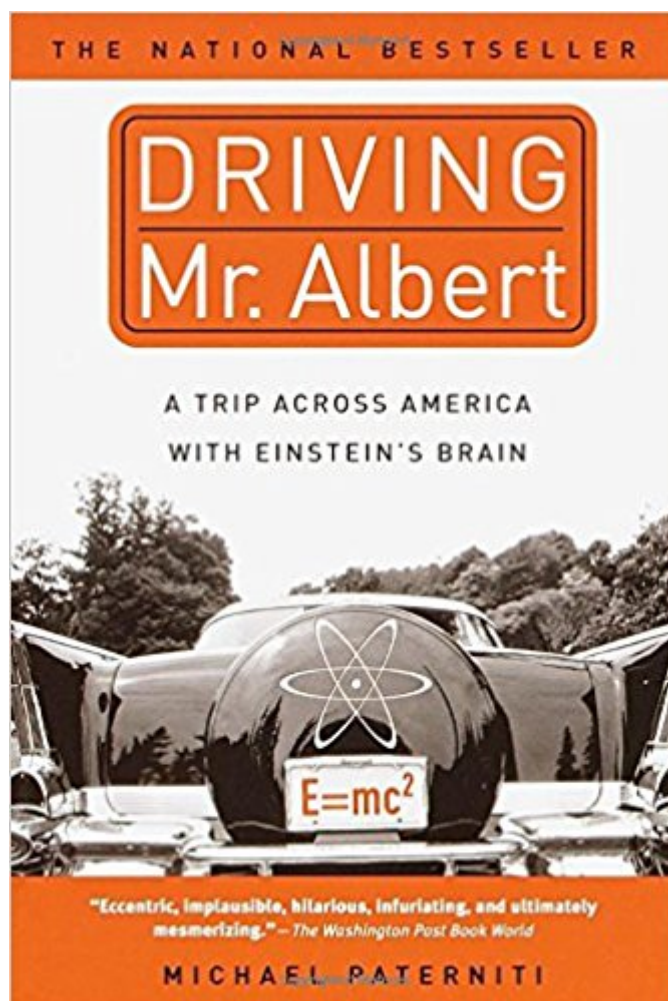




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# Driving Mr. Albert: A Trip Across America With Einstein's Brain



## Synopsis

Albert Einstein's brain floats in a Tupperware bowl in a gray duffel bag in the trunk of a Buick Skylark barreling across America. Driving the car is journalist Michael Paterniti. Sitting next to him is an eighty-four-year-old pathologist named Thomas Harvey, who performed the autopsy on Einstein in 1955 -- then simply removed the brain and took it home. And kept it for over forty years. On a cold February day, the two men and the brain leave New Jersey and light out on I-70 for sunny California, where Einstein's perplexed granddaughter, Evelyn, awaits. And riding along as the imaginary fourth passenger is Einstein himself, an id-driven genius, the original galactic slacker with his head in the stars. Part travelogue, part memoir, part history, part biography, and part meditation, *Driving Mr. Albert* is one of the most unique road trips in modern literature.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

*Driving Mr. Albert* chronicles the adventures of an unlikely threesome--a freelance writer, an elderly pathologist, and Albert Einstein's brain--on a cross-country expedition intended to set the story of this specimen-cum-relic straight once and for all. After Thomas Harvey performed Einstein's autopsy in 1955, he made off with the key body part. His claims that he was studying the specimen and would publish his findings never bore fruit, and the doctor fell from grace. The brain, though, became the subject of many an urban legend, and Harvey was transformed into a modern Robin Hood, having snatched neurological riches from the establishment and distributed them piecemeal to the curious and the faithful around the world. The brain itself has seen better days, its

chicken-colored chunks floating in a smelly, yellow, formaldehyde broth, yet its beatific presence in the book, riding serenely in the trunk of a Buick Skylark, encased in Tupperware, reflects the uncertainty of Einstein's life. Was he a sinner or a saint, a genius or just lucky? Harvey guards the brain as if it were his own. From time to time, he has given favored specialists a slice or two to analyze, but the results have been mixed. Physiologically, Einstein's brain may have been no different from anyone else's, but plenty of people would like the brain to be more than it is, including Paterniti: I want to touch the brain. Yes, I've admitted it. I want to hold it, coddle it, measure its weight in my palm, handle some of its fifteen billion now-dormant neurons. Does it feel like tofu, sea urchin, bologna? What, exactly? And what does such a desire make me? One of a legion of relic freaks? Or something worse? Traversing America with Harvey and his sacred specimen, Paterniti seems to be awaiting enlightenment, much as Einstein did in his last days. But just as the great scientist failed to come up with a unifying theory, Paterniti's chronicle dissolves at times into overly sincere efforts to find importance where there may be none, and it walks a fine line between postmodern detachment and wide-eyed wonderment. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, the book offers an engrossing portrait of postatomic America from what may be the ultimate late-20th-century road trip. --Therese Littleton --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Driving a Buick Skylark across the country with an addled octogenarian and an organ may not seem like the ripest material for a story, even if the organ is Albert Einstein's brain. In the hands of a stylish writer like Paterniti, however, the journey becomes a transcendent and hilarious exploration of heady themes like obsession, love and science. In 1955, the octogenarian, a pathologist named Thomas Harvey, removed Einstein's brain during an autopsy and, claiming he wished to study it further, took it home. In the years that followed, he sliced and shipped the brain around the world, but never relinquished most of the organ. Nor, to the criticism of colleagues, did he release his long-promised study. Forty-two years later, Harvey was finally ready to return the brain to Evelyn Einstein, Albert's granddaughter. He enlisted Paterniti, a freelance writer living in Maine, for the task. What ensues is a rare road story that gives equal weight to journey and destination. An expansion of an article published in Harper's magazine, this road-tale bears the classic elements of a spiritual quest. The brain a classic example of a character stand-in. But Paterniti so seamlessly weaves his stream-of-consciousness musings about everything from the theory of relativity to his own sputtering relationship with Harvey that the book becomes much more. Readers will hear echoes from American cultural history. The wanderlust of the Beats, the literary texture of Hemingway and the pastel-tinted surrealism of the Simpsons. It's impossible to put this book down. Paterniti has written

a work at once entertaining, psychologically rich and emotionally sophisticated. A feat as rare as, well, Einstein himself. Agent, Sloan Harris. (July) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

A book that can stir up a lot of painful memories in many people who have been through very rough childhoods will still surely grab anyone's attention and won't let go until the end. It has a very interesting plot and our protagonist shows us in a very deep way the internal struggle one in his position will go through in their minds no matter what terms are taking place or how large scale the danger is. I think it went by incredibly fast once we knew about the terrorist situation, this is the only thing I didn't like, and this is when it brought me back to the reality that I was reading a fiction by somehow combining a hint or glimpse of humor and situations explained quickly and simply in lay terms for young adults, this just didn't mix with a terrorist situation. Other than that, it's very enjoyable.

A fascinating and unique read! Many passages were so well-written that I actually squealed, and I consider myself to be a reasonably good writer/reader. My only criticism is that a few times the driving got a little slow, as driving does. But the original plot and engaging characters more than made up for that. I'd highly recommend this book to people who appreciate bizarre plots and characters, which, I'm sure, includes any fan of Mr. Albert Einstein.

Enjoyed the authors writing style and will read more from him. Book subject was very interesting and I appreciated the history lessons interspersed. So glad I bought the book. Chuckled out loud a few times too

While I enjoyed the trip across the United States with these two characters and the unusual characters they met along the way the book never seemed to feel completely unified. Perhaps that is what the author wanted but I always felt like the three characters in the story -- the author, the doctor and the brain -- never connected fully. Still an enjoyable read with all kinds of insights into the life of Albert Einstein to research.

Although there are a few editing mistakes throughout the book, like spelling mistakes or missing letters, it does little to take the reader's attention off the story - it just is something I would love to see fixed. I love, though, how Steven builds up the story and how he closes it towards the end. I was

also truly awestruck by how little the movie resembles the book - I saw the movie first. All in all, I would (will) definitely read this book again! ãfÂ ã Å\_ã Ëœã Â•

In Walter Isaacson's new biography, *Einstein: His Life and Universe*, he recommends *Driving Mr. Albert: A Trip Across America with Einstein's Brain* by Michael Paterniti. This book is filled with interesting facts, great observations, but above all, it's a fun read. *Driving Mr. Albert* reminds me of the oddball travelogues I've come to enjoy written by Tony Horwitz (*Confederates in the Attic*, *Blue Latitudes*, etc.). When Einstein died in Princeton Hospital in 1955, the pathologist who performed the autopsy, Dr. Thomas Harvey, took the brain for himself. He did it without the permission of the family, but when it was discovered, the family allowed him to keep the brain provided that any results were to be published in scientific journals. Harvey rationalized his actions by saying that he wanted to research the brain to discover the key to Einstein's brilliance. Unfortunately, Harvey was not a neurologist and didn't really have the knowledge to perform a proper study of any brain, let alone Einstein's. He gave out parcels of the brain to various scientists, but until many decades after Einstein's death, nothing definitive was able to be determined. In the meantime, Harvey switched jobs, moved around the country, and all the while, he kept Einstein's brain with him. A young writer, Michael Paterniti, became fascinated by the story of the brain and befriended Thomas Harvey when the doctor was 85 years old. Harvey mentioned that he'd like to travel to California to meet Evelyn Einstein, Einstein's step-granddaughter. So Paterniti volunteered to be his chauffeur, and they set out from New Jersey with pieces of Einstein's brain in tow. The main story is not the destination but the things that happen along the way. Some of the stops (like Los Alamos) have ties to Einstein, while others (Las Vegas) do not. Throughout the journey, Dr. Harvey remains almost as much of a mystery as the brain. Not only does he not reveal any secrets, but he is also reluctant to show the brain to Paterniti. Paterniti hopes for a glimpse of the brain--perhaps when Harvey falls asleep. He writes "I want to touch the brain. Yes, I've admitted it. I want to hold it, cuddle it, measure its weight in my palm...Does it feel like tofu, sea urchin, bologna? What exactly? And what does that desire make me? One of the legion of relic freaks?" *Driving Mr. Albert* is a great compliment to Isaacson's more serious and in-depth biography. Paterniti writes that "having Einstein's brain in the trunk rearranges the way you see everything." Reading *Mr. Paterniti* will rearrange the way you perceive Albert Einstein.

Interesting premise. Often amusing. Sometimes a little tedious. Never quite made its point.

Wow, I was introduced to this story because of the movie; which I pretty much thought totally sucked. Then I read somewhere in a magazine that this was actually a good book so, for the heck of it, I thought I would give it a try. The book is nothing like the movie and what is even more shocking, is the story line in the book is orders of magnitude better than the rather stupid plot of the film. I cannot for the life of me not understand why the plot of the movie didn't more closely follow the plot of the book since it is much more interesting and cinematic. This is a really great story and a very fast, quick, easy read. Highly recommended.

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