

OASIS Book Reviews Inspiration on Demand

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The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

How one woman's cells changed scientific thinking forever

By Rebecca Skloot

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This presentation is based on a summary from [blinkist.com](https://www.blinkist.com)

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What to expect in this session

- **Cell strands' importance in research**
- **Stories told to slaves to keep them scared**
- **Your cell or tissue samples and your rights**

Who was Henrietta Lacks?

Read more @

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henrietta_Lacks

Henrietta Lacks



Henrietta Lacks circa 1945–1951

Born August 1st, 1920 in Roanoke, VA

Belonged to a family of Tobacco Farmers

Married to David 'Day' Lacks

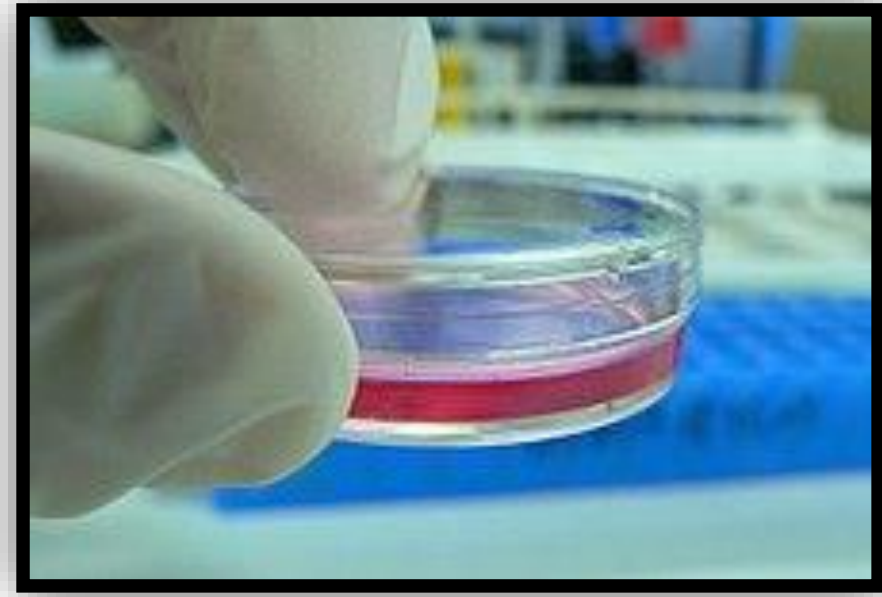
Had 5 children, 3 boys and 2 girls

She was diagnosed with cancer early 1951

Passed away from Cancer in October, 1951 @ age 31

HeLa - *Immortal human cells*

Live Human Cells needed for Experimental Research

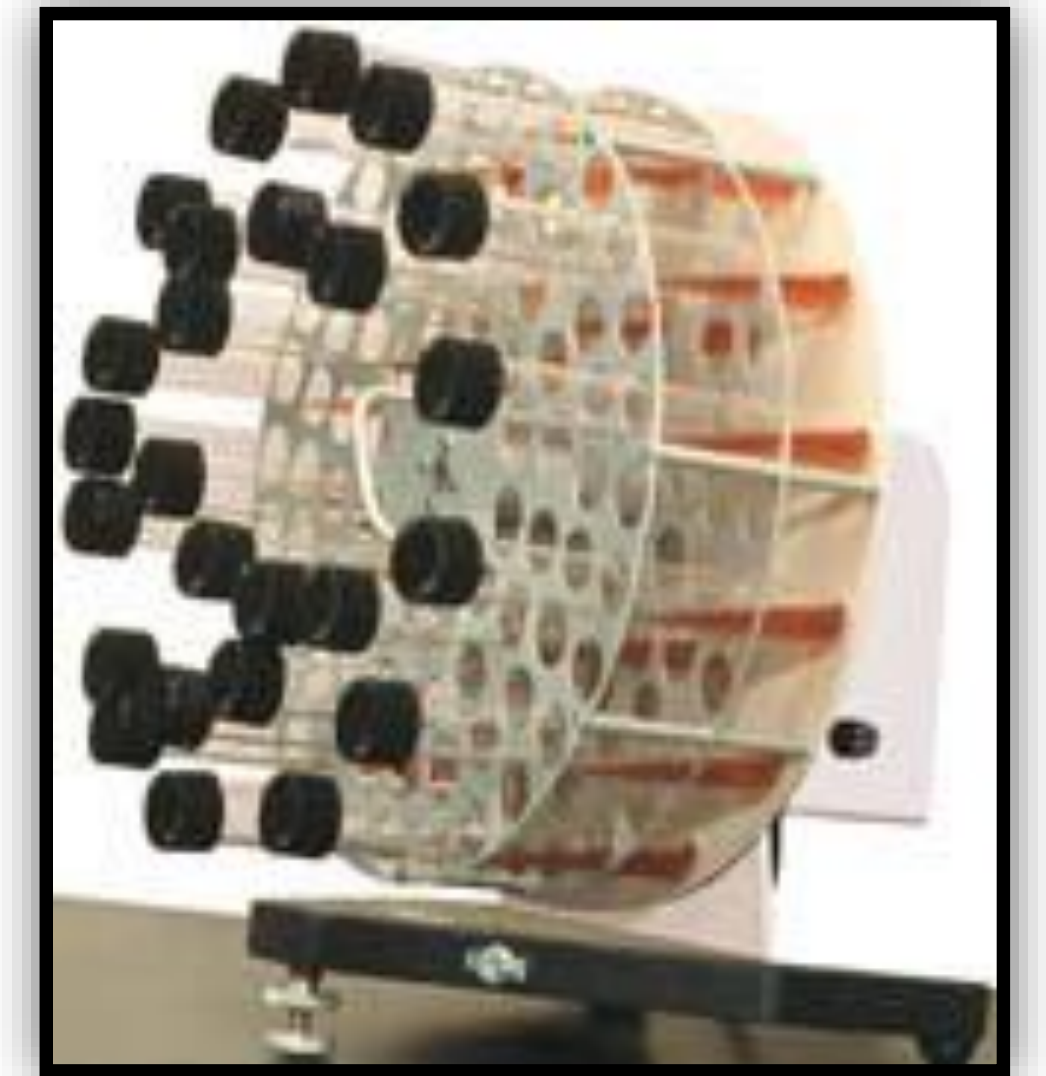


Cell Cultures did not survive long enough till...

Dr. Gey's New Roller Tube Culturing technique

Her cells doubled fast so they shared them

1. Low Cost
2. Survived & Grew better
3. Could be transported
4. Resistant to POLIO



**Since the 1950s over
110 BILLION lbs. of HeLa cells
have been grown &
Over 11,000 patents
involving HeLa cells**

Source [Wikipedia](#)

Famous Cells - Forgotten Donor

HeLa cells were used in research labs all over the world

No one knew where or whom they came from

The author learnt about HeLa in 1999 at Morehouse College

She got the Lacks family contact information from Dr. Pattillo

They did not meet her, like he told her. There was no trust

Mistrust towards medical industry due to known Exploitation

Mistrust & Historical Fears

100s of Poor black men infected with Syphilis for “research”

1930s Tuskegee Experiments - not cured though they could

1800's - Night Doctors were believed to kidnap blacks to test

Slave owners made it up to keep them scared, some are true

In 1900s Hospitals & Research centers offered money for bodies

Johns Hopkins was located near a poor black area...folks scared

Too Much HeLa everywhere

1966 DNA researcher found HeLa was in all cell cultures

HeLa cells were so resilient, they contaminated all close by

Research assumed different cell cultures was now incorrect

Researchers needed her families DNA to study the issues

Deborah, her daughter worried about getting cancer met them

Cell Donation & Privacy

Alaskan pipe worker John Moore had cancer & spleen removed

His cells were marketed without consent, he sued - but LOST

Ted Slavin had antibodies, was told & agreed to allow research

Henrietta did not have their chance to claim rights for her cells

As of 2009 - you have no rights; what your cells can be used for

Summary

- **Henrietta Lack's cells - called HeLa helped in research to cure Polio and other diseases**
- **She was not informed - and will never know their role in modern medical science**
- **Her family did not know much about it till much later**
- **Historical mistrust exists towards medical industry because of real exploitation & stories**
- **Others whose cells were used sued and lost and/or profited**
- **She never had the opportunity because she passed long ago**
- **Privacy rights are still not quite clear, mostly just recommendations to update laws**