



The Only Living Man With A Hole In His Head

Todd Colby Pliss

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One man. One Tamping Iron. One medical marvel.

Based on a true story, “The Only Living Man With A Hole in His Head” tells the tale of railroad foreman Phineas Gage, whom in 1848, had a three-foot long, inch-and-a-half in diameter, thirteen pound iron rod blast through his skull, taking out part of his brain, and the doctor who treated him and valiantly fought the medical establishment to prove the authenticity and merit of the case as Phineas Gage entered a journey into changed personality, the P.T. Barnum freak show and driving stage coaches in South America. It ended with medical science forever changed.

The Only Living Man With A Hole In His Head Details

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From Reader Review The Only Living Man With A Hole In His Head for online ebook

Heidi says

Based on a true story, The Only Living Man presents the account of Phineas Gage and his traumatic brain injury. The book also spends a good deal of time recounting the struggles that Dr. John Harlow, the doctor who treated Gage after his accident, faced in bringing to the world the things he had learned about the human brain from treating Gage. I found both accounts fascinating. I found myself empathizing with Gage and the dramatic changes he was forced to live with after the accident, including changes in personality such as profanity and a seeming inability to judge risks appropriately. On the other hand he seems to have also developed a phenomenal memory as well. The human brain is and has always been a fascinating part of the human experience. This account also includes a clear look at the prejudices and arrogance that we humans cling to so thoroughly, some of us more than others of course. I found it heartbreaking the way that Phineas struggled to find a new life after his old life was so thoroughly shattered. He even worked at P.T. Barnum's American Museum as a 'freak' for a time. Sadly, those with these kind of features are still treated badly much of the time.

While I enjoyed the story, there were some problems with this book. The biggest was the clear lack of thorough editing. There were grammatical errors, repetitive words, and long sentences. With a thorough editing the book would be a much more pleasant read. I would also have enjoyed more details about what exactly happened to Gage, although that may simply not be available. Dr. Harlow kept detailed records about his experiences, Gage did not. I did appreciate the epilogue and bibliography that explain where the author got his information, but it does need to be remembered that this is BASED on a real story, which means parts of it are fictionalized, so I wouldn't call this straight nonfiction.

Overall, I would say this is an intriguing read for those who can get past the editing issues. Keep in mind that it does contain a moderate amount of swearing and profanity and some rather graphic details about the injuries that Gage endured. One thing I can say for sure, I'm grateful for how far the medical establishment has come in the 150+ years since then, and we owe a debt to Gage and Harlow for helping us learn so much. To bad it came at the cost of so much suffering.

Lauren Hammond says

I loved this book. Honestly, it was beautifully written. The language was relevant to the times. Phineas Gage is one of the most well known medical cases in the world. And as I read about his life, my heart broke for him. I teared up on several occasions...This is definitely, without a doubt a must read.

Audacia Ray says

A real yawn of a book. Thought I'd get more science, but it was really historical fiction, with terrible dialogue and really flat prose.

Lynn Bensinger says

Saw his skull in Harvard museum...and the ROD that went through it. he was always mentioned in psych classes...this kind of thing fascinates me. Now I want to know more about the personal side of it...

D. Ennis says

I was really looking forward to reading this but was so disappointed with the writing. . . actually not just disappointed but appalled. I couldn't finish the first 20 pages it was so poorly written. Too bad. It is a great topic and Pliss certainly has talent but the run on sentences are out of control. The "period" language was awkward and stiff. A good editor would have saved this book.

Lyssa says

Interesting book, but I was hoping for more of Phineas' story. It just seemed like if there wasn't enough information about a certain time, it jumped back to the doctor's story. And some of Phineas' jobs just seemed glossed over so we could move on to the next chapter of the doctor wanting to be a politician. I would have enjoyed it more if the friendship between the two had been expanded upon or there was more detail about Phineas' history.

Also might have enjoyed it more if the ebook read like it had been edited. The errors in spelling, grammar, and sentence structure really impacted my reading of the book. The spelling and grammar were irritating, but tolerable. Sentences, not so much. I'd be merrily reading along, then have to stop and re-read a sentence because it would just end randomly or just not make sense. Really messed with the flow of the book.

Amanda says

Disappointing, and I had been waiting to read this. I thought it was a biography, but it's fiction. (My mistake, of course.) Not sure how much I can really say I learned since it is a novel.

Beyond that I really disliked the writing style, particularly the bad dialogue and run-on sentences. It needed some solid editing, which would have eliminated mistakes like:

"...worried about her mother's mental state of mind..." and

"On a frigid Monday morning, Phineas, devoid of any warmth generating outer garments..."

If only there was a concise term or word to describe 'warmth generating outer garments.' I could go on.

Time after time, lack of editing and clumsy writing derailed the story. Phineas Gage's life is fascinating

enough. The overdone style and unbelievable dialogue ultimately distracted from what could have been a compelling book.

Jason says

My affinity for this book may be completely related to a previous exposure to the underlying story. There is nary a psychology or therapy (OT, PT, SLP) student that has not been introduced to the name, Phineas Gage. "The only living man with a hole in his head" is not only a title, but a perfect summation of the incredible, true story of the marrying of a man's railroad tamping rod and his cranium. The importance of this man's injury and his doctor's efforts to legitimize his story cannot be overstated; without them, the medical institution's understanding of the brain may have been set back decades. Where this work begins to breakdown is in its literary merits, or lack thereof. Besides a myriad of editing mistakes, Pliss's writing seems to waffle between inspired and benign. Credit must be paid, however, to any author that attempts to novelize this most unusual story.
