

My Lobotomy

I just finished reading an engrossing memoir entitled *My Lobotomy*. It took me a really long time to read it because I had to put it on hold since another book I had requested from the library came in. I was number 223 on the waiting list for the other book, so when it came in, I had no choice but to put down *My Lobotomy* for about a month. I was reluctant to put it down though, because Howard Dully's life story is fascinating. The book details a kid's life growing up in the 1950's and 1960's under the thumb of his 'evil' stepmother. As cliché as it sounds, there really is no better way to describe Howard's stepmom, but 'evil' is my adjective for her, not his. I find it very surprising and admirable of Howard that his memoir never takes a direction of self-pity, blame, nor hatred toward any of the people who were responsible for the trauma he endured as a child and young man. Rather, the narrative is written very matter-of-factly, and it follows Howard on his fascinating, though tortuous journey through the United States mental health system in the 1960's.

Howard Dully was forced to undergo a lobotomy at the tender age of 12. Basically, his stepmother resented him because he was a reminder to her of his real mother, his father's widow. So stepmother Lou was determined to get rid of Howard any way she could. When the lobotomy didn't turn him into a vegetable, she shipped him off to loony bins, insane asylums, or mental institutions, whichever term would best describe these places in the 1960's. This is a picture of an anesthetized 12-year-old Howard getting an ice pick lobotomy:



Lou convinced Howard's father and a doctor named Freeman that Howard was mentally ill. Well actually, Dr. Freeman did not need much convincing. He was the 'father of the lobotomy' and was eagerly looking for patients upon whom he could practice his 'procedure'. The procedure consisted of sticking an ice pick into one's eye sockets and swirling it around – seriously. And poor Howard was forced to endure this 'operation' as a kid at the age of 12. His memoir details every aspect of his life; it's riveting, heartbreaking, and finally triumphant because Howard is now a full grown man who seems like a genuinely nice guy, especially given everything he's been through and had to come to grips with in his life.

The book starts at his birth and chronicles his early life with his doting biological mother; taking the reader through all his trials and tribulations with stepmother Lou, the lobotomy, his struggles with addiction as a young adult, and finally on his search through his medical records and the touching interviews he conducted with his own father about his role in the events that shaped Howard's life. The book also includes the many notes taken by Dr. Freeman after his meetings with Howard and his family, which offer a very interesting and unique perspective...

After I finished this book, I was curious about many of the things I had read about, so I conducted a little research of my own, and I found [recordings Howard made about his story for the National Public Radio](#), as well as some [more information about Dr. Freeman and his ice-pick lobotomies](#)... Fascinating stuff, and I encourage you to check out Howard's story – the book is *My Lobotomy* by Howard Dully. Like I said, it's truly amazing to me that after all he's been through, Howard just seems to want to know **why** it happened, rather than **who** to blame for it... an extremely commendable type of attitude which is growing increasingly rare in this day and age and was very refreshing to read about. Thanks, Howard, for such a compelling read!