victims and their families. He wrote as he lived with heart and genuine concern for humanity, to live to one's fullest potential as he did... always on the move. He will be sorely missed. Rest in Peace.

Jessie says

I was very fortunate to have received an Advance Reader Copy of this book from GoodReads First Reads contest, not least because I am a massive fan of Dr. Sacks.

Among his many gifts and abilities, two are displayed beautifully in this memoir: Sacks' intellectual prowess and the ability to translate his amazing experiences into beautiful prose.

Having read much of Dr. Sacks' work, I had always known that he continues to lead an incredible life, though I did not know how incredible until I was able to read this book. Throughout, he draws together snapshots, vignettes and vivid descriptions of his life and relates them to the development of his skills as a neuroscientist - a particular sort of neuroscientist, in fact.

I couldn't put the book down, truly. I was struck especially by his honesty and candour. Despite his privileged upbringing [his mother was one of the very first gynecological surgeons in Great Britain, for instance], Sacks faced many challenges. It was both heartbreak and heartwarming.

If you've been stimulated and entertained by Sacks' past work, you'll not be disappointed by this one.

Cathy says

I am heart-broken on hearing that Oliver Sacks died. I have read and enjoyed his books for more than 30 years. I even had a pleasant conversation with him once at a book awards ceremony, completely unaware of his identity. This last book is the most personal, revealing and an immensely satisfying work. I am struck again by prejudice, irrational laws and homophobia that has ruined so many lives. He had a ferocious intellect and imagination and he could see connections where others could not. I am glad that he was a prodigious writer and we have his books.

Jafar says

After writing many books, with great compassion and understanding, about his patients, Oliver Sacks reflects on his own life with humility and appreciation. What a wonderful human being, and what a fruitful life! He won't be with us for too long. Here is his recent article in The New York Times on learning that he has terminal cancer.

I would never have guessed that this gentle soul was a biker and a body builder.

Glenn Sumi says

Neurologist. Doctor. Author. Pianist. Motorcycle enthusiast. Amateur weightlifter.

Oliver Sacks packed a lot of life into his 82 years (he died in August). And this incredible volume, the second part of his memoirs (the first is 2001's *Uncle Tungsten*), chronicles his busy, fascinating adult life:

Oxford, navigating his way through research and clinical studies (a trip to an Israeli kibbutz helped him focus on his career), his move to the U.S., his travels (“On The Move” indeed), discovering his passion for writing, finding his subjects, publication ups and downs, maintaining his deep friendships (among them the poets Thom Gunn, whose poem gives the book its title, and W.H. Auden), his family – both parents and two brothers were physicians, a third brother was schizophrenic – his battle with substance abuse and his late-in-life romantic partnership.

A tougher editor could have tightened some of the prose – I lost count of the number of times Sacks refers to someone as “genial” – and the science gets pretty dense near the end. But this is quibbling.

Sacks gives you the backstory to all his books (including Awakenings, which was made into a film, and his breakthrough book of essays, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat*), tells you about some brushes with death (including one example of road rage that’s like something out of a thriller), and a couple of times includes some of his earlier written sketches that recount experiences more accurately than memories can.

What emerges is a portrait of a deeply complex, private, brilliant man who seized hold of life and found a way to utilize and appreciate all the gifts he was given. I’ll return to this inspiring book many times.

A couple of observations:

- One of his best friends was... Carol Burnett! No, not the comic actress. This Carol Burnett is an African-American doctor. I chuckled whenever he mentioned her.
- I suppose this is Sacks’s “coming out” book. When, at 18, he told his father that he might be attracted to men (up til then he had never done anything), his mother told him he was “an abomination” and she wished he “had never been born.” Sacks never theorizes about how this affected him. After 40, he was celibate for more than 35 years. He doesn’t explain why this was, but also, tactfully, doesn’t say how, living in New York City at the time, this might have reduced his contact with certain diseases. His various affairs, and his finding love late in life, gives the book an emotional resonance without ever feeling maudlin. His love of his schizophrenic brother Michael also adds heft, and may have instilled in him a curiosity about science and the brain.
- Sacks lived on City Island in New York City. I had no idea this place existed! It also provides a wonderful metaphor for the man himself.
- He spent time in Canada, and may have ended up as a physician in Manitoulin Island.
- Two of his famous cousins are: Al Capp, the cartoonist, and Israeli politician Abba Eban!
- If you want to know where Sacks’s love of footnotes comes from, it’s explained here. Often, his books would mushroom in size after they were submitted for publication because he would keep adding notes.

Petra X says

The print book, this one *On the Move* got 5* and a more extensive review. This review is for the BBC book and only gets 2*. **Update** But I have rerated it 5 star as for some reason, only this review shows. It is the worst abridgement of a book I have ever read. However I did enjoy reading it so much I bought the full book. The abridgement shows Sacks as this young man who liked motorbikes and drugs and grew up to become a genial doctor and best-selling author. A man who suppressed his homosexuality and lived alone, lonely all his life until he met his soul mate in his 70s. Nothing could be further from the truth! Absolutely nothing.

Whoever abridged this should be sent to work in a packing factory away forever from words, because they don't understand enough about books, writing or people to do anything but ruin them.

Original notes and review, all rubbish as it turns out. (view spoiler)

Will says

What a surprising, intriguing, brilliant, compassionate and thoughtful man! I thought I knew Oliver Sacks fairly well through his fascinating books drawn from his neurological practice, through *Awakenings* and his earlier autobiography *Uncle Tungsten*. How wrong I was.

This was a physician whose compassion and humanity separated him from the usual run of doctors, and he certainly had run-ins and violent disagreements on principle with many of them, in particular his superiors. He writes with disarming honesty and candour: when he was 12, a perceptive teacher wrote “Sacks will go far, if he does not go too far”.

And later, as he realized he was not cut out to be a research scientist, he was told “Sacks, you are a menace in the lab. Why don’t you go and see patients – you’ll do less harm”.

It was fortunate he did. In all his works, and here, he comes across with intensity and passion, larger than life even, and he seemed to be such an outgoing and genial personality; he mixed with the most interesting people – from Francis Crick to Jonathan Miller to W.H. Auden. But he says he was a classic introvert and extremely shy, tracing it back to his wartime experience of being abandoned to a brutal boarding school: “*Timid and inhibited all my life ...*” is almost impossible to believe, so there’s hope for all of us introverts then!

And although I knew he was very fit I would not have guessed that he was a champion weightlifter, an avid motorcyclist and experimented with hard drugs.

One thing I particularly enjoyed discovering: he was so fluid and fluent at writing (he wrote pages of case notes every day) yet he was obsessed with fine-tuning everything he wrote. Every revision produced more observations, more insights. For one of his early books, his aunt finally said

“Don’t, don’t, don’t, tamper with it or add any more footnotes!”

and his publisher,

“the footnotes are fascinating but they come to three times the length of the book”, it was perfect as it was. Perhaps the extreme example is his later work *Musicophilia*, where even the footnotes have footnotes. (I think I will have to return to that book and not read any of them)

And yet, there seemed to be something missing in this joyous account of his life. I thought he would have said more about his last years (he finished writing just before he learnt that his ocular cancer had spread),

when so much happened to him, and he published so much, in such a short period. In the last pages of the final chapter, he says,

“It sometimes seemed to me that I have lived at a certain distance from life. This changed when Billy and I fell in love.”

This in his last five years, after revealing that he had been celibate for nearly half his life. And,

“I am a storyteller, for better or worse. I suspect that a feeling for stories, for narrative, is a universal human disposition, going with our powers of language, consciousness of self and autobiographical memory.”

There the chapter ends, quite abruptly; I thought there had to be more, but the final 30-odd pages are photographs.

Perhaps that *is* the way to go though – leaving your audience yearning for more.

But then I found what I felt was missing, in a kind of coda he later wrote in the NY Times. In *My Own Life*, he says

“I cannot pretend I am without fear. But my predominant feeling is one of gratitude. I have loved and been loved; I have been given much and I have given something in return; I have read and traveled and thought and written. I have had an intercourse with the world, the special intercourse of writers and readers.

Above all, I have been a sentient being, a thinking animal, on this beautiful planet, and that in itself has been an enormous privilege and adventure.”

Such a moving account of a life.

William2.1 says

An essential endnote for the indefatigable Sacks reader. Recommended with brio. However, those just starting on the Sacks oeuvre are probably best off with *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, *Awakenings*, *The Island of the Colorblind* or *An Anthropologist on Mars*. Read and be reborn.

Hank Stuever says

Maybe 2.5 stars.

I had mixed emotions about this book, especially the last half of it, which devolved from an interesting narrative of young manhood into a lot of tedious name-checking and humblebragging. It's worth mentioning up front that, while I've been a faithful reader of Oliver Sacks's fascinating articles over the years (mostly in the *New Yorker*), I've not read any of his other books. I don't think I've even seen the Robin Williams movie version of "Awakenings" all the way through. Yet I was moved to read this memoir by recent news that Sacks has a terminal illness. Also, of course, I'm intrigued by the revelation (at least it was news to me) that Sacks is gay. Score another for the long list of gay geniuses! (Also there's the cover photo of him as a young

rogue on his motorbike: hubba-hubba!)

All that said, I found myself increasingly turned off by the personality type that comes through in the memoir. His intelligence and inquisitive/empathetic nature are what make him who he is, but I kept getting the feeling that he's sort of rudely oblivious to all the people, places, things and situations in life that don't interest him. If you're not on board with what he's interested in (or don't have an illness or disorder that interests him), then "On The Move" leaves you with the impression that you probably don't exist. The world utterly and totally revolves around him, yet he does a pretty good job of convincing his admirers that his empathy knows no bounds.

As the years go on, he makes his name as a clinician with a special gift for turning the suffering of his uniquely-afflicted patients into compelling non-fiction prose. I did a Google search and discovered I'm not alone in wondering if he exploited them. Or, at the very least, he glommed onto many of them, ostensibly to treat them, but mostly to write about them.

He does mention several times that he has social awkwardness (he doesn't give it any official diagnosis) and that he was in psychoanalysis for 45 years. I also wonder why he doesn't write more about the reasons he remained celibate from age 40 to 75 -- which may well have saved his life, concurrent with the AIDS epidemic.

This critique might come as a surprise to him; I just don't think he meant to write a book that paints a self-portrait that is this aloof and self-absorbed. Kind of a dick, really. I also can't remember a time when I read a memoir about a writer's life and the craft of writing and wound up relating *not at all* to the writer's description of his own processes.

I was surprised this book left me so cold. There were parts of it I quite enjoyed, mostly in the first 175 pages.

Chris says

Note: I wrote this review in May, 2015, then let it sit until today when I heard that Oliver Sacks just passed away. I have not re-edited the text to reflect that sad fact.

This is a book that I could not put down until I finished it, save for six hours of sleep overnight.

For Dr. Oliver Sack's most personal and poignant work, which I believe is his best, I will provide a different perspective to what others on Goodreads and most respected newspaper reviewers have already said. The differences are mostly those of other reviewers' omissions.

Dr. Sacks is a very well known neurologist and a widely-read, successful author. He is greatly liked as a lovable "teddy bear" by his many hundreds of clinical patients. These are indisputable, well-deserved facts. Sadly, he was diagnosed with terminal cancer shortly before this book was released, too late to be mentioned within. Certain issues I will mention have nothing to do with Dr. Sacks or the book's content, and don't reflect upon him in the slightest.

I enthusiastically agree with essentially every reviewer that this is a wonderful book. It's open and candid, inclusively covering every phase of his life after his earlier 2001 memoir of boyhood, *Uncle Tungsten*. It's

written in the typical Sacks style: direct and logically organized for clarity, with repetitions here and there for reinforcement. If it sounds like I'm describing the usual "scientific" style as applied to a life story, that's exactly what it is, but without any overloading pedantics. The key characteristic is that you feel as if you are sitting with him at dinner, or at a bar, while he's talking one-on-one with you, describing his life. It's an excellent example of what must be his clinical style when dealing with patients. It reads effortlessly, almost automatically.

Of course, Sacks is a man of science, as is plainly evident by examining his large output of books on various aspects of neuroscience. In a nutshell, these record his clinical observations, then synthesize these observations into general hypotheses, which often lead to the discovery and application of palliative treatments and sometimes outright cures.

However, all the science he presents is available in much more detail from his other books. What's here is a summary of those books, to which the reader should go if more depth is needed. His memoir is more valuable as a record of how Sacks' career evolved, how each subject area fitted into his larger life. Not all were successes: I found his honest acknowledgments of his failure as a research scientist a surprise, and he supplies ample amusing evidence of this. Thus, fortunately for his patients, and us, he was "forced" to become a clinician and writer.

If not the scientific details, then why do I think this is book so great? I could say it's in how it provides comfort to struggling writers. We sympathize with Sacks as he writes manuscript after manuscript, each being rejected by multiple publishers. He often wrote a long book, 50,000 words say, in just a few days, which was subsequently rejected. Then he would immediately start another one, shelving the rejected one for possible later rework, but most often it was forgotten. He gives us an inside view of the creative process.

More of a lesson to us, he lost several complete manuscripts, and some irreplaceable research data, due to carelessness. Again, rather than rewrite or redo, he either tackled another work or conveniently changed jobs. Genius? Assuredly. Absentmindedness? Certainly. Irresponsibility? Yes, he admits it. But these memories still are not why the book is so important.

What's left then? Only the most important part of anyone's life: his *real* life, his loves, his experiences which make him human—all of which are deliberately defined as apart from his career. What a life's treasure Dr. Sacks includes! Just by reading published reviews and advertising, we expect to read—and do—about his disturbing near-fatal drug addiction, his love for motorcycles, which also nearly killed him, and his wandering nearly penniless across tens of thousands of miles of American roads. The jacket copy gushes nicely and adds to the list of Sacks' enthusiasms:

With unbridled honesty and humor, Sacks shows us that the same energy that drives his physical passions--weight lifting and swimming--also drives his cerebral passions. He writes about his love affairs, both romantic and intellectual; his guilt over leaving his family to come to America; his bond with his schizophrenic brother; and the writers and scientists--Thom Gunn, A. R. Luria, W. H. Auden, Gerald M. Edelman, Francis Crick--who influenced him.

Embedded there is mention of "romantic love affairs." This, finally, is what *On the Move* delivers in a big way! The first four chapters, a full 132 pages out of a total of 384, deals predominantly with sex: his sexual shyness in college, his sexual awakening, his search for partners, his emotional devastation of being dumped, and the terror of dumping in turn. (Of course, nothing is pornographic.) I was nearly open-mouthed in amazement to see how his sexual urges drove him to risky behavior and fairly extreme promiscuity in San

Francisco and New York City around 1960, when Sacks was in his late-20s, at the height of the Beat movement.

All this sex is interwoven with motorcycling, speed, adventuring, and eventually drugs. This is a raucous new voice for Sacks. It rounds out the person and brings his sometimes distant scientific expert persona closer to many, if not literally every, reader.

The remainder of the book, eight more chapters, are framed by—not his career—but by this same theme of sex and love. As he gets older into his 50s and 60s, his sexual experiences understandably recede: in his case, to almost nothing. Indeed, Sacks avows that he was celibate for several decades at this time. The story then is solely his growing career as a neurologist and writer, with occasional wistful imaginings as erotic subjects appear and disappear, almost as signposts to the narrative.

Sacks chooses to end his memoirs by revealing a late, new love affair he entered into at age 75. With this most moving section of the entire book, he closes his recollections. It's all very extraordinary, beautiful—this episode, and the entire book—it's so human, and unexpected.

I'm sure you've guessed it by now: Sacks is gay. All his sexual experiences have been with men, save for the usual unsuccessful experimentation driven by curiosity. He discloses this on page 9 and it is the central thread of the entire book all the way to the end.

Thus, Dr. Sacks comes out publicly, frankly, and with no apologies, at age 81. This is important. That is the real value of this book: it shows to his adoring reading public, and to politicians who literally control the fate of gay people around the world, that someone of his stature, popularity, intelligence—his "value" to society in short—can actually be gay. He can be sexual just like everyone else, and still help innumerable people with their neurological problems. Yet the world didn't end as a result. Amazing, yes?

There is a serious problem, though. Why is his homosexuality, which I show is so central to this book that gay sex, his relationships, and love affairs actually *frame the narrative*—why then is this missing from reviews and advertising? It's certainly no secret to all readers of the book, including all of its reviewers.

Why do respected reviewers from major book review publications and newspapers, and all Goodreads popular reviews, *fail to mention the most important aspect of the book*? We can assume they've read it, right? They probably didn't skip the first 132 pages, huh? And every reviewer on the planet, particularly if they don't have time to read a book in its entirety, will *at least* read the last chapter or two for its conclusions, where Sacks reveals with deeply moving prose, his new "love affair" (to use the book's oh, so *gender-neutral* advertising term) with author Billy Hayes. Surely any reviewer whose reviews are worth reading would consider the book as a whole, not just some filtered parts of it, excerpted to avoid inducing his, the reviewer's, queasiness.

If Sacks instead were straight, and had revealed his sexual history as he has done in these memoirs, every single reviewer would mention it, and some of them certainly would be negative given their general uncomfortableness with sex, period. So why the double standard?

I obviously love Sacks book, its intellectual content right along with its gay sex. This pairing of the "high" and the "low" is what makes it great. But not everyone, surely, would agree with me.

Reviewers, please, treat all writers equally, straight and gay, with respect and honesty. To do otherwise is to hide, through "covering," a normal aspect of the human behavior. Doing so perpetuates homophobia in social

relations and politics.
