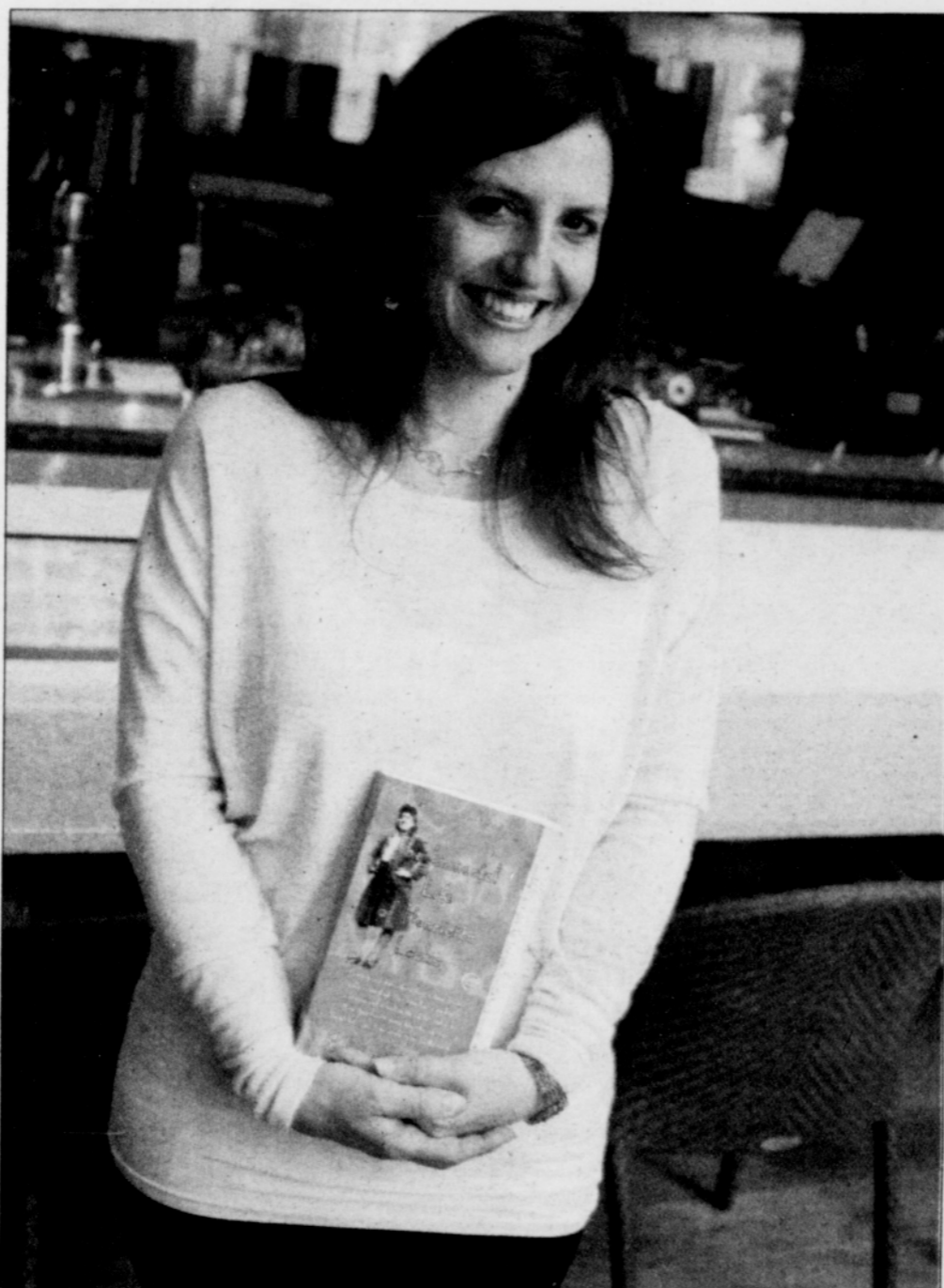


Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

Engaging with Race and Medical Ethics

Best-selling author comes home for 'PCC Reads'



Best-selling author Rebecca Skloot is coming home for Portland Community college's PCC Reads Program. Her book 'The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks,' engages in race and social justice issues.

Acclaimed science author Rebecca Skloot, who penned the New York Times best seller, "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks," is coming to Portland Community College for its PCC Reads Program.

Skloot, one of 50 PCC Diamond Alums honored during the college's 50th anniversary, will talk at 6 p.m., Thursday, May 17, at the Slavic Church Emmanuel, 2025 S.E. 82nd Ave, next door to PCC's Southeast Center. The engagement is open and free to the public.

"The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks," is Skloot's debut book and took more than a decade to research. It instantly became a New York Times best seller in hardcover, paperback and electronic editions. It was named The Best Book of 2010 by Amazon.com and a Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers Pick.

Her visit to PCC marks a return home to where she went to school and got the idea for the book. In 1988, the 16-year-old Skloot was a student at the Metropolitan Learning Center (she dropped out of Lincoln High School her freshman year) and decided to take Don Defler's college-level science class at the PCC Sylvania Campus. During that class, he lectured about HeLa cells and attached a name to the cells, sparking Skloot's curiosity.

"She was such a serious student and a good student, and she was so sincere," Defler said. "What's happened to Rebecca is really phenomenal."

As a result of that class, the idea

for the book was born.

The book tells the story of a poor Southern tobacco farmer Henrietta Lacks, whom scientists know as HeLa. In 1951, Henrietta developed a strangely aggressive cancer, and doctors at Johns Hopkins Hospital took a tissue sample without her knowledge. She died without knowing that her cells would become immortal—the first to grow and survive indefinitely in culture. The cells became of the most important

tools in medicine and are still alive today, though she has been dead for more than sixty years.

HeLa cells were vital for developing the polio vaccine; uncovered secrets of cancer, viruses, and the effects of the atom bomb; helped lead to important advances like in vitro fertilization, cloning, and gene mapping; and have been bought and sold by the billions. Yet Henrietta Lacks, a black woman remained virtually unknown, buried in an unmarked grave.

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