

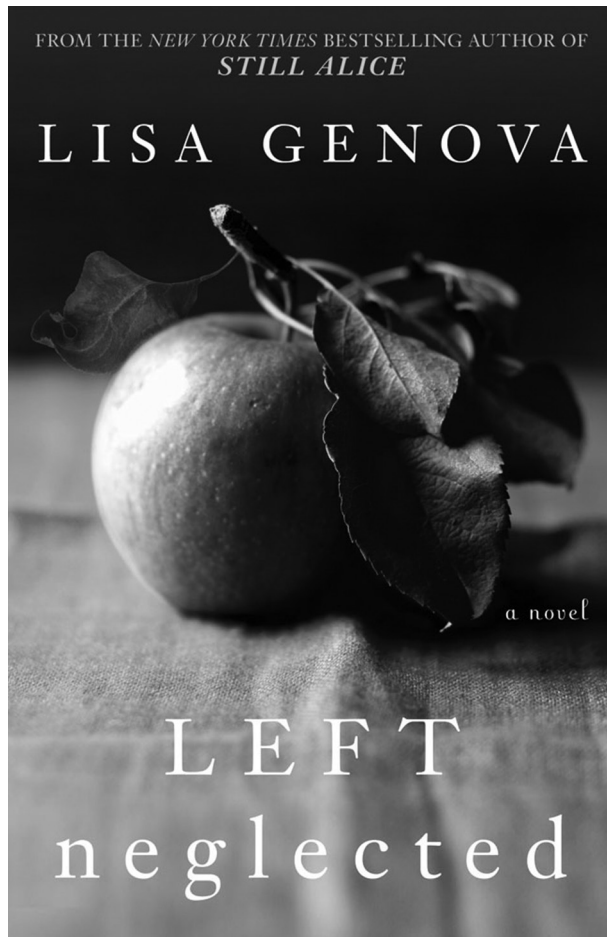
BOOK REVIEW

Rehabilitating the Mind and Spirit: “Left Neglected”

Lisa Genova, PhD. Gallery Books, USA, 2011

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Lisa Genova's first novel, *Still Alice*, recounted the heart-wrenching story of a Harvard professor's journey with early onset Alzheimer's Disease. It was raw, sagacious, and brilliantly written. I literally couldn't put it down – I finished it in one day. Logically, I was eagerly awaiting the release of *Left Neglected* and snatched it up as soon as it hit the shelves.

Left Neglected tells the story of Sarah Nickerson, a consummate perfectionist who barely has time to breathe amidst her chaotic lifestyle. She manages to carefully juggle the roles of wife, mother of three, and VP of a prominent consulting firm where she frequently

logs 80+ hours per week. Her fast paced days are fastidiously planned to accommodate her overbooked schedule. Sarah's world is shattered when she is in a horrific car accident that results in a traumatic brain injury. Left neglect is a devastating condition in which there is a deficit in attention to and awareness of the left side, as a result of damage to the right hemisphere. *Left Neglected* explores a woman's quest to regain her life after everything with which she identifies is lost.

Sarah is a well-drawn protagonist who is charismatic and relatable. Her busy lifestyle easily elicits an element of familiarity in the reader, thereby enticing them to continue turning the pages in order to find out how she will deal with her inability to execute many of the activities she took for granted on a daily basis. The audience is also witness to the vulnerability that results from depending so heavily on others for completion of normally effortless tasks. Accommodation and adaptation are both major themes of this novel, as Genova describes Sarah's awe-inspiring struggle to recover.

Martha will ask me to put on makeup, and I will, and then my mother, who is usually hovering in the background, will either giggle or gasp depending on how the day is going, and Martha will tell me that I didn't apply anything on the left. The left half of my lips will have no lipstick, my left eye will have no mascara or liner or shadow, and my left cheek will have no blush.

And then I'll study my face in the mirror and really try to see what they see, and I'll see myself in full makeup, looking pretty good, minus the Chia Pet hairdo. It's a spooky and sometimes embarrassing moment, becoming aware of what they see, comparing it to what I see. And what I don't. I'm missing a whole continent of experience, and I'm not even aware of it. To me nothing is missing.

Throughout her recovery, Sarah is forced to examine and re-evaluate both her identity and her priorities. In doing so, readers also feel compelled to reflect on their own lives and what's important to them. She was an over-achieving multi-tasker striving to keep up the affluent lifestyle to which she was accustomed. Sarah is forced to slow down and consider what matters most in life. She discovers that success is not limited to a single definition and she is able to live a fulfilled life with much less.

*And I'm starting to wonder. What else is there?
Maybe success can be something else, and
maybe there's another way to get there. Maybe
there's a different road for me with a more
reasonable speed limit.*

The storyline with Sarah's mother adds additional themes to the novel, including love, loss, and forgiveness, in several different contexts. At the risk of

revealing too much, I will keep my comments on this portion to a minimum. However, it is worth noting that this was astutely written and very well integrated with the storyline and underlying themes. In my opinion, it contributed significantly to the lure of the novel.

Not as gripping as *Still Alice*, *Left Neglected* still had many poignant moments that encouraged readers to find joy in the simple pleasures of life. However, Sarah's struggles and annoyances became repetitive near the end and I occasionally felt like I was re-reading a section of the novel. Overall, *Left Neglected* is an impressive reflection of the fragility and transparency of life and the resilience of the human spirit.

*I smile, loving him for changing with me, for
going where my Neglect has taken us, for getting
the new me. Because while I still hope for a full
recovery, I've learned that my life can be fully
lived with less.*

Guysborough Antigonish Strait Health Authority

"Working Together For a Healthy Community"



Guysborough Antigonish Strait Health Authority serves a population of over 44,000 residents in Antigonish, Guysborough, Inverness and Richmond counties in picturesque Nova Scotia.

Our District includes five healthcare facilities in Antigonish, Canso, Guysborough, Evanston and Sherbrooke. We also have services relating to Primary Health Care, Continuing Care, Addiction Services, Mental Health and Public Health. GASHA is home to St. Francis Xavier University, a campus of the Nova Scotia Community College and has the first accredited District Trauma Centre in Nova Scotia.

Living and working in rural Nova Scotia comes with many benefits. Smaller communities mean closer relationships with fellow physicians, staff and local residents while still maintaining close proximity to the major centres within the Province.

GASHA offers a competitive recruitment package and provincial incentives for physicians. We invite you to come and check out our lifestyle; you will not be disappointed.

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