

# Book review on as we are now by may sarton and still alice by lisa genova

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## **As We Are Now by May Sarton**

The novel *As We Are Now* by May Sarton is about Caroline Spencer a 76 year old woman who is a retired school teacher. The novel revolves around the realities of aging and death. Caro, as she is referred to in the novel, suffers a heart attack and is therefore deposited in a nursing home known as Twin Elms located in rural England. Caro is need of short term care, however, this translates to long term care and she is forced to stay in the nursing home for a considerably longer period of time than was supposed to be. The nursing home is under staffed; the health conditions are of a low standard. Caro is able to survive in the nursing home by keeping a diary where she records the daily occurrences. She puts efforts to try and forward complains in relation to the conditions in the nursing home. The reception of her grievances is received negatively because she is cruelly treated by the head of the nursing home. She faces a lot of cruelty from the head nurse and this is what makes her to set the nursing home on fire killing herself and other patients as well.

This novel has several imperative themes that have major impact on the society and the world at large. The novel shows how aging is entangled with a lot of challenges. Caro is placed in a long term care in the nursing home which she does not need. This gives the implication that relatives and friends disown a person when approaching the aging stage of life. This is basically what happens in the society and Sarton has been quite thorough in addressing the issue. In the current society, the aged will be put in confined

places as if they were not part of the society. Programs to cater for the rights of the aged should be set up to cater for the challenges they face.

Once placed in the Twin Elms nursing home, Caro faces a lot of cruelty from the head nurse. She is so frustrated because her efforts to improve the conditions in the nursing are not seen. This is what happens in the society, once the aged are deposited in the nursing homes, it is not guaranteed that they will receive the best care possible. On the contrary, the aged in the nursing homes face worse conditions than what they could have experienced if left to stay in close proximity to the society. The problems that Caro faces while at the nursing are a good reflection of what happens in the society. The problems have become prevalent and efforts to address them have proven futile. Sarton has highlighted these problems from the experiences of Caro in the nursing home.

Frustrations in life can result to outcomes that may have adverse effects to the society. Sarton gives the case of Caro as a perfect example of a person who causes the death of many people including herself as a way of overcoming the frustrations she has in life. These occurrences can be reflected back to the society where people will tend to find ways through which they can let out their frustrations. Aged people who are frustrated in the society may be involved in actions in the society that may not be ethically right such as taking away lives just as Caro does. These actions develop as means of airing out their grievances to the society in a way that would alert the society of their needs to be loved and be socially accepted (Dass 2001). The outcomes of actions from such people may be displeasing

but it is up to the society to take care of its people especially the aged, to counter the occurrence of such situations.

As people age in the society, nursing homes should not be the first priority for them. The nursing homes may be the worst that could happen for these people. From the case of Caro in the novel, the nursing home proves to be a hell that she never knew would become part of her life at old age. Old age is therefore surrounded by many challenges especially loneliness and solitude. Loneliness is the poverty of self; solitude is richness of self (Sarton 1973).

The old people in the society are considered as outcasts and for this reason they are discriminated against. Caro does not require to be in the long term care program in the nursing home but because of her old age, she is deposited into the program by her relatives. Relatives should be the ones on the first lane to take care of the aged but the novel proves otherwise. The situations that arise around the aged life of Caro are a true reflection of what is happening in the society.

Sarton has described the conditions at the Twin Elms nursing home in a very displeasing way. This image is exactly similar to the one in the society where the nursing homes for the aged are in very bad conditions. The picture has been clearly painted where the nursing home had very few staff members and lacked enough equipment. This gives the implication that the needs of the aged in the society have not been fully put into consideration. They have been exposed to living conditions that are inhumane. No one in the society is ready to address the issue and this is what prompts Caro to take the cruel action against herself and those around her. We have to dare to be

ourselves, however frightening or strange that self may prove to be (Sarton 1973). The society should be in a position to address the problem faced by the aged by ensuring that they are provided for the best living conditions not only in the nursing homes but at home as well.

## **Still Alice by Lisa Genova**

*Still Alice* is a book written by Lisa Genova about a 49 year old woman, Alice Howland, a Harvard psychology professor. She has three children and a husband. Her life is good until she is diagnosed with a disease known as Alzheimer. This is a disease of forgetfulness. Alice' perfect life is disrupted. She changes from being a high achieving teacher, wife and mother to a confused, disoriented person. This disease takes toll on her thus cannot go on with her career. She is therefore taken to the Harvard Square where she is visited daily for twenty five years.

Lisa Genova's novel highly concentrates on the success of a person in this case Alice during her adulthood. She is a Harvard psychology professor therefore reflecting on her success. This shows that her educational background was one filled with achievements. This is every adult's dream-to achieve and be successful in life. It is quite evident following from Lisa's description that Alice was an achiever. Her adult life is reflected upon by her success in life and also the life that she lives.

At first Alice thinks that the forgetfulness is due to menopause. She is afraid of facing the reality just like any other person would. After achieving and reaching the point that she has, it is hard to accept that she is sick. Her

future is one which entails confusion, disorientation and forgetfulness. For an adult who had that much success and in the end falling sick, not enjoying the fruits of their work is quite unfortunate. She has to agree to the fact that she is sick which appears to be a challenge to her.

The Alzheimer disease leads to Alice losing her job, independence, clarity and contact with the world. During one's adult life this is termed as a catastrophe. Being that she put in all her effort in her studies just to come and be affected by a disease which disrupts her perfect life is despicable. It is frustrating as it appears as though her success is useless. If the disease was due to ageing that would be understandable but being 49 years of age, Alice is still young though not that young.

Normally symptoms like forgetfulness and confusion are displayed by the ageing people. Mostly they experience this in the late 80s onwards. This fact shows that Alice' disease is not due to ageing as she is still young.

## **Conclusion**

The two novels tend to focus on the realities associated to aging in the society. Aging should not be treated as a vice to the society as is the case in Sartre's novel, "As We Are Now". Aging should be considered as part of the human lifecycle and should be therefore be embraced as it approaches.

From the novel, Still Alice by Lisa Genova, the protagonist, Alice, does not want to face the reality of aging. Aging is natural and should hence not be shunned away because it is an aspect of life beyond the life of mankind. Both novels highlight on the major issues concerned with aging and the problems

that arise when people approach old age. Sarton shows the problems that the aged experience. The society should therefore behave in a way that is contrary to the occurrences in the novel.

### **Reference:**

May S. (1973). *As We Are Now*, New York: W. W. Norton Publishers.

Genova L. (2007). *Still Alice*, New York: iUniverse.

Dass R. (2001). *Still Here: Embracing Aging, Changing and Dying*, London: Riverhead Books.