



The Recollections Of Eugene P. Wigner: As Told To Andrew Szanton

By Andrew Szanton

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One of the greatest physicists of the 20th century recounts his journey from Hungary and the Nazi invasion to the creation of the first atomic bomb.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

"Recollections" might seem too straightforward and too modest a word for the memoirs of a Nobel physicist who moved in the orbits of Dirac, Einstein and Teller. It is, however, the only one that can do justice to the genteel and sweet qualities in this charming, rambling book of reminiscences. Wigner's versions of key moments in the Manhattan Project and the characters of its major participants--Leslie Groves, Enrico Fermi, Edward Teller--are perhaps generous to a historical fault, especially his loyalty to Hungarian countrymen Jon von Neumann and Leo Szilard, among the period's most misunderstood and controversial scientists (at opposite ends of the atomic question). Wigner's memory is not self-serving, only loving, and some of this surprisingly durable amiability necessarily must come from his old-country, bourgeois Jewish upbringing, evoked in burnished prose with the assistance of freelance writer Szanton, also a Hungarian-American. The record of 20th-century physics is brighter and clearer for these firsthand recollections by a man whose life came close to the depths of evil and the heights of human ambition and wonder, but who can still close by remarking, "I have tried to be happy in this life. . . . I could not do better with a second chance."

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Review

"A useful addition to the history of science and science policy in the 20th century." -- *New York Times Book Review*

"A wealth of observations on contemporary mathematicians and physicists, from David Hilbert to Richard Feynman." -- *American Scientist*

From the Back Cover

Eugene P. Wigner, indisputedly one of the world's greatest physicists of the twentieth century, recounts the breathtaking story of his singular life. Dr. Wigner's winning of the Nobel Prize crowned a lifetime of achievements in physics - achievements that profoundly affect our understanding of science today. His enormous contributions to the Manhattan Project and his insights into quantum physics stand as hallmarks of his incomparable talent. But equally important are his musings on his long and uniquely fascinating life. This memoir, a fruitful collaboration between Eugene Wigner and writer Andrew Szanton, reveals a story by turns endearing, painful, and ultimately triumphant. A witness to many of the changes of the twentieth century, Wigner grew up amid the political turmoil of Hungary. He later experienced the Berlin of the early 1930s as Hitler rose to power. During World War II, he took an active role in the Manhattan Project, the building of the world's first atomic bomb. In his recollections, he conveys the exultation of observing the first successfully controlled nuclear chain reaction. Eugene Wigner's friends and acquaintances comprise a Who's Who of twentieth-century scientists, and the book is replete with their vivid, candid, and amusing portrayals. Having enjoyed many years working with Albert Einstein, he paints an engaging portrait of that most famous of geniuses. He also sketches distinctive pictures of the trio of his fellow Hungarians: Leo Szilard, one of the first men to dream seriously about the atom bomb; Johnny von Neumann, perhaps the greatest mathematician of the century; and Edward Teller, the prime architect of the hydrogen bomb. This is the first major bookever written about Eugene P. Wigner. It makes a significant contribution to the history of the Manhattan Project and to the history of nuclear physics. But in a much larger sense, physics is only its backdrop. The real story is that of an extraordinary man and his unforgettable life.

Users Review

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