

REFLECTIONS FROM JOURNEY'S END

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This is the book I want my parents to read. I would like my older patients to read it too. And when I grow old and maudlin, this is the book I hope I remember the contents of, if only just a little.

Gratitude is a collection of four essays that first appeared in the *New York Times*, written by neurologist-storyteller Oliver Sacks over the final two years of the eighty-odd years of his life. Together, these essays form the sum reflection of a man looking back on a long and busy journey that he has found fruitful and fascinating.

You can read this book in two ways.

I first read *Gratitude* because Sacks is a favorite author of mine. I was introduced to his neuroanatomical curiosities in *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* and I have loved his stories since. *Gratitude* allowed me to get a deeper glimpse of the man behind the neurologist: his hopes, anxieties, childhood interests and extra-work pursuits. Reading his books and final essays over the years was like reading an extended autobiography in multiple installments. Read this book and know the man better, if you know him already.

Or, read and wonder what you want to do with your life. You want, really, to live so richly, enjoy so freely and give so generously that at eighty, you can look at the future and feel excited about turning eighty-one. You want to be heartened that a man can live a long life, face a

number of challenges which include health issues, relocations and adult loneliness, and not need to complain about his infirmities; and decide that you would like to be like that too.

"My father, who lived to ninety-four, often said that the eighties had been one of the most enjoyable decades of his life. He felt, as I begin to feel, not a shrinking but an enlargement of mental life and perspective. One has had a long experience of life... triumphs and tragedies, booms and busts, revolutions and wars, great achievements and deep ambiguities... One is more conscious of transience and, perhaps, of beauty... one can take a long view and have a vivid, lived sense of history not possible at an earlier age... I do not think of old age as an ever grimmer time that one must somehow endure and make the best of, but a time of leisure and freedom, freed from the factitious urgencies of earlier days..." — Oliver Sacks, on the eve of his 80th birthday, in *Gratitude*.

Read this book and if you live to be eighty, don't complain about it. ♦

TITLE: Gratitude
AUTHOR: Oliver Sacks
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PROFILE



TEXT BY

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Dr Ong Chooi Peng loves Agatha Christie, JD Robb, CS Lewis, Oliver Sacks and good food. One of her resolutions this year was to actively search out non-medical and non-CME reading materials because she is convinced these make her better as a physician.

