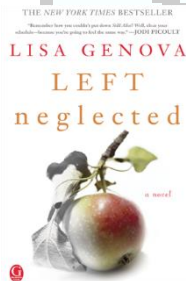




## Fr. Michael Goetz Library Learning Commons Teacher's Book Review



### *Left Neglected*, Lisa Genova Reviewed by Ms. Cosgrove, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

The function of the human brain continues to be a source of endless fascination to the scientific community and to writers of fiction. A few years ago, this week's author introduced readers around the world to a Harvard professor who learns that she has Alzheimer's Disease, in her very well received novel entitled *Still Alice*. This year she introduces us to her new protagonist, a working mother in the corporate culture whose life takes an abrupt shift when she is injured in an accident and must learn to see the world in a whole new way. Like *Still Alice*, this work of fiction introduces the reader to new research about just how the human brain works.

The book is as much about our culture of over-scheduling and stress management as it is about the medical condition faced by the protagonist, Sarah Nickerson, the mother of three small children who for too long has been attempting to balance her needs and the needs of her family with the ever growing demands of her job. Readers, despite their age group, might see a reflection of themselves in this woman who pushes herself beyond her limits to acquire materialistic things and a social status which in the end have little value. Learning how to perceive her world in a whole new way, to compensate for her injury, forces Sarah to reexamine her priorities and reestablish a life plan that places more value on a moment to moment mindfulness, rather than a race to fill every minute with some sort of accomplishment.

The book builds to its climax very slowly, while the reader gets to know Sarah, her husband and children as they speed through each day attempting to find time for each other. While racing to work one day, she attempts to use her cell phone and loses control of her car. Remarkably, she survives the accident, despite severe injury to her brain. Sarah is left with a condition known as Left Neglect. As a result of the trauma to the right side of her brain, nothing on the left side of her body or visual field exists. Sarah is left not seeing anything in her left field of vision and does not even believe that her left arm and leg belong to her. It is not the same as being

paralyzed, in that she is physically capable of seeing and moving these limbs. Through therapy she has to be trained to send messages to the brain to acknowledge this side of the body that it wants to ignore. The book chronicles her journey in reclaiming her life.

Novels that celebrate the human capacity to, in the words of William Faulkner, “endure and prevail” have the capacity to not only help readers realign their perspective in life, but to inspire as well. This book accomplishes just that.

