



**Graphic  
Medicine as  
Medical  
Narrative**

Curated by Kate E. Bright

**Comics, Graphic  
Novels, and  
Graphic Medicine**

# Comics

A **Comic** is a medium of expression where thoughts or ideas are portrayed with images. Drawings or works of art are often combined with text and laid out in a sequential order.

Comics connect practice and theory: "The multiple layers of comics make them a good way to explore the messy complexity of real life practice..."

- Comics are Research: Graphic Narratives as a New Way of Seeing Clinical Practice - Muna Al-Jawad

Comics can bring aspects of a situation to light, unlock emotions, have symbolism and images at its disposal, help map a journey through story and can tap into humor.

Images can draw attention to a topic, subject matter or everyday occurrence. This serves as a valuable tool for comics.

Comics have a role to play in the discussion of "difficult, complex or ambiguous subject matter"

Utilizing visual art helps the reader understand information. It helps them make sense of the world.

- Comics are Research: Graphic Narratives as a New Way of Seeing Clinical Practice - Muna Al-Jawad

Comics have a distinct language and history.

It is considered "low art" and is thus freed from the conventions of the mainstream art world. This gives comics a wider range of creativity because it does not have to adhere the rules of conventional art.

- Comics as Research: Graphic Narratives as a New Way of Seeing Clinical Practice - Muna Al-Jawad

Comics, considered an underrated medium, has gotten recognition through the medium of graphic novel. A new demographic of people have become interested.

# Graphic Novels

A book that consists of comics. The word "novel" tends to refer to fictional works, but when paired with "graphic", is used more broadly and includes fiction, non-fiction, and anthologies. It is not a "comic book" because this term refers to a series, or periodical.

# Graphic Medicine

Considered a sub-genre of Graphic Novels, **Graphic Memoirs** are a series of comics that are biographical or autobiographical. Frequently, graphic memoirs fall in the category of graphic medicine novels because they often deal with health-related topics.

Ian Williams coined the phrase **Graphic Medicine** as "the intersection between the medium of comics and the discourse of healthcare".



**Why is Graphic  
Medicine  
Important?**

# The Medical Humanities

Applying the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts to medical education and practice has gained in popularity in recent years. **The Medical Humanities** encourages the study of these disciplines in relation to medicine, teaching that they can inform medical education.

Many medical schools, nowadays, encourage the study of classical literature to assist with understanding "the human condition".

"...studying literature helps physicians grow in self-understanding"... "literary theory contributes to an 'ethical, satisfying and effective practice of medicine'".

**For Medical  
Professionals,  
Graphic  
Medicine...**

...plays a role in  
the discussion of  
difficult subject  
matters.

...effectively relates  
patient experience.

...effectively relates  
caregiver  
experience.

...is a means of  
healing from  
trauma.

**A Useful  
Medical  
Narrative**

Graphic Medicine proves to be a popular genre of writing that tells the story of experiences dealing with illness or caring for someone with an illness.



Williams suggests that comics adhere to the natural sequential narratives our minds create when experiencing the world. The sequence of panels helps the reader make sense of what they're experiencing.

"Complex ideas can be quickly and easily digested as images or as a partnership of words and imagery"

- *Graphic Medicine: comics as medical narrative* - Ian C M Williams

Humor is used to draw attention to a subject and is done in a way where there is no derision or self-derision.

Authors use graphic novels to educate their audiences about their experiences and to pass along important information about the medical process. Medical situations are addressed that may not be discussed otherwise.

“Companionship through shared experience”

“comics offer an engaging, powerful and accessible method of delivery and consummation of these narratives.”



**Powerful Books  
to Pick Up**



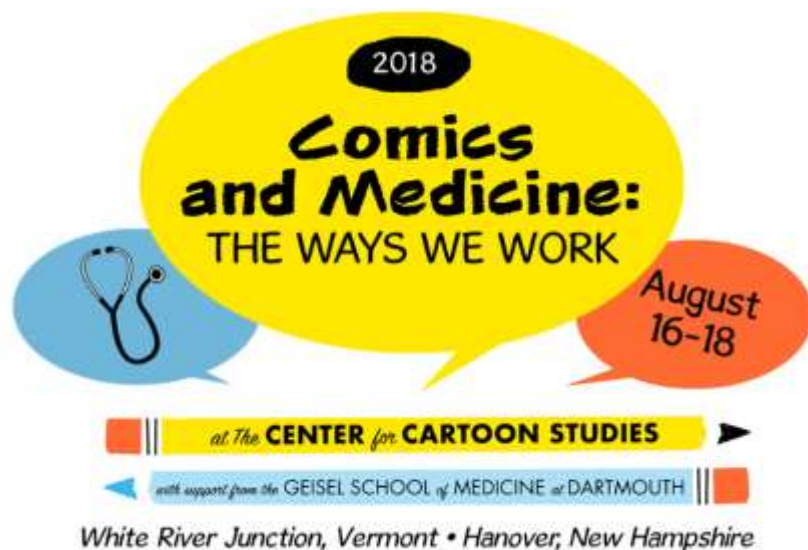
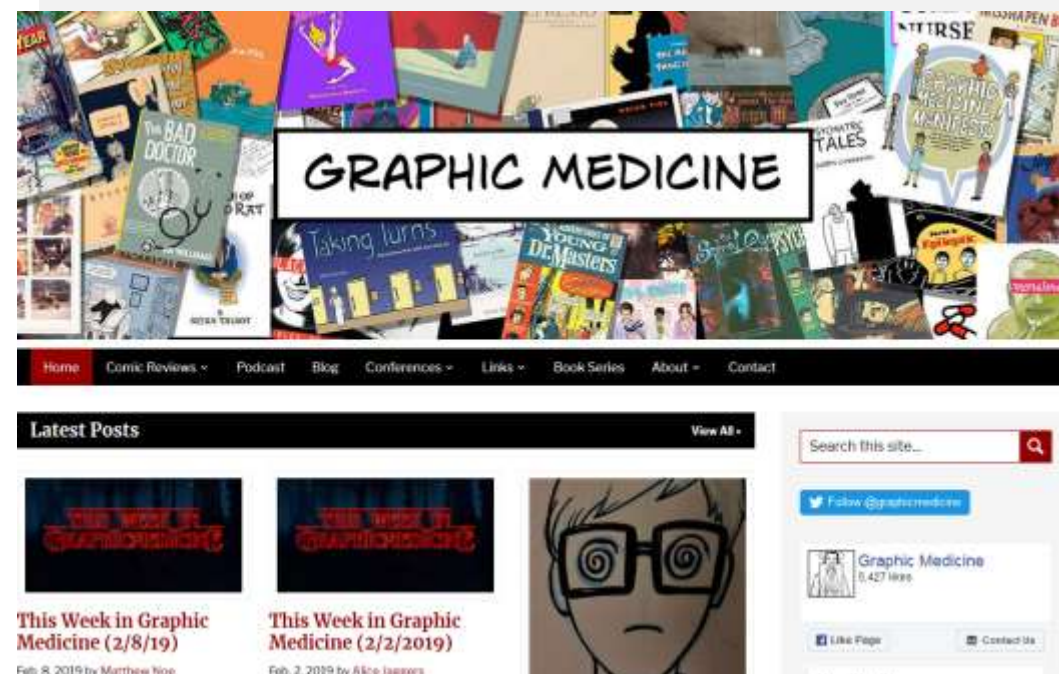
Ian Williams

Ian Williams is the author of the graphic medicine novel "Bad Doctor" and is a general practitioner based in Brighton, UK. He is known for coining the phrase "Graphic Medicine".

With an interest in both art and medicine, Ian pursued disciplines separately before discovering graphic novels that tackle medical or health science themes. He went back to school and received a Masters in Medical Humanities, writing his dissertation on graphic medicine.

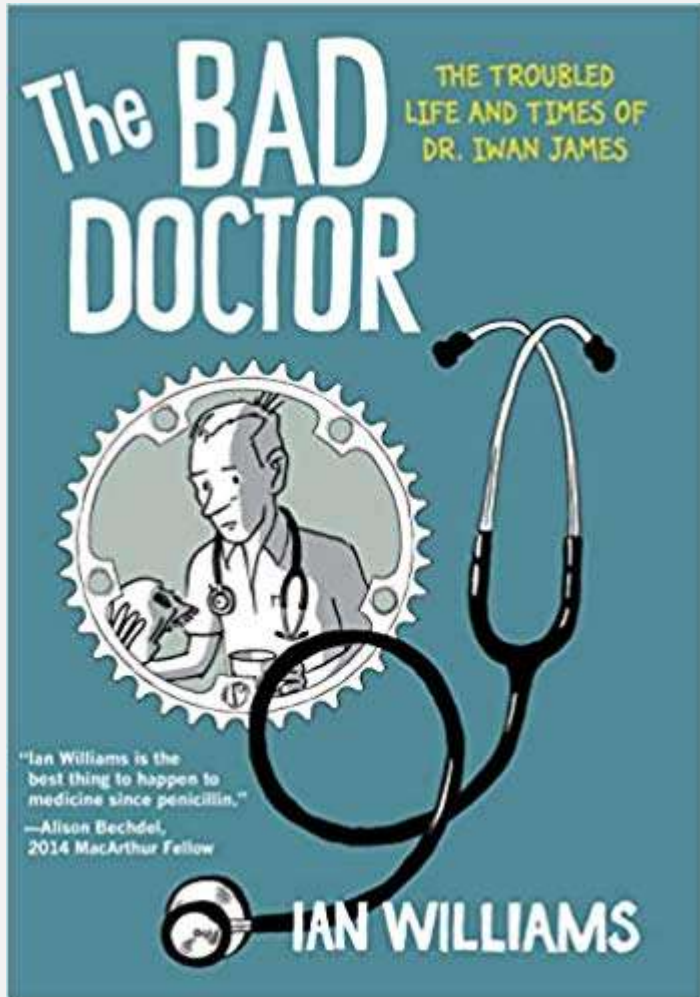
- Guru of graphic medicine - Paul Gessell

He now helps organize international conferences on graphic medicine each year. **This year's conference: July 11-13, 2019**, Hosted by Brighton and Sussex Medical School, at the Sallis Benney Theatre, Brighton, UK.



e  
Querying  
Graphic Medicine  
Paradigms, Power, and Practices



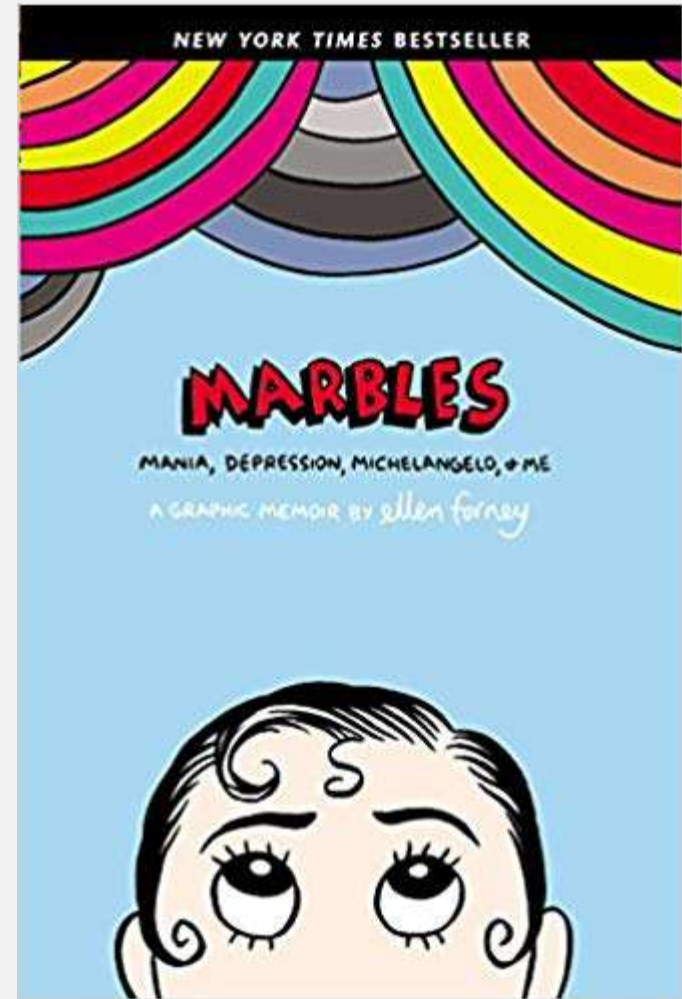


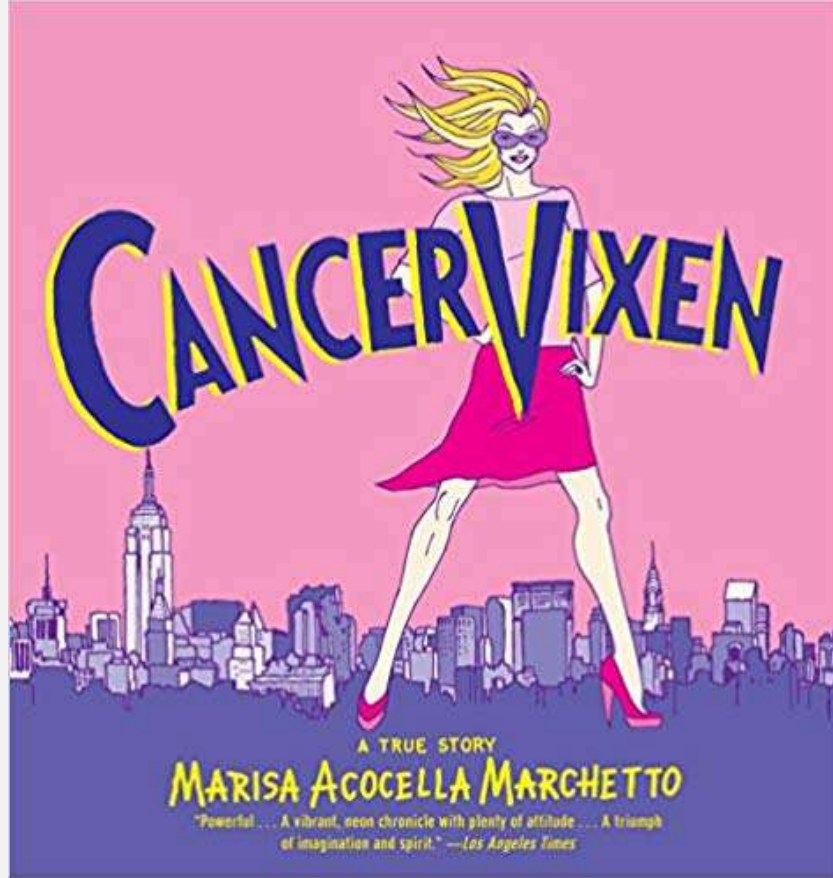
Meet Dr. Iwan James: cyclist, doctor, would-be lover, former heavy metal fan, and, above all, human being. Weighed down by his responsibilities—from diagnosing personality disorders to deciding who can hold a gun license—he doubts his ability to make decisions about the lives of others when he may need more than a little help himself. Cartoonist and doctor Ian Williams introduces us to Iwan's troubled life as all humanity, it seems, passes through his surgery doors.

Cartoonist Ellen Forney explores the relationship between “crazy” and “creative” in this graphic memoir of her bipolar disorder, woven with stories of famous bipolar artists and writers.

Shortly before her thirtieth birthday, Forney was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Flagrantly manic and terrified that medications would cause her to lose creativity, she began a years-long struggle to find mental stability while retaining her passions and creativity.

Darkly funny and intensely personal, Forney's memoir provides a visceral glimpse into the effects of a mood disorder on an artist's work, as she shares her own story through bold black-and-white images and evocative prose.



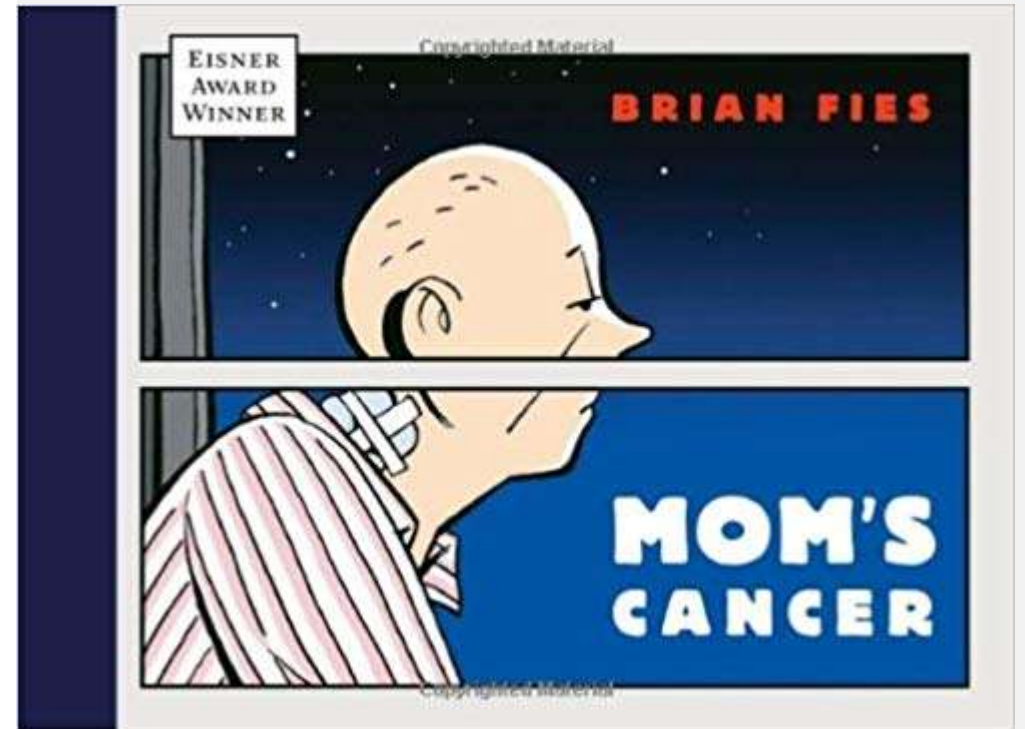


The groundbreaking graphic memoir that inspires breast cancer patients to fight back—and do so with style.

“What happens when a shoe-crazy, lipstick-obsessed, wine-swilling, pasta-slurping, fashion-fanatic, about-to-get-married big-city girl cartoonist with a fabulous life finds . . . a lump in her breast?” That’s the question that sets this powerful, funny, and poignant graphic memoir in motion. In vivid color and with a taboo-breaking sense of humor, Marisa Acocella Marchetto tells the story of her eleven-month, ultimately triumphant bout with breast cancer—from diagnosis to cure, and every challenging step in between.



Winner of the 2005 Eisner Award in the category of Best Digital Comic for the original Web version, **Mom's Cancer** is now available as a graphic novel. An honest, unflinching, and sometimes humorous look at the practical and emotional effect that serious illness can have on patients and their families, **Mom's Cancer** is a story of hope—uniquely told in words and illustrations. Brian Fies is a freelance journalist whose mother was diagnosed with lung cancer. As he and his two sisters struggled with the effects of her illness and her ongoing recovery from treatment, Brian processed the experience in his journal, which took the form of words and pictures.



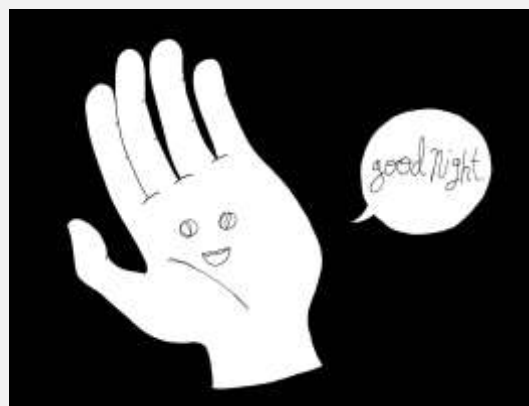
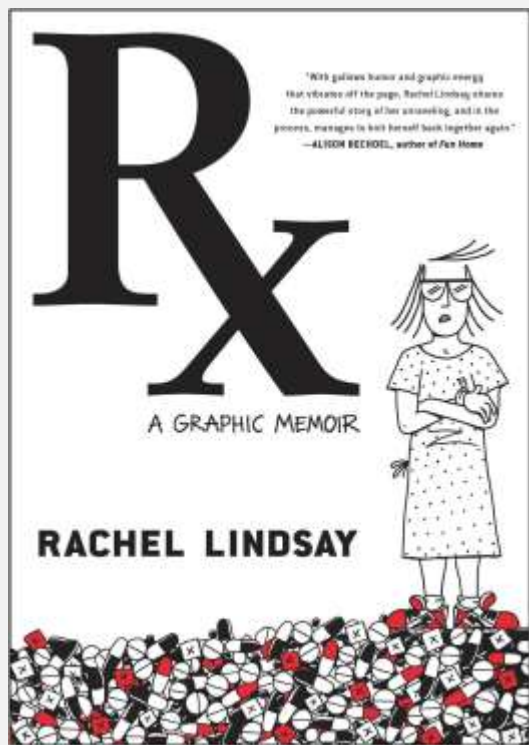


**Graphic Medicine**  
**Authors in Vermont**





Rachel Lindsay is a Vermont-based cartoonist and author of **Rx: A Graphic Memoir**, about her experience advertising psychopharmaceuticals as a bipolar person, and subsequent involuntary hospitalization for mania, which has received acclaim from Kirkus Reviews, Publisher's Weekly, and New York Magazine, among others. A powerful new voice in the mental health realm of the Graphic Medicine community, Lindsay has spoken about her work at Harvard Medical School, Columbia University, Mount Sinai Hospital, and the California Institute of Integral Studies, among others. Her comic strip, **Rachel Lives Here Now**, appears weekly in **Seven Days**.





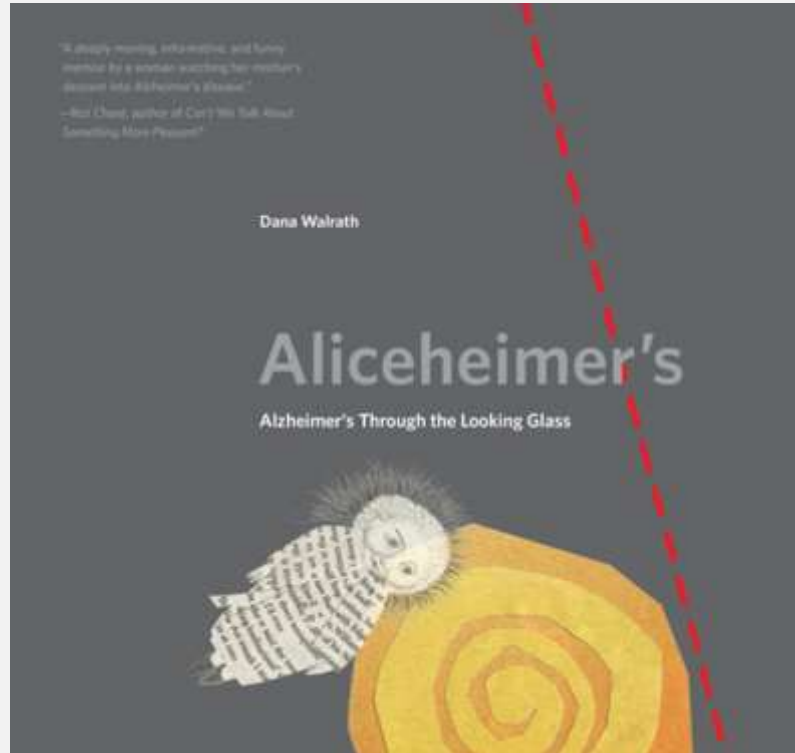
Dana Walrath is a medical anthropologist, writer, and artist who lives in Vermont. Until 2008, she taught medical students at UVM's Larner College of Medicine.

She grew up in New York City interested in art and science, spending more time outside running and playing than inside reading and writing. She started teaching at a young age, studied at Barnard College and Columbia University, drawn to both visual art and biology, and earned a PhD in the anthropology of childbirth from the University of Pennsylvania. Anthropology was a means for her to connect creativity with her varied interests in life, science, and writing.

"Since moving to the mountains of Vermont with my husband and three sons in the summer of 2000, I've used stories and art to teach medical students at the University of Vermont's College of Medicine. Creative writing and artwork were done mostly during hours stolen from sleep and squeezed between other responsibilities. The balance tipped toward creative work shortly after my mother, Alice, and dementia moved in with us. Alice had always wanted me to be a doctor. When she stood in my kitchen in early 2008, admiring the cabinet knobs I had hand painted and said, 'You should quit your job and make art full time,' I listened, and I haven't looked back. When Alice lived with us, I had the great pleasure of earning an MFA in writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts."  
<http://www.danawalrath.com/about/>



**Dana Walrath**



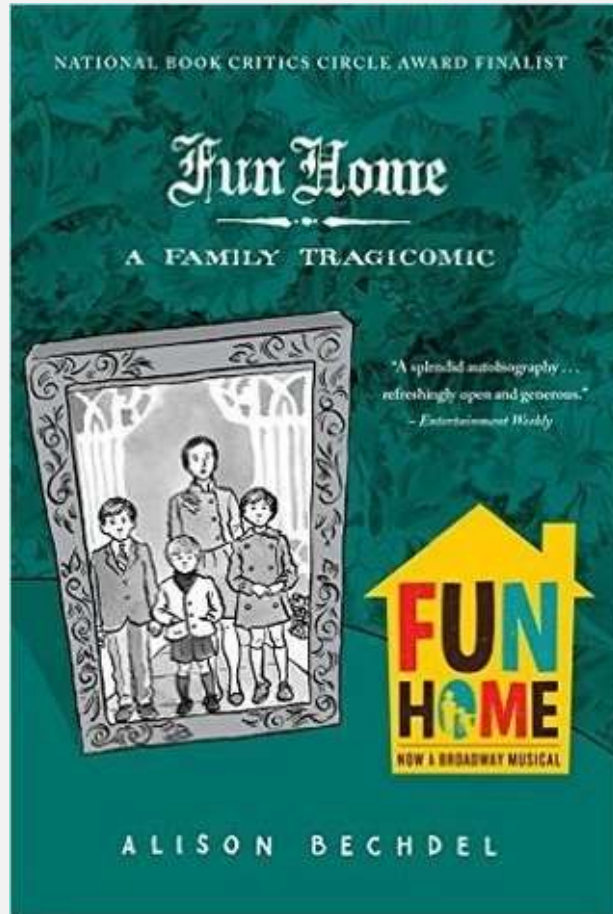
**Aliceheimer's** is an exploration of Dana's experiences with her mother, Alice Mashoian Walrath. It is a navigation through Alzheimer's, the rituals that ground Alice, the stories and memories that transport her to different times, the childlike understanding while grappling with a present world she can't remember. It is a circuitous, fluid journey between the present and the past, following the meanderings of Alice's Alzheimer's, from seeing her late husband up in a tree outside Dana's Vermont farmhouse to trips back to World War II and food rationing. Dana puts her expertise to work to help deal with her mom's memory loss, time traveling, emotions, and sense of security.

Alison Bechdel is an American cartoonist. Originally best known for the long-running comic strip **Dykes to Watch Out For**, she came to critical and commercial success in 2006 with her graphic memoir **Fun Home**, which was subsequently adapted as a musical and won a Tony Award for Best Musical in 2015. In 2012, she released her second graphic memoir **Are You My Mother?**. She's a 2014 recipient of the MacArthur "Genius" Award and is also known for the "Bechdel test". The Bechdel test, also known as the Bechdel-Wallace test, is a measure of the representation of women in fiction. It asks whether a work features at least two women who talk to each other about something other than a man.

Alison lives and works in Bolton, Vermont.







A fresh and brilliantly told memoir from a cult favorite comic artist, marked by gothic twists, a family funeral home, sexual angst, and great books.

This breakout book by Alison Bechdel is a darkly funny family tale, pitch-perfectly illustrated with Bechdel's sweetly gothic drawings. Meet Alison's father, a historic preservation expert and obsessive restorer of the family's Victorian home, a third-generation funeral home director, a high school English teacher, an icily distant parent, and a closeted homosexual who, as it turns out, is involved with his male students and a family babysitter. Through narrative that is alternately heartbreaking and fiercely funny, we are drawn into a daughter's complex yearning for her father. And yet, apart from assigned stints dusting caskets at the family-owned "fun home," as Alison and her brothers call it, the relationship achieves its most intimate expression through the shared code of books.

## References:

- Al-Jawad, M. (2013). Comics are Research: Graphic Narratives as a New Way of Seeing Clinical Practice. *J Med Humanit*, 36:369-374. doi: 10.1007/s10912-013-9205-0
- Williams, I.C.M. (2012). Graphic Medicine: Comics as Medical Narrative. *Med Humanit*, 38:21-27. doi: 10.1136/medium-2011-010093
- Gessel, P. (2016). Guru of graphic medicine, *CMAJ Humanities* 188:17-18. doi:10.1503/cmaj.160027
- Williams, I.C.M. Why 'Graphic Medicine'?. Retrieved from <https://www.graphicmedicine.org/why-graphic-medicine/>.

## Graphic Medicine Links:

<https://www.graphicmedicine.org/>

<https://www.graphicmedicine.org/national-library-of-medicine-graphic-medicine-exhibit/>

<https://medicinagrafica.com/>

<https://www.graphicmedicine.org/online-articles/>

Ian Williams

<http://www.thebaddr.com/>

<https://www.graphicmedicine.org/links/medical-humanities-links/>

## Teaching with Comics: A Course for Fourth-Year Medical Students:

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10912-013-9245-5>

<https://www.graphicmedicine.org/links/comics-sites-and-blogs/>

<https://www.graphicmedicine.org/links/comic-authors-and-artists/>