

From brain surgery gone awry, an enduring gift: American Academy program recalls ‘the man who couldn’t remember’

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Press Release

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. -- When an experimental brain operation left him a “profound amnesiac,” Henry Gustav Molaison might have chosen a private existence away from the public eye. Instead he made a gift of his misfortune, willingly exposing himself to the tests of 100 researchers over 50 years so that science might learn something about memory and the human brain.

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences will explore Molaison’s life and legacy on **February 15, 2012** with a reading from the new play, “Yesterday Happened: Remembering H.M.,” and a panel of experts. The panel features some of the scientists who knew and worked with Molaison.

Known simply as H.M., Molaison was just 27 years old in 1953 when he lost his ability to form new memories. In 2008, he died at the age of 82 in a Connecticut nursing home, but the scientific breakthroughs inspired by his ordeal endure today in numerous textbooks, research papers, and book chapters. The study of his brain continues to advance neurological research.

The panel will include Massachusetts Institute of Technology neuroscientist **Suzanne Corkin**, who worked with Molaison for five decades; **Robert Desimone**, Director, McGovern Institute for Brain Research, and the Doris and Don Berkey Professor of Neuroscience, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; **John D. E. Gabrieli**, Grover Hermann Professor of Health Sciences and Technology and Cognitive Neuroscience, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and **Elizabeth Kensinger**, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, and Director, Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience Laboratory, Boston College.

The program, beginning at 6 p.m. at the American Academy, is by invitation. Members of the media who wish to attend should contact Paul Karoff at 617-576-5043 or pkaroff@amacad.org.