

Essay-still alice by lisa genova

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Alice grew and evolved while everybody else changed. Before reading *Still Alice*, I did not know this is what Alzheimer's patients went through. I had no clue. I thought they were bed ridden and depressed, secluded in a dark room. But, for Alice this was life and while she grew and developed, others around her changed. Her relationships with her family and colleagues changed. Lisa Genova could not have picked a better disease. I think it was a blessing in disguise for Alice. Of course not to say that she should have gotten it.

But, if she had cancer or ALS like what Morrie had in Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Alice would have been a "hero." On the contrary, she was repulsed and repelled by her society and her husband failed to understand her. This made her a stronger woman. She grew because she had dementia. Throughout the book, Genova reiterates that we think of success in terms of career and credentials. I am not impervious to that either. A person who is apparently really advanced in his or her career is deemed successful and the people, who work behind the scenes for example, being a mother, are not.

Of course, Alice had a very successful career at Harvard. But, when she no longer wore "the imaginary blue ribbon", she was no longer worth the respect and attention she used to get. Almost everybody's attitude changed towards her. Alice had recalled them as people who "supported each other through slumps of negative data and grant rejection, through waves of crippling self-doubt, through illness and divorce." Only this illness was any other but Alzheimer's. Not only do some people have this attitude towards the disease, I realized that Alzheimer's patients do not have many resources to begin with.

As a society we have not paid attention to inventing some neat gadgets for patients that will allow them to recall important information for example, the directions to their house or the bathroom they could not find. Plus, she could not even find a support group for herself. Strangely, they had a support group for caregivers but, not for patients. So, she met Mary, Cathy and Dan. They too complained that their reputations had suffered at work. People associate the change in behavior of Alzheimer patients with substance abuse or a result of domestic problems.

Eric Wellman thought like that. Dan, Alice's research student was the only person in her academic circle, who respected her and demonstrated her big finish in career. After all, she was able to inspire him to carry on her work. The changes in her society did not stop at her career. Interestingly, as Alice's disease evolved, her personal relationships did too. John, with whom she had spent her entire life, grew further from her. His fiddling with the wedding ring in the doctor's office showed his weakness of faith in their marriage after Alice was diagnosed.

The fact that he could not see her change when she had learned to be less stubborn about what she gets from Jerri's was a sign that he wanted to live with and missed the old Alice. I think he had cried more times than anybody else in her family. It was hardest for him to cope with her illness. Perhaps because he was too dependent on her—the moment when he could not find his glasses, he needed Alice as Genova beautifully elaborated in the first paragraph. But, if Alice, the master of recalling things, were to lose that quality, how was he to function in that marriage? This was ironic.

As John grew apart from her, I think the void was filled by Lydia—the child Alice knew the least. Where John reckoned with her mental capabilities and loved her for that, Lydia connected with her mother's renewed emotional intelligence. That's why I think she decided to join college after Alice had brought up the subject again. After all, she could trust her mother now. But, I was surprised when Lydia refused to get tested for the disease. I think there are pros and cons of knowing. I would want to know. So, that I can get my act together and accomplish what I need to before I am no longer able to.

It is like what Morrie said: everybody knows they are going to die but, nobody believes it. I would want to at least know that I may get Alzheimer's and get used to the fact before it is too late. Even though Alice knew her other children more, they played a little role in her life after her diagnosis. I think since Anna was diagnosed with the mutated gene, she was more careful and empathetic towards her mother but I did not like her attitude. She was more concerned about herself than Alice. Tom sparingly showed up. I wonder why Genova kept him out of the picture most of the time. May be because he was busy studying and because he was a guy.

And Alice's progression was mainly emotional. So, knowing myself and a little bit about both genders, I think that emotions are mainly a female department. Alice's role had metamorphosed from a scholar to a mother. And the fastest growth of motherhood was shown through communication via emotions between a mother and a daughter. For example, in the last paragraph Lydia asked her mother to relay her feelings after witnessing Lydia's acting and Alice successfully communicated in just a few words. Alice

connected beautifully with the language of emotions at a time when language, which made up her whole career, began to part with her.

She frequently remembered her mother and sister. I wonder if it was Alzheimer's or she needed comfort in remembering her family more. Similarly, the butterfly necklace became more important to her. It was a memory of her mother but, also signified a butterfly's short but, beautiful life. I think Alice related to the story and so did I. But, it was intriguing when she had called on to God whom she had never called on to. In times of need I also feel the urge to be more spiritual. This reminded me of Morrie, who admitted that he talked to God for the first time during the later stages of his illness.

Also, Alice felt the need to visit her family's graves. Reminds me of a time when I went to visit a cemetery with my friend. I had a hard time trying to think about mortality like Alice. She was not concentrating on death in the cemetery. She was thinking about John and their relationship. All in all, Genova did a great job of giving us a picture of what an Alzheimer's patient may go through. She pointed out Alice's inner thoughts and feelings and how she had matured in so many ways while keeping her personality intact. Like before, she used cognitive exercises to remember items.

She was smart about the use of her blackberry and coming up with ideas to test her memory. She kept herself in an excellent physical condition. Which makes me want to get up and exercise every morning before I become senile. She also had a brilliant career and a family. Therefore, her initial decision to commit suicide came as a surprise. I think her family would not have approved of it. But overall, I think Alice grew in the process and others

reacted accordingly. For instance, Lydia saw past the disease while John and Alice's colleagues only saw what was shown to them.

Therefore, I do not think Genova did justice to what other people might be feeling and thinking. Especially, I would have liked to read about John's perspective. Ironically, even when Dr. Davis had initially said that Alice's accounts may not be too reliable, Genova kept the story going from Alice's point of view. This made me biased towards Alice while not having a clear idea of what John and other people may have been going through. But at least, now I have a better understanding of Alzheimer's and its manifestations.