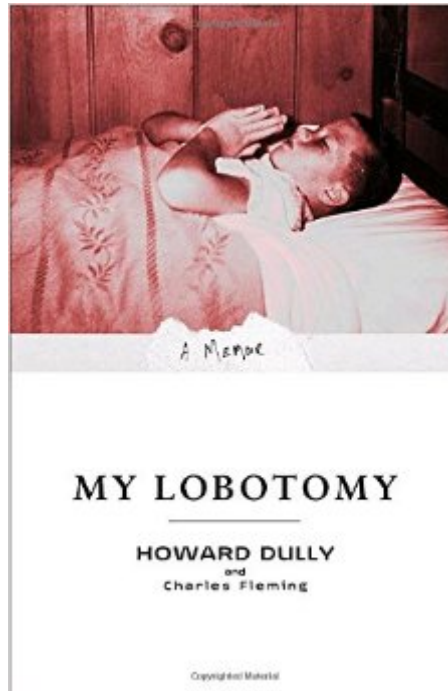




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# My Lobotomy: A Memoir



## Synopsis

In this heartfelt memoir from one of the youngest recipients of the transorbital lobotomy, Howard Dully shares the story of a painfully dysfunctional childhood, a misspent youth, his struggle to claim the life that was taken from him, and his redemption. At twelve, Howard Dully was guilty of the same crimes as other boys his age: he was moody and messy, rambunctious with his brothers, contrary just to prove a point, and perpetually at odds with his parents. Yet somehow, this normal boy became one of the youngest people on whom Dr. Walter Freeman performed his barbaric transorbital — or ice pick — lobotomy. Abandoned by his family within a year of the surgery, Howard spent his teen years in mental institutions, his twenties in jail, and his thirties in a bottle. It wasn't until he was in his forties that Howard began to pull his life together. But even as he began to live the “normal” life he had been denied, Howard struggled with one question: Why? There were only three people who would know the truth: Freeman, the man who performed the procedure; Lou, his cold and demanding stepmother who brought Howard to the doctor's attention; and his father, Rodney. Of the three, only Rodney, the man who hadn't intervened on his son's behalf, was still living. Time was running out. Stable and happy for the first time in decades, Howard began to search for answers. Through his research, Howard met other lobotomy patients and their families, talked with one of Freeman's sons about his father's controversial life's work, and confronted Rodney about his complicity. And, in the archive where the doctor's files are stored, he finally came face to face with the truth. Revealing what happened to a child no one — not his father, not the medical community, not the state — was willing to protect, *My Lobotomy* exposes a shameful chapter in the history of the treatment of mental illness. Yet, ultimately, this is a powerful and moving chronicle of the life of one man.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Johnny Heller brings the tale of Dully's childhood lobotomy to life in this rugged, clear-cut autobiography. Heller perfectly captures Dully's San Jose accent, adding a grain to words to give a slightly raspy tone. Detailing the author's troubled, often heartbreaking childhood, Heller narrates at a surprisingly swift and unrelenting pace, resulting in an even stronger portrayal of Dully's story as he opts not to hammer each tragic occurrence into the listener's mind. Rather, Heller relates the story in matter-of-factly, as Dully never pauses to mourn his painful adolescence, but chooses to include as much information as he possibly can while speaking of his own experiences. Dully's honest story never pleads for the audience's sympathies, but firmly demands their attention. Heller does not disappoint as he relates this intriguing and painful tale. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"The lobotomy, although terrible, was not the greatest injury done to him. His greatest misfortune, as his own testimony makes clear, was being raised by parents who could not give him love. The lobotomy, he writes, made him feel like a Frankenstein monster. But that's not quite right. By the age of 12 he already felt that way. It's this that makes *My Lobotomy* one of the saddest stories you'll ever read." —William Grimes, *The New York Times* "Dully's tale is a heartbreakingly sad story of a life seriously, tragically interrupted. All Howard Dully wanted was to be normal. His entire life has been a search for normality. He did what he had to do to survive. This book is his legacy, and it is a powerful one." —San Francisco Chronicle "In *My Lobotomy* Howard Dully tells more of the story that so many found gripping in a National Public Radio broadcast: how his stepmother joined with a doctor willing to slice into his brain with "ice picks" when he was all of 12 years old." —New York Daily News "[Dully's] memoir is vital and almost too disturbing to bear—a piece of recent history that reads like science fiction | Dully, the only patient to ever request his file, speaks eloquently. It's a voice to crash a server, and to break your heart." —Cleveland Plain Dealer "The value of the book is in the indomitable spirit Dully displays throughout his grueling saga | By coming to grips with his past and shining a light into the dark corners of his medical records, Dully shows that regardless of what happened to his brain, his heart and soul are ferociously strong." —Chicago-Sun

Times"Plain-spoken, heart wrenching memoir ..."•San Jose Mercury News"Gut-wrenching memoir by a man who was lobotomized at the age of 12.Assisted by journalist/novelist Fleming (After Havana, 2003, etc.), Dully recounts a familytragedy whose Sophoclean proportions he could only sketch in his powerful 2005 broadcast on NPR•All Things Considered. "In 1960, he writes, "I was given a transorbital, or ice pick lobotomy. My stepmother arranged it. My father agreed to it. Dr. Walter Freeman, the father of the American lobotomy, told me he was going to do some tests. It took ten minutes and cost two hundred dollars. Fellow doctors called Freeman's technique barbaric: an ice pick-like instrument was inserted about three inches into each eye socket and twirled to sever connections from the frontal lobe to the rest of the brain. The procedure was intended to help curb a variety of psychoses by muting emotional responses, but sometimes it irreversibly reduced patients to a childlike state or (in 15% of the operations Freeman performed) killed them outright. Dully's ten-minute "test" did neither, but in some ways it had a far crueler result, since it didn't end the unruly behavior that had set his stepmother against him to begin with. "I spent the next forty years in and out of insane asylums, jails, and halfway houses," he tells us. "I was homeless, alcoholic, and drug-addicted. I was lost. From all accounts, there was no excuse for the lobotomy. Dully had never been "crazy," and his (not very) bad behavior sounds like the typical acting-up of a child in desperate need of affection. His stepmother responded with unrelenting abuse and neglect, his father allowed her to demonize his son and never admitted his complicity in the lobotomy; Freeman capitalized on their monumental dysfunction. It's a tale of epic horror, and while Dully's courage in telling it inspires awe, readers are left to speculate about what drove supposedly responsible adults to such unconscionable acts.A profoundly disturbing survivor's tale."•Kirkus"...Hard to put down." •The RecordFrom the Hardcover edition.

This book isn't so much about the lobotomy that was forced upon Howard Dully as it is about child abuse. Howard was, in my opinion, a normal 12-year old perhaps a bit more rambunctious and careless than some other 12-year olds, but still a 12-year old boy by anyone's standards. He had a paper route, he liked to play, he got along with his siblings, he was going to school. It was his stepmother who was the problem and was told so by four psychiatrists. But she had decided that Howard was the problem, and she continued to mistreat him at home and take him to psychiatrist until she found the one that would tell her what she wanted to hear: "Howard was mentally ill, and

the only way to treat him was a lobotomy." So she convinced Howard's father (not a strong father) that this is what needed to be done and made it happen. Howard amazingly not only survived the procedure but eventually almost totally recovered from it. After living as a homeless alcoholic with a drug addiction, Howard pulled it together, became sober, got an IT degree and became a bus driver. My Lobotomy is an amazing story of an unwanted child whose truly evil step-mother and father had him lobotomized for no reason, and conquered all the odds against him to become a functioning, contributing member of society. He is truly an amazing person.

Interesting perspective of the historical period and especially medical practices. Little slow moving as a general observation but felt exactly like what it was, someone's memories of their real life. Interesting to actually read it without knowing all the particulars of everyone's thoughts, actions etc. Solid read if only what he perceived as he experienced it. Much like our own lives .... 20/20 hindsight.

An enlightening story of a hyperactive kid and a "mean step-mother" who didn't want to be bothered with him. Thank God times have changed and what she had done to this boy is now obsolete. He was born during a time when the mental health system was in the dark ages and tells a tragic story of this boy's life after seeing a psychiatrist. Very interesting!

Reading this book is a deeply emotional experience. I couldn't put it down. I almost didn't read it because the writing seemed simplistic in the beginning and I thought it was just a slowly developing life story. I couldn't have been more inaccurate. It is a very emotionally moving story. I will be thinking about this author's life and the questions he asks for a long time.

A rambling dialogue is sometimes laborious and a bit scattered, but hey, the guy had a lobotomy and it is his authentic take on what's happened to him. Pretty obvious what happened to the author was an atrocity, but what is even more insightful is how his toxic and abusive home environment is proves more damaging than his lobotomy.

The horrors of lobotomies!! I am horrified at the lengths your step-mother went to in order for Freeman to do that to you. Your father was careless in agreeing to go along with it. You were a typical boy, not something to be experimented on. I'm glad you finally found your way. I hate to think what would have happened to me if I had been alive then, as I suffer from mental illnesses.

Excellent writing!!

This is a book I found hard to put down. In some ways it's like a gruesome sight that you can't take your eyes off of. It is an amazing journey through his life and a testimony to the strength of his spirit. And although Howard Dully seems to have gotten closure as to why this was allowed to happen to him, I find myself still questioning. I would have given this book five stars except for one small grammatical mistake that was present throughout the book and that was his constant use of "me and so-and-so" when it should have been "so-and-so and I." Can't believe that got through his co-author, proofreader, and editor. It drove me NUTS!

Mr. Dully's story is incredible! As a children's mental health therapist, this story really resonated with me. Especially Howard's comments on adults medicating children just because they're difficult. We are, thankfully, not subjecting children to terrible procedures such as lobotomy or electroshock nowadays, but I do think medical doctors and some psychiatrists are all too eager to medicate young children with emotional and behavioral difficulties. Howard's story is both fascinating and heartbreaking; his courage, perseverance, and resilience are remarkable.

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