

Pioneering Brain Scientist Still Working at 99

November 20, 2017

You're a preeminent neuroscientist, and a professor at Canada's prestigious McGill University. At age 99, what motivates you to keep up your research at the Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital?

I am very curious. Human quirks attract my interest. If you're a theoretical person, you can sit and dream up beautiful theories, but my approach is, "What would happen if "or, "Why is this person doing [that] "and then, "How can I measure it?" I wouldn't still be working if I didn't find it exciting.

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Are you curious in real life, too?

Yes. I'm a good "noticer—" of behavior as much as the kind of furniture people have!

In the 1950s, you made a revolutionary discovery— that memories are formed in a brain area called the hippocampus, which is now getting lots of attention for its role in memory loss and dementia. Has brain research gotten easier?

Nowadays, everyone has functional magnetic resonance imaging. Anybody with access to a medical school can get a good look at the patients' brain while they're alive and young, but it wasn't like that [then]. Psychologists were studying patients who were much older and beginning to show memory impairment. Then they had to wait for their patients to die.