

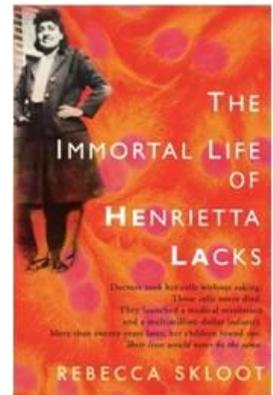


Author Skloot Shares the True Immortality of Glenbard Family Read *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*

There's nothing unusual about a Glenbard auditorium filling to capacity for a GPS evening presentation, even if it's scheduled during the first week of school. But on August 25th at GWHS, students, parents, faculty and administrators had to really hustle if they wanted a seat. Why? Because many residents who are also members of book groups were already seated waiting to hear Rebecca Skloot, author of the Glenbard Family read book choice, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*.

In 1993, a sixteen year old, who had failed a high school biology class, was sitting in a summer school biology class, taught at a local community college in Washington state. After the professor explained the nature of HeLa cells, the first human cells that lived and reproduced in a lab setting, the cells principally responsible for the medical research that lead to the vaccine to prevent polio, chemotherapies for cancers, genetic research and on and on, the sixteen year old asked one question. "What do we know about Henrietta Lacks?" The professor replied, "Very little."

Skloot was that sixteen year old. That one question changed the trajectory of her life and twenty-five years later, her book which chronicles the brief life, tragic death and stunning discovery of Henrietta's, cells, cells that would not die, has been the catalyst for millions of people, not only to understand who was Henrietta Lacks, but to understand the important roles ethics and patient privacy play in the pursuit of medical research, even when that research may lead to cures impacting all of humanity.



In 1951, Henrietta was a 31 year-old, Afro-American mother of five children whose husband was a poor tobacco farmer near Baltimore, Maryland. Lacks became very ill and was seen at Johns Hopkins, one of the only hospitals that was "allowed" to treat blacks. Johns Hopkins' doctors diagnosed her with an extremely aggressive form of cervical cancer. It was during her stay at the hospital that Lacks' cervical cells were harvested from her, without her knowledge or consent, which was a common practice of hospitals at that time. But it was her cells, "HeLa" cells, which have been reproduced, and bought and sold for millions of dollars then and now. And her family never received a penny.

Skloot's message for students is simple and straight-forward. If someone tells you something, and you have to ask, "Wait. What?" Then it is your innate sense of curiosity, your sense of wonder which will lead you down the path you're meant to take to meaningful learning. Her message to parents? If your child is underachieving in school, it may be the way they are being taught; students can have different learning styles. To educators? You never know when something you are say to a class is going to be the spark that ignites a student's passion for learning. And to everyone in the audience, we need to understand the innate responsibility the medical community has regarding the dignity of patients. We all need to consider what role ethics does, and will, play in the medical and scientific search for cures.

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