

Biography

Oliver Sacks, MD, FRCP

Oliver Sacks was born in 1933 in London, England, into a family of physicians and scientists (his mother was a surgeon and his father a general practitioner). He earned his medical degree at Oxford University (Queen's College), and did residencies and fellowship work at Mt. Zion Hospital in San Francisco and at UCLA. Since 1965, he has lived in New York, where he is a practicing neurologist. From 2007 to 2012, he served as a Professor of Neurology and Psychiatry at Columbia University Medical Center, and he was also designated the university's first Columbia University Artist. Dr. Sacks is currently a professor of neurology at the NYU School of Medicine, where he practices as part of the NYU Comprehensive Epilepsy Center. He is also a visiting professor at the University of Warwick.

In 1966 Dr. Sacks began working as a consulting neurologist for Beth Abraham Hospital in the Bronx, a chronic care hospital where he encountered an extraordinary group of patients, many of whom had spent decades in strange, frozen states, like human statues, unable to initiate movement. He recognized these patients as survivors of the great pandemic of sleepy sickness that had swept the world from 1916 to 1927, and treated them with a then-experimental drug, L-dopa, which enabled them to come back to life. They became the subjects of his book, *Awakenings*, which later inspired a play by Harold Pinter ("A Kind of Alaska") and the Oscar-nominated feature film ("Awakenings") with Robert De Niro and Robin Williams.

Sacks is perhaps best known for his collections of case histories from the far borderlands of neurological experience, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* and *An Anthropologist on Mars*, in which he describes patients struggling to live with conditions ranging from Tourette's syndrome to autism, parkinsonism, musical hallucination, epilepsy, phantom limb syndrome, schizophrenia, retardation, and Alzheimer's disease.

He has investigated the world of Deaf people and sign language in *Seeing Voices*, and a rare community of colorblind people in *The Island of the Colorblind*. He has written about his experiences as a doctor in *Migraine* and as a patient in *A Leg to Stand On*. His autobiographical *Uncle Tungsten: Memories of a Chemical Boyhood* was published in 2001, and his most recent books are *Musicophilia*, *The Mind's Eye*, and *Hallucinations*.

Sacks's work, which has been supported by the Guggenheim Foundation and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, regularly appears in the *New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books*, as well as various medical journals. *The New York Times* has referred to Dr. Sacks as "the poet laureate of medicine," and in 2002 he was awarded the Lewis Thomas Prize by Rockefeller University, which recognizes the scientist as poet. He is an honorary fellow of both the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and holds honorary degrees from many universities, including Oxford, the Karolinska Institute, Georgetown, Bard, Gallaudet, Tufts, and the Catholic University of Peru.