

BOOKS

The book under the couch: what disturbs the reader

What Disturbs Our Blood: A Son's Quest to Redeem the Past

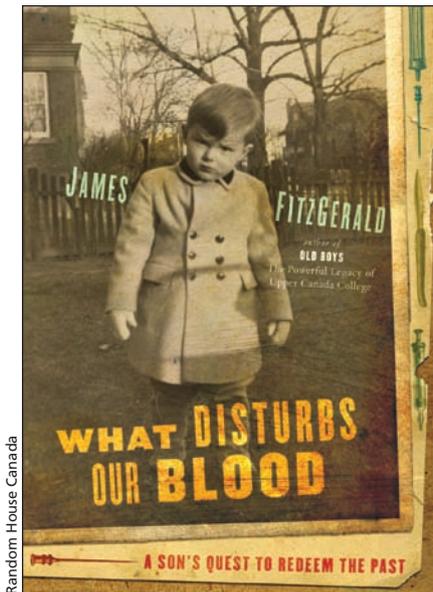
James FitzGerald
Random House Canada; 2010

Horror was my reaction to James FitzGerald's revelations. Part way through, I shoved his book underneath the couch, where it lay for months. I could not deal with the atrocities performed in the name of "medicine."

Brutal. Electrifying. Melancholy. Illuminating. A scholarly masterpiece.

FitzGerald's book is two stories. He weaves his search for the truth about the tortured lives of his grandfather and father — and the often unrecognized accomplishments of these two Canadian medical pioneers — with vivid stories of medical history.

The author's grandfather, single-minded and self-sacrificing, was the founder of Connaught Laboratories and director of the University of Toronto School of Hygiene. Gerry FitzGerald was considered by many to be the father of preventive medicine. The laboratory's vaccines, serums and antitoxins were provided free to all Canadians — a radical concept espoused by the elder FitzGerald. His death came suddenly and unexpectedly. The reasons



and cause remained unspoken.

The author's father was an allergist. In the 1960s this was a specialty as indefinable and strange as was Jack FitzGerald. Like his father before him, Jack held strong to his beliefs. A vehement defender of private medicine, he opened a private allergy extract lab because extracts produced by commercial laboratories had no set standards. He fought to disprove that allergic reactions were due to nerves. Stress and depression were effects, not causes, he argued. Sadly, he slipped into mental illness, as

had his father before him, and disintegrated gradually, silently. Both men were eventually forgotten — in most history books, and in the Canadian psyche — hidden away like the shame and darkness of their mental illnesses.

The author, haunted by his family's carefully hidden history, exposes the mania and treatments (or lack thereof) of his grandfather and father. In so doing, he tears apart the underbelly of 20th century medicine. We get an insider's look at the opposing views on mental illness prevalent in the early 1900s.

We learn of the battle between Freud, with his disturbing theories, and the medical establishment, with its often radical procedures: lobotomy, insulin shock or the removal of gallbladders, stomachs, testicles, ovaries or colons in an attempt to "rip out" the root cause of mental illness — poisonous toxins.

FitzGerald takes us down the road of insanity walked by two greats of Canadian medicine and opens our eyes to a history left behind. As with his valiant work on Upper Canada College, the silence has been broken. This book will rattle your soul.

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The forbidden legacy of madness

An interview with James FitzGerald, the author of *What Disturbs our Blood: A Son's Quest to Redeem the Past*.

There are few among us who have never imagined living someone else's life. Whether roused by envy, dread or the odd idle

daydream, it's easy to stray from the hand we've been dealt, and cast ourselves according to whim.

Unless, of course, you are James FitzGerald. Son and grandson to two medical giants, James grew up haunted by a dark family secret. Conditioned to shun all things wretched, he chose instead to ques-

tion, to probe the forbidden legacy.

No small feat. His father and grandfather, both doctors, at the peak of their success, went mad — all record of their achievements shrouded in medical archives.

It is a fascinating story — the result of which is the book, *What Disturbs Our Blood*, in talks to become the sub-