

The Woman Who Can't Forget

Fill in the gaps with the words from the box:

cling on shed light reveal
workings intact immersed
came to light reeled off verify
at the end of her tether retrieve



For most of us, memory is a kind of scrapbook, a mess of blurred and faded snapshots of our lives. As much as we would like to

1) _____ to our past, even the most poignant moments can be washed away with time.

Ask Jill Price what she was doing for any day since the age 12, however, and she will give you the minutiae [mɪˈnjuːʃiː] of the weather, what she was wearing, or even what side of the train she was sitting on her journey to work. Her condition - ‘Highly superior autobiographical memory’ (or HSAM for short), first 2) _____ in the early 2000s, when she emailed the neuroscientist and memory researcher Jim McGaugh one day, and asked whether he could help explain her experiences.

Intrigued, McGaugh invited her to his lab, and began to test her. He realised that Jill’s case might 3) _____ on how normal memories are formed and recalled. He would give her a date and ask her to tell him about the world events on that day. True to her word, she was correct almost every time. Luckily, Price had also kept a diary throughout that period, allowing the researchers to 4) _____ her recollections of personal incidents too; and it turned out that her memories remained 5) _____. After a few years of these sporadic studies, they decided to give her a further, spontaneous test: “Name the dates of every single time you’ve visited our lab”. In an instant, she 6) _____ a list of their appointments.

Disappointingly, brain scans have failed to 7) _____ any huge anatomical differences that might explain how this occurs. Instead, the key seems to lie in more general thinking patterns and habits. McGaugh recently profiled around 20 people with HSAM and found that they scored particularly highly on two measures: fantasy proneness and absorption. Fantasy proneness could be considered a tendency to imagine and daydream, whereas absorption is the tendency to allow your mind to become 8) _____ in an activity – to pay complete attention to the sensations and the experiences. “I’m extremely sensitive to sounds, smells and visual detail,” explains Jill Price “I definitely feel things more strongly than the average person.”

Price’s perfect memory came with a price. She often found herself 9) _____ reliving painful experiences, such as the death of her father. Her memory was not like a computer hard drive that can store information and 10) _____ it when needed. Instead, it was more like a streaming video that played continuously, whether she wanted it to or not. But she never wished she could forget. All she wanted was to understand the 11) _____ of her mind.