

Kirkus Reviews
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Thorndike, John
THE LAST OF HIS MIND: A Year in the Shadow of Alzheimer's

A brave, moving story of a son's devotion to his dying father. Novelist and memoirist Thorndike (*Another Way Home: A Family's Journey Through Mental Illness*, 1997, etc.) decided that when his father, a once indomitable editor at Life magazine and a reserved figure of authority, began to falter physically and mentally at the age of 92, the author was the one sibling who could put his life aside and take care of him. The decision to move from his farm in Ohio into his father's home in Cape Cod was not altogether altruistic, he admits, since he had agreed with his brother that he would get paid for taking care of his increasingly forgetful father. When the author's mother died more than 30 years before, "awash in depression, drugs and alcohol," Thorndike had not been present, and he felt "negligent," vowing "that when the time came I was going to look after my father." The author is remarkably candid about his complex and changing feelings for his parents, who divorced ten years before his mother's emotional slide. Neither of them was affectionate with each other or with their sons, a deep hurt that Thorndike rectified by his closeness with his own son. By caring for his confused, language-challenged father daily-feeding him, bathing him and thinking up ways to keep him stimulated-he attained enormous tenderness for and understanding of his father. Sadly, Thorndike's father refused to talk openly about his mother, who had left her husband for other men who were more emotionally giving. The author makes the startling realization that he, by his sensuality and openness, had "become the man my mother wouldn't leave." Though some readers may criticize the author for being self-serving-he recognized that he had a better story in his father's decline than the novel he was currently writing-Thorndike's prose is serenely beautiful and his patience in caring for an Alzheimer's patient is extremely admirable.

An affecting work of emotional honesty and forgiveness.