



Understanding Illness & Health Care

Gere BooksTalk – March 18, 2019

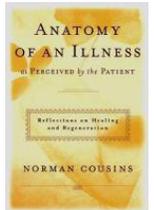
Kit Keller, volunteer presenter

From WebMD:

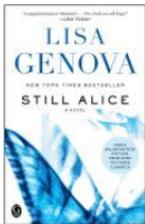
“When you laugh, chemicals called endorphins flow through your brain. They not only lift your spirits but they also help your body ward off illness and help ease pain. So go ahead...giggle your way to better health!”

Norman Cousins – [*Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient: Reflections on Healing and Regeneration*](#) (1979) [613 Cou]

When diagnosed with a debilitating disease, Norman Cousins, in league with his physician, explored using laughter as an effective treatment.



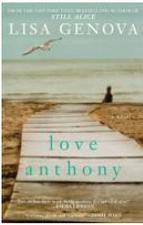
Lisa Genova – author and research neuroscientist. She puts her neuroscience expertise to work as she brings various conditions to life and helps us see the personal impact these have on day-to-day life.



[*Still Alice*](#) (2009) – Alice Howland is a Harvard professor; she has a successful husband and three grown children. When Alice begins to grow forgetful, at first she just dismisses it, but when she gets lost in her own neighborhood she realizes that something is terribly wrong. Alice finds herself in the rapid downward spiral of Alzheimer’s Disease. She is only 50 years old.



[*Left Neglected*](#) (2011) – Sarah Nickerson is like any other career-driven supermom in Welmont, the affluent Boston suburb where she leads a charmed life with her husband Bob, a faithful nanny, and three children – Lucy, Charlie and nine-month-old Linus. In the blink of an eye, all the rapidly-moving parts of her jam-packed life come to a screeching halt. A traumatic brain injury completely erases the left side of her world, and for once, Sarah relinquishes control to those around her, including her formerly absent mother.

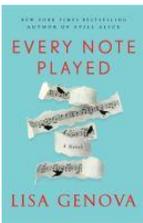


Love Anthony (2013) – The medical issue of this book is autism. Olivia Donatello’s dream of a ‘normal’ life shatter when her son, Anthony, was diagnosed with autism at age three. Understanding the world from his perspective felt bewildering, nearly impossible. He didn’t speak. He hated to be touched. He almost never made eye contact. And just as she started to realize that happiness and autism could co-exist, Anthony died.



Inside the O'Briens (2015) – Huntington’s Disease is at the center of this book. Jo O’Brien is 44 years old when he gets his diagnosis. Huntington’s is a lethal neurodegenerative disease with no treatment and no cure. Each of Jo’s four children has a 50% chance of inheriting their father’s disease, and a simple blood test can determine their genetic fate.

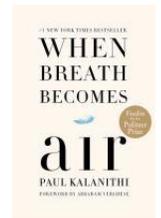
While watching her potential future in her father’s escalating symptoms, twenty-one-year-old Katie struggles with the questions this test imposes on her young adult life. Does she want to know? What if she’s gene positive? Can she live with the constant anxiety of not knowing. We watch the family members work through answering these questions.



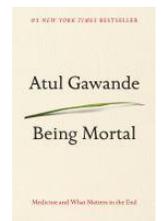
Every Note Played (2018) – The protagonist of this story is a world-renowned pianist. Every finger of his hands was a finely calibrated instrument, dancing across the keys and sticking each note with exacting precision. That was eight months ago. Richard now has ALS, and his entire right arm is paralyzed. His fingers are impotent, still, devoid of possibility. The loss of his hand feels like a death, a loss of true love, a divorce – his

divorce. He knows his left arm will go next.

Paul Kalanithi, M.D., When Breath Becomes Air (2016) [Biography Kalanithi] – This book is both beautifully written and heartbreaking. The memoir of Paul Kalanithi, a neurosurgeon at Stanford University, who is diagnosed with terminal lung cancer in his mid-thirties. Kalanithi uses the pages within his book to not only tell his story, but also share his ideas on how to approach death with grace and what it means to be fully alive. And the writing is beautiful – thoughtful and elegant.



Atul Gawande, M.D., Being Mortal (2014) [362.175 Gaw] – Dr. Gawande explores how the medical field handles the dying process. Medicine has triumphed in modern times, transforming the dangers of childbirth, injury and disease from harrowing to manageable. But when it comes to the inescapable realities of aging and death, what medicine can do often runs counter to what it should. This book examines the ultimate limitations and failures of the medical profession – in its own practices as well as others – as life draws to a close. And he discovers how we can do better.



Susannah Kaysen, Girl Interrupted (1994) [616.89 Kay] – This book explores how someone with Borderline Personality is exhibited. The author agreed to enter a psychiatric hospital, expecting to be there a few weeks. Instead, she is there for two years, after being committed based on a 20-minute interview.

