



BOOK REVIEW

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“Senior moment” seems like a common verbal locution among those of us of a certain vintage, a bane auguring dark days ahead, real or imagined, but certainly not a matter of levity proportion. The dreadful “A” word, a very feared affliction, hangs like a Damocles sword over our heads. Any number of remedies have been brought to the fore with the claim of remedying this aging consequence, but truth be told, none has risen to the level of a game changer. So it was with glee when I read a synopsis of *The Complete Guide to Memory*, a how-to memento written by a neurologist. It didn’t take long for me to be sold on it. After reading the first chapter once I purchased it, I liked it so much that I gifted it to 3 friends over the past holiday season. This is a well-researched reference manual filled with historical tidbits and very practical methods to enhance one’s ability to collate and recall memory. It’s the type of book that one goes back to in any order of the chapters.

It’s a great pleasure to discover the very attention that people living in antiquity afforded to the retention of memory. This book offers a historical treasure trove-cum-scientific exegesis on the role of the brain in the caption and the recall of memory without intimidating the uninitiated. The level of writing is straightforward, and even when there is some technical description, the pith of the message can be understood without dwelling on the granular detail. One can say that quite a bit of handholding takes place. It helps us to understand the difference between a benign deficient recall versus an inappropriate one. The different phases of memory, like encoding, storage, and retrieval, are described in a clear-eye narrative, tailor-fit for laymen and practitioners alike. He also emphasizes that encoding represents the most crucial step, and he lays out different and clever ways to enhance the encoding part. A neat trick entails the association of an image with an item so that it can be vividly remembered. The nexus of a multitude of sensory stimuli strengthens the process of encoding. Better encoding yields easier recall. The neat tricks offered do pique one’s interest, and one realizes that each one is just as creative as the other and that even incites us to devise our own. Reading this book qualifies as a trip down a path for the discovery of one nugget after another.

For example, one can refer to this book to find out about the views of iconic figures like Aristotle, as well as learned but not necessarily well-known scholars throughout the ages who pondered just like us about a way to make our memory work more efficiently. Cicero, well known, is cited with Boncompagno da Signa, not so well known but renowned, who proffered the following during the twelfth century, “Memory is the glorious and wonderful gift of nature, by which we recall the past, comprehend the present, and contemplate the future through its similarities with the past.” The author, Restak, tells us, “Even eight hundred years later, no one has defined memory with such elegance and concision.”

I wholeheartedly recommend this book. It’s not meant to be a one-off reading. No, it has too many features to lend itself to that. Think of it like a well that feeds us interesting information that one can go back and forth to and even use as a springboard to experiment. All of us can benefit

from the information contained. We want to keep the occurrence of the senior moments to a minimum.