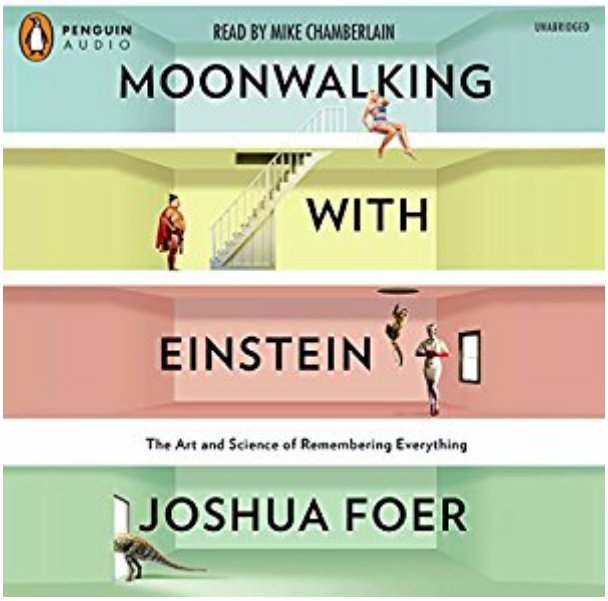
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Moonwalking With Einstein



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Synopsis

Foer’s unlikely journey from chronically forgetful science journalist to U.S. Memory Champion frames a revelatory exploration of the vast, hidden impact of memory on every aspect of our lives. On average, people squander 40 days annually compensating for things they’ve forgotten. Joshua Foer used to be one of those people. But after a year of memory training, he found himself in the finals of the U.S. Memory Championship. Even more important, Foer found a vital truth we too often forget: In every way that matters, we are the sum of our memories. Moonwalking with Einstein draws on cutting-edge research, a surprising cultural history of memory, and venerable tricks of the mentalist’s trade to transform our understanding of human remembering. Under the tutelage of top "mental athletes", he learns ancient techniques once employed by Cicero to memorize his speeches and by Medieval scholars to memorize entire books. Using methods that have been largely forgotten, Foer discovers that we can all dramatically improve our memories. Immersing himself obsessively in a quirky subculture of competitive memorizers, Foer learns to apply techniques that call on imagination as much as determination - showing that memorization can be anything but rote. From the PAO system, which converts numbers into lurid images, to the memory palace, in which memories are stored in the rooms of imaginary structures, Foer’s experience shows that the World Memory Championships are less a test of memory than of perseverance and creativity. At a time when electronic devices have all but rendered our individual memories obsolete, Foer’s bid to resurrect the forgotten art of remembering becomes an urgent quest. Moonwalking with Einstein brings Joshua Foer to the apex of the U.S. Memory Championship and readers to a profound appreciation of a gift we all possess but that too often slips our minds.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is one of those rare books that is not only a joy to read, but also immensely helpful. It can help all of us with something that is at once troublesome and worrisome: our memory. It does this with ease, not teaching us some grueling rote memory technique, but one that is easy, natural and intuitive. Yet Moonwalking with Einstein turns out to not be exclusively a how-to book on memory. So what is it?Well, yes, it is about memory and how to improve it, but it is at once a history of techniques, a description of what memory is and what can go wrong with it, and also a running narrative of how the author, a journalist himself with no special memory skills, becomes one of the most proficient memory athletes in America.I'd learned a mnemonic device to aid memorization decades ago while in college, and found it to be helpful, but for some reason I'd abandoned the technique once I graduated. But Moonwalking with Einstein expands the mnemonic technique I learned back then by use of something of which I'd never heard: the "Memory Palace." The Memory Palace exploits our inherent skill for remembering images and spatial locations, harnesses these two abilities we all posses in abundance, and relates them to the memorization of numbers, lists and assortments of other difficult to remember items. The amazing thing is that the Memory Palace not only makes memorization easy, it also makes it fun.What makes the book so interesting is that it is narrative non-fiction and reads like a novel. The author locks his conflict with his own memory early on, gives a sense of rising tension as he accumulates the forces to overcome its limitations, and resolves this internal conflict at the end when he participates in the US Memory Championship. I didn't read it as urgently as I did today's number one bestseller, Laura Hillenbrand's Unbroken, but still, I couldn't put it down.In Chapter Five, I scanned the "to-do" list of fifteen items on pages 92/3 that the author had to memorize in his initial attempt, and developed the technique for myself as I read about the author memorizing it. As my Memory Palace, I used an old home of a high school friend with which I was still familiar, constructing useful details as I went. When I had finished reading about the author memorizing the list (took me about five minutes), I had memorized it myself, and I found that the items were not only immediately memorable, but that the list of items and their sequence was still with me days later, and so imbedded in my memory that I'm sure I'll ever forget it. All this, I accomplished effortlessly. This is a truly remarkable feat for me because I'm almost seventy years old and have chronic fatigue syndrome, which adversely affects all aspects of my memory.It has also given me hope that I might finally learn ancient Greek. I tried to learn it

several years ago, but found building a vocabulary so difficult that I abandoned the project. Rote memory was just too much trouble. I am interested in all things Greek, and as it turns out, the Memory Palace technique was invented in the fifth century BC by Simonides following his narrow escape from the collapse of a building. This in itself is a story you'll be interested in reading about. The author says that since the time of this ancient Greek, "the art of memory has been about creating architectural spaces in the imagination." Having been to Greece twice, I have all the makings of a superb Greek Memory Palace. While traveling around Greece and the western coast of Turkey for ten weeks, I visited many cities and islands: Athens, Thebes, Delphi, Ithaca, Mykonos, Delos, Santorini, etc. I can't count all the archaeological sites I visited. What I'm creating isn't just any old Memory Palace but actually a Memory Country. Within each location, I can identify as many locations for storing words and meanings as I need. But not only that, I can also use characters from Greek mythology to create actions and images to reinforce the material, as the author suggests. All this constitutes my Greek Memory Palace: the location where I will store ancient Greek words and meanings as I learn the language, in accordance with the instructions learned in Moonwalking with Einstein. None of it was difficult. I picked it up as I read the book.The author describes how in the past people viewed their minds as something to perfect by loading it with all sorts of intellectual material. "People used to labor to furnish their minds. They invested in the acquisition of memories the same way we invest in the acquisition of things." [page 134] Some even believed that "the art of memory was a secret key to unlocking the occult structure of the universe." [page 151] This has given me an entirely new view of how to perceive my own mind and nourish it in the future.The author also discusses how we came to lose touch with our ability to remember with the invention of the printed word. The history of that estrangement and how inventions like Wikipedia and the Internet foster that estrangement is a very interesting story. The author makes the reader aware of what is happening to us and provides a way to project ourselves into the future without suffering so much of technology's debilitating effects.Perhaps the reason this book is so successful is that the reader never loses sight of the practical use of the information the author is providing because the author is discovering it himself and actively making use of it in his quest to make it into the US Memory Championship.This is an important book. Everyone can benefit from reading it.David Sheppard

After reporting on world level memory competitions, the author decides to train for events himself. In the process he introduces his readers to some of the techniques he learned and put to use to develop his skills.In future additions, the author might include more details of some of the methods

he used or have YouTube video links to add more depth but he did provide enough information in his chapter notes for those interested to learn more.

I picked up this book with a lot of scepticism, but I was proven wrong. I had always had problems with numbers and people's names, although I am quite good at remembering faces, stories and places. The "memory palace" method in this book helped me change my angle on memorising data. After I read the book I memorised my credit card numbers, bank account numbers and visa number for fun (as practice) as well as phone numbers. The method makes it fun to assign facts to the memory (as promised), but the big surprise for me was that the numbers and names stick in the long run; it is just as easy to recall them after weeks or months.

I caught an interview with Joshua Foer on the "Colbert Report" a few weeks ago and was fascinated by Foer's story of competing in the US and World memory championships. What made his story so fascinating is that Foer isn't some savant or MENSA member, but a journalist who happened to be fascinated with memory competition and whether normal individuals could vastly improve their memory.Foer's book travels through interesting locales and shines best when recounting the fascinating characters that help him hone memory techniques and the even odder personalities competing in these memory competitions. Foer does a solid job of recounting the early historical use of memory, in an era without printed books and where stories were passed by through oral communication. However, the science and historical parts of "Moonwalking with Einstein" do not make for the nearly compelling read that Foer's own individual journey through memory development and his surprise victory in the US memory championship. While Foer doesn't fare nearly as well in the world championships, he certainly will put a smile on your face with his fun juxtaposition of science and unique personal experiences.I didn't read this book to improve my memory techniques (although I've tried some of the basic techniques and found they do work), but to see if Foer's written and full-length story was as good as his interview on Colbert --- I can enthusiastically say that his book was worth the read.

This was a book I picked up after listening to the Serial Podcast. I was on a big memory kick after that and came across this. This is a really good narrative of an interesting story sprinkled with useful facts about the human memory, how we remember things and what we can do to improve our memory. Author Joshua Foer, tells his tale of the training and steps he took to improve his memory in order compete in the United States Memory Championship. If you want to improve your memory

or learn more about memory pick this tome up.

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