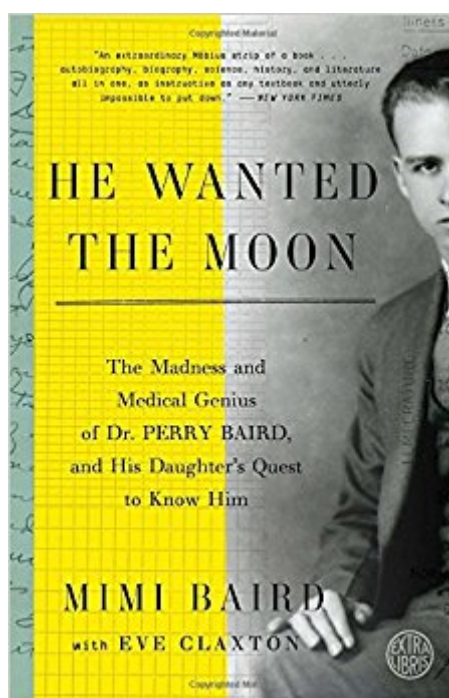


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# He Wanted The Moon: The Madness And Medical Genius Of Dr. Perry Baird, And His Daughter's Quest To Know Him



## Synopsis

Soon to be a major motion picture, from Brad Pitt and Tony Kushner A Washington Post Best Book of 2015 A mid-century doctor's raw, unvarnished account of his own descent into madness, and his daughter's attempt to piece his life back together and make sense of her own. A Texas-born and Harvard-educated, Dr. Perry Baird was a rising medical star in the late 1920s and 1930s. Early in his career, ahead of his time, he grew fascinated with identifying the biochemical root of manic depression, just as he began to suffer from it himself. By the time the results of his groundbreaking experiments were published, Dr. Baird had been institutionalized multiple times, his medical license revoked, and his wife and daughters estranged. He later received a lobotomy and died from a consequent seizure, his research incomplete, his achievements unrecognized.

Mimi Baird grew up never fully knowing this story, as her family went silent about the father who had been absent for most of her childhood. Decades later, a string of extraordinary coincidences led to the recovery of a manuscript which Dr. Baird had worked on throughout his brutal institutionalization, confinement, and escape. This remarkable document, reflecting periods of both manic exhilaration and clear-headed health, presents a startling portrait of a man who was a uniquely astute observer of his own condition, struggling with a disease for which there was no cure, racing against time to unlock the key to treatment before his illness became impossible to manage. Fifty years after being told her father would forever be "gone" and "away," Mimi Baird set off on a quest to piece together the memoir and the man. In time her fingers became stained with the lead of the pencil he had used to write his manuscript, as she devoted herself to understanding who he was, why he disappeared, and what legacy she had inherited. The result of his extraordinary record and her journey to bring his name to light is *He Wanted the Moon*, an unforgettable testament to the reaches of the mind and the redeeming power of a determined heart. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Praise for *He Wanted the Moon* "An extraordinary Möbius strip of a book...Autobiography, biography, science, history and literature all in one, as instructive as any textbook and utterly impossible to put down...The text of Dr. Baird's manuscript is haunting. The tone is one a suspense writer might struggle to sustain: The most unreliable of narrators, Dr. Baird is objective, charming, humorous, then suddenly just a little off, and then flat-out gone, leaving an irrational stranger in his place. The reader can almost watch the circuits in his brain surge and dim just as, Ms. Baird reports, the handwriting in the manuscript morphed from disciplined to disorderly and back again. • "The New York Times" "Extraordinary...a remarkably eloquent account of mental illness, reminiscent of Kay Redfield Jamison's *An Unquiet Mind* and Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted*. Perry Baird emerges as thoughtful and at times eerily aware of his condition as well as his inability to elude either its symptoms or the primitive treatments for them [The elder Baird's narrative is cinematic, featuring *Ratched*-like nurses and an escape scene straight out of *The Fugitive*... [Dr. Baird] never really knew his daughter" or her achievement in telling this story. • "The Washington Post" "Baird's lonely, angry, grief-stricken, and occasionally grandiose account of his illness and its shattering costs is the reason we can't put [this book] down. His sharply detailed recollections are sometimes sane and sometimes not, but his writing is lucid even when his thinking isn't. His manuscript is a plea to understand his experience and, by extension, others'." • "The Boston Globe" "He Wanted the Moon is one of the most disturbing and profoundly moving books I've read in years, and one of the great father-daughter books of our time. It will take its place as a classic in the literature of breakdown, alongside Kay Redfield Jamison's *An Unquiet Mind* and William Styron's *Darkness Visible*. The brilliant Dr. Perry Baird's memoir lets you see up close what it is like to go through the most manic phases of bipolar disorder" it is a nightmare, but this book is a damn wonder. Through it, Mimi Baird has finally given her father the credit he was due. • "Pat Conroy, author of *The Prince of Tides* and *Death of Santini*" "Powerful, fascinating, and completely unique. This heartbreaking book is a one-of-a-kind first person window into the world of psychiatric illness before the era of drug therapies in this country. Reading *He Wanted the Moon* is a bit like discovering the Dead Sea

Scrolls "it is one of the most eloquent, powerful and important accounts of mental illness ever put to paper." "David Isay, founder of StoryCorps and author of *Listening is An Act of Love* and *Ties that Bind* "Thanks to a daughter's brave determination to excavate her absentee father's life, we are gifted with deep personal insight into a brilliant but sick mind that could have been lost forever. This is a truly important book "a devastatingly honest account of mental illness that provides personal insight into long-ranging travesties of psychiatric care in the U.S. Unforgettable." "Susannah Cahalan, author of *Brain on Fire* "Dr. Perry Baird's vivid account of his own madness, and the treatment he received, is as remarkable as it is disturbing. By sharing her family's story, Mimi Baird has certainly done a great service to her father's memory. But she's also made a significant contribution to the literature of mental health. *He Wanted The Moon* is a poignant book, and, I believe, an important one." "Alexandra Styron, author of *Reading My Father* "He Wanted the Moon does for mental illness what *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* did for the science of cancer: at once reveal suffering and heal it through knowledge. By allowing her father to be heard, Mimi Baird gives voices to all Americans silenced by mental illness down the decades. A miraculous story told in a miracle of a book." "Amity Shlaes, author of *Coolidge* and *The Forgotten Man* "Here is how you know you have just read a wonderful book: You immediately begin telling everybody you know about it, which is exactly what I did when I finished *He Wanted the Moon*." "Robert Whitaker, author of *Anatomy of an Epidemic* and *Mad in America* "He Wanted the Moon details the horrendous treatment commonly given to patients at a time when there was no known way of ameliorating the dangerous and self-destructive behavior that often characterizes manic-depression. This is a fascinating and informative book which I would highly recommend." "Dr. Elliot Valenstein, author of *Blaming the Brain* and professor emeritus of psychology and neuroscience at the University of Michigan "Mimi Baird's short book about her father's long struggle with mental illness is a tale within a tale. She longed to know why he had simply disappeared one day from her life, and what she found was his own vivid account of watching himself slide into darkness. Mimi has performed a quiet miracle, giving life back to a man everyone wanted to forget." "Thomas Powers, Pulitzer-Prize winner and author of *The Killing of Crazy Horse* "Astonishing in its illuminations...This striking and poignant family story evokes compassion for everyone affected by this cruel malady." "Booklist "Through this moving memoir, Baird slowly brings her father back to life and reveals the sordid history of treating mental illness." "Bookpage "Perry Baird was a pioneer in attempting to understand the workings of manic depression | In bringing her father's harrowing, tragic, and moving story to life, Mimi Baird celebrates him and gives voice to the terrible

suffering the mentally ill once endured, and still do today, and challenges the prejudices and misperceptions the public continues to have about the disease.â Publishers Weeklyâ Moving...[Baird] sketches the life of a man who had done brilliantly in college and medical schoolâ even co-authoring a paper with the eminent physiologist Walter Cannonâ but who would be felled by psychosis...A sobering account of how little we knew and how much we still have to learn about mental illnessâ especially how not to treat it.â Kirkus Reviews

From the Hardcover edition.

Mimi Baird, a Bostonian, is a graduate of Colby Sawyer College. After working at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, she later moved to Woodstock, Vermont, where she worked as an office manager at the Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center. There she met a surgeon who had once known her father, a meeting that prompted her quest to finally understand her father's life and legacy. Mimi has two children and four grandchildren. This is her first book. Eve Claxton was born in London. She has been instrumental in creating six works of non-fiction as a co-writer or ghostwriter, and is the editor of The Book of Life, an anthology of memoir. She also works with StoryCorps, the National Oral History Project featured on NPR. Eve lives with her husband and three children in Brooklyn.

WOW!! I read this book & came away with sadness & regret in the horrific way Human Beings with Mental Illness were Treated. Great strides have been made the care & treatment of patients with Manic Depressive Illness. Caretakers must never lose sight that each & every pt is a human being & must be treated with human dignity & Respect. I'm so happy that Dr. Baird's daughter found her Father in his writings & was able to tell his story .

An interesting look from the inside of depression, and what outrageous and inhumane treatment were used to "cure" a person from that solitary hell, that I feel can only be told from someone who has been through such a downward spiral. The story of what a family goes through in dealing with mental illness as told from his daughter, who was never told the truth regarding her father. The story took place during a time when these issues were swept under the carpets, lies were told, secrets kept. By piecing together the past held in journals, articles and interviews with old family friends, the narrator comes to know the father she never knew and was simply always told "went away" the truth comes forth.

Very interesting read. Gives insight to the horrible treatment of mental health patients years ago.

Everyone should be aware of the torments inflicted on this lovely elegant charming man who is a doctor doing research on his own bipolar disorder and recorded first hand his own experiences in places no one should be locked up in and certainly not with the torturous punishments and padded rooms for solitary confinement which he experienced. It is a short story written from the inside of a brilliant man who wants everyone to know what is wrong with that way things are and try something different.

Having had a husband with mental illness who ultimately took his own life, I found Mimi Baird's book profoundly moving, and, in some ways, her father's experiences echoed my husband's descent into hopelessness. I commend Ms. Baird for never giving up on her quest to learn what had happened to her father and for the painstaking care she gave to preserving his journals and then sharing his story with others who deal with mental illness.

I went to a talk by the author of this book. Read the book before the lecture and then again after. Excellent information about bipolarism itself and about the development of an understanding of the condition and the development of treatments for the condition.

As one who has always been interested in the history of mental health and the tragic way it was handled for years, this book gives insight to the patient perspective. It is also intriguing that the patient is a well educated man who desperately tried to push for a greater understanding of his manic disease. The daughter's relentless search for her father's truth draws you even closer to the man behind the disease.

An interesting true story, totally heartbreaking at times. Thank goodness for Dr. Baird's well-kept journals, the continuing research into psychiatric illness, and the pharmaceutical progressions that have been made to treat mental illness as well as the determination of his daughter to make his story known.

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