



King of Hearts: The True Story of the Maverick Who Pioneered Open Heart Surgery

By G. Wayne Miller

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Few of the great stories of medicine are as palpably dramatic as the invention of open-heart surgery, yet, until now, no journalist has ever brought all of the thrilling specifics of this triumph to life.

This is the story of the surgeon many call the father of open-heart surgery, Dr. C. Walton Lillehei, who, along with colleagues at University Hospital in Minneapolis and a small band of pioneers elsewhere, accomplished what many experts considered to be an impossible feat: He opened the heart, repaired fatal defects, and made the miraculous routine.

Acclaimed author G. Wayne Miller draws on archival research and exclusive interviews with Lillehei and legendary pioneers such as Michael DeBakey and Christiaan Barnard, taking readers into the lives of these doctors and their patients as they progress toward their landmark achievement. In the tradition of works by Richard Rhodes and Tracy Kidder, **King of Hearts** tells the story of an important and gripping piece of forgotten science history.

From the Hardcover edition.

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King of Hearts: The True Story of the Maverick Who Pioneered Open Heart Surgery By G. Wayne Miller Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #316437 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Crown
- Published on: 2002-02
- Released on: 2000-02-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .75" w x 6.00" l, 1.08 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 302 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The surgeon-as-rock-star mystique seems like it must have come straight out of Hollywood, but the myth had to begin more concretely. A good candidate is Minnesota's Dr. Walt Lillehei, the hard-working, hard-playing father of open-heart surgery, whose life is told in garish color in *King of Hearts* by journalist G. Wayne Miller. From his early brilliance, recovery from deadly lymphatic cancer, and dramatic repair of seemingly hopeless heart cases to the disintegration of his career at its peak thanks to an army of personal enemies and conviction on tax evasion counts, his story is consistently surprising and engaging. Fast cars, hard drinking, and plenty of women filled his time when he wasn't turning lives around with a few strokes of his scalpel, and the reader will find the surgeon's actions almost unbelievable--rarely endearing, but occasionally saintly. Combining this melodramatic biography with the fascinating story of the struggle for open-heart surgery, considered impossible little more than a generation ago, Miller makes a compelling case that the daring scientist was simply another side of the arrogant, absent-minded playboy. No ordinary biography, *King of Hearts* is breathless reading--you'll find yourself surfacing every few chapters to remind yourself it's nonfiction. --Rob Lightner

From Publishers Weekly

Open-heart surgery is now almost routine in the United States, but just a few decades ago the idea of repairing cardiac defects by cutting into a living human heart was almost unthinkable. Yet thanks to the efforts of a talented few who refused to believe it couldn't be done, open-heart surgery became a reality in the 1950s. Chief among its pioneers was the intense and flamboyant Minnesota surgeon Dr. C. Walton Lillehei, whose story Miller tells here in thriller style. Miller, a staff writer for the Providence Journal, recreates the anxieties and excitement of an era poised on the brink of astonishing technological advances but stymied by a disease that killed more than 625,000 Americans annually. Lillehei was convinced that open-heart surgery was the answer--but how to divert blood from the heart and still keep the patient alive? Lillehei's first attempts, in 1954, used a complex and risky donor-patient blood exchange. Several of his first patients died; behind his back, nurses began calling him "murderer." By 1955, however, Lillehei and his colleague Richard DeWall perfected a simplified heart-lung machine made with beer hose and plastic tubing ("a high school science fair project was more complex," Miller observes) that finally allowed Lillehei to achieve his dream of "bringing advanced open-heart surgery to the masses." Lillehei's innovations revolutionized cardiac surgery; many believed he would win a Nobel prize. Instead, the surgeon was disgraced when he was found guilty of tax fraud in 1973. Miller's fast-paced and scrupulously researched account reveals both the exhilaration and the tragedy of Lillehei's story. Agent, Kay McCaulay, Pimlico Agency. (Feb.)

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From Library Journal

This is a powerful account of the development of surgical techniques for repairing the human heart, operations long thought impossible. Miller, an award-winning writer for the Providence Journal, focuses on C. Walton Lillehei of the University of Minnesota, a driven and iconoclastic surgeon determined to provide hope for children whose congenital heart defects doomed them to disability and early death. The wrenching stories of these children, the sacrifices of their parents, and researchers' incredible experimental efforts to divert blood from damaged hearts using dog hearts or the living bodies of donors make for riveting reading. Lillehei's heart-lung machine and other innovations that followed make possible the almost one million coronary bypass and open-heart surgeries now performed each year. Highly recommended for all readers,

particularly those who owe their lives to Lillehei's path-breaking research.

-Kathleen Arsenault, Univ. of South Florida at St. Petersburg Lib.

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Users Review

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Cara Fultz:

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Betty Richey:

As people who live in the particular modest era should be upgrade about what going on or details even knowledge to make these people keep up with the era that is always change and make progress. Some of you maybe may update themselves by looking at books. It is a good choice to suit your needs but the problems coming to you actually is you don't know what type you should start with. This King of Hearts: The True Story of the Maverick Who Pioneered Open Heart Surgery is our recommendation to make you keep up with the world. Why, as this book serves what you want and need in this era.

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