

# “DISCOVERY CONSISTS OF SEEING WHAT EVERYBODY HAS SEEN AND THINKING WHAT NOBODY HAS THOUGHT.”

—Albert Szen Györgyi

## About the Book

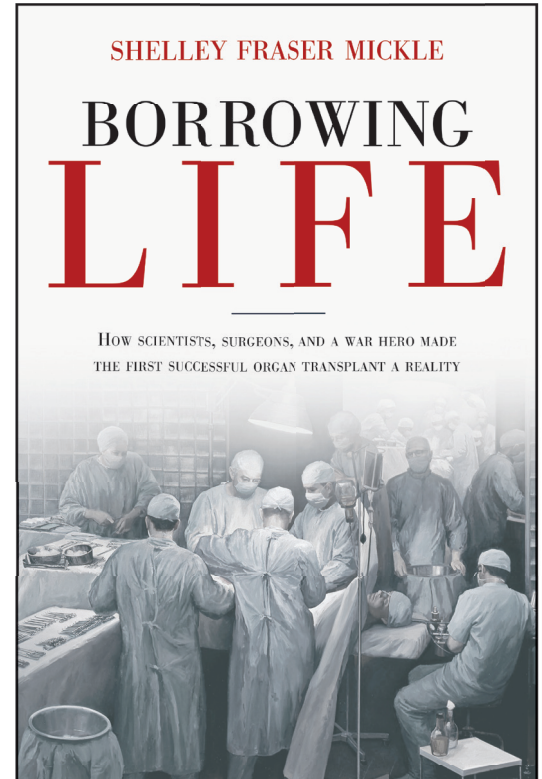
Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, Boston, 1954. Two days before Christmas, Dr. Joseph Murray and his team do the impossible. They transplant Ronald Herrick's kidney into his twin brother, Richard, saving him from acute renal failure.

This victory was the summit of a long, hard climb by a global team of scientists. Shelley Mickle Fraser's gripping account, beginning with Dr. Murray's training amid the horrors of World War II, spotlights giants of science and narrates the struggles on the road to save lives.

“. . . an uplifting look at the quest to make transplants the routine lifesaving procedures they have become.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“. . . irresistible . . .” —*Kirkus Reviews*



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## About the Author



Shelley Mickle Fraser has been publishing critically acclaimed novels since 1989. She is the author of *The Queen of October* (a *New York Times* Notable Book), *Replacing Dad* (adapted for film by CBS), *The Turning Hour* (later developed into a suicide prevention program for public schools in Alachua County, Florida), and many more. She has also been a commentator for NPR's "Morning Edition." Shelley lives in Gainesville, Florida.

- Nowadays we think of organ transplantation as a difficult but common medical intervention. Are you surprised that the first successful transplant was made as recently as 1954?
- In what ways did the World Wars influence and sometimes interfere with the development of organ transplantation?
- What were some key obstacles to successful organ transplantation?
- How was Joseph Murray's medical training different from what we think of today as the typical career path for a surgeon? How do you think these differences influenced him as a doctor and as a person?
- What was the significance of Peter Medawar's experiments with cattle twins?
- What role did the partners and other family members of these scientists and surgeons play in their achievements?
- How did Kolff come to invent the dialysis machine?
- Many considered organ transplantation to be the province of science fiction before the Herrick surgery. Why? Are there hypothetical or experimental clinical interventions that we currently consider to be "science fiction"?
- What role did the Rockefeller Institute (today called the Rockefeller University) play in the development of organ transplantation?
- The historic Herrick surgery took place during the Red Scare and the early years of the Cold War; how did that political climate affect the scientific community?
- Why do you think a kidney transplant (as opposed to, say, a heart or lung transplant) was the first successful organ transplantation surgery?
- As demonstrated by the case of the young doctor in October of 1952, what counts as a successful surgical outcome can be unclear. Do you think that the young doctor should be considered the first successful kidney transplant, rather than the Herrick twins? Why or why not?
- What role did the news media play in the Herrick surgery? Does this resonate with the way scientific and medical advancements are reported today?
- What ethical questions did Brigham and the surgical team face regarding the Herrick surgery? Would you have made a different decision in their shoes, not knowing if the surgery would succeed or fail?
- Richard Herrick had conflicted feelings about the transplant up to the eve of the surgery. Why do you think that is?
- Historical accounts usually refer to individuals by their surnames after providing their full name; why do you think the author chose to refer to the "main characters" of this nonfiction narrative by the familiar forms of their first names?
- How did Peter Medawar's skill as a lecturer and performer affect the reception of his scientific findings?
- This book contains several historical images. Why do you think the author and editorial team selected these images? Are there any images (photos, paintings, archival documents, etc.) that you think should also be included?
- *Borrowing Life* pulls together many disparate threads and a cast of dozens into one story. What are some techniques the author uses to produce a coherent narrative from this temporally and geographically expansive set of events? Would you have done anything differently if you were the author of this book (present chapters in a different order, narrate from a different perspective, etc.)?