

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

INSTRUCTIONS FOR HOST

BEFORE YOUR DISCUSSION

- Email an invitation to your book group members
- The Following bookstores are offering 10% off the purchase of this book:
 - *King's English Bookshop in Salt Lake City*
- **The Gerda That Remains** (56 min) is available to stream at pbsutah.org/gerda
- Join the Facebook Group "Book Club in a Box Discussion Group" to find ideas, helpful links, etc.
- During your discussion:
 - Make PBS Utah materials in the box available to the group
 - Show clips from the film
 - Take photos to share with PBS Utah and Facebook group

AFTER YOUR DISCUSSION

- Please have members fill out feedback forms and mail back to PBS Utah
- Share your photos and ideas with others on the Facebook Group
- Invite your book club members to join the Facebook Group via email
- Complete host survey
(Link will be emailed to you after your discussion)

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GET INVOLVED!

You chose this box because you are interested in these stories and issues. Learn more by visiting these organizations:

- **Gerda's Blog**
gerdasaunders.com
- **Alzheimer's Association of Utah**
alz.org/Utah
- **Healthy Aging**
daas.utah.gov
- **Memory Matters**
memorymattersutah.org

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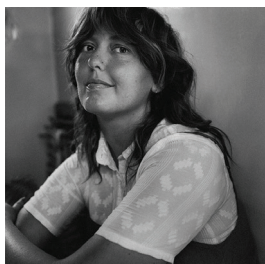
FILM SYNOPSIS



THE GERDA THAT REMAINS

Author and academic Gerda Saunders was diagnosed with cerebral microvascular disease, a precursor of dementia, and has been living with the disease for over a decade. She embarks on a journey of self-discovery and inquiry as the effects of the illness begin to unravel her identity. Born and raised in South Africa during the early years of apartheid, Gerda was shaped by her academic experiences and questioning nature. Her childhood academic success carried over into a career of writing and teaching math, science, English, and gender studies.

But at the prime of her life's work, Gerda's brain began to fail her. Her degenerative brain became a new space for study from a scientific and personal perspective. "Every time my brain suffers an additional insult, I have less brain power to puzzle out my remaining self," Gerda says. Filmed over the course of six years, **The Gerda That Remains** moves through Gerda's changing realities with intimacy and honesty in front of the camera. Observational footage draws us into her psychological experience as she navigates the loss of certain parts of her intellectual identity in real time. While her verbal skills remain strong, she articulates her experience of dementia with groundbreaking nuance, poetry, and vulnerability — and as she does so, we see the toll it takes on her over the years.



KELSIE MOORE Director

Kelsie is an Australian/American documentary director, cinematographer and editor. Her films explore themes of identity and belonging as she challenges her own perceptions of people, place and home. As a consistent contributor at NPR Utah's RadioWest Films, she has produced many character-driven stories from the American West, winning her a number of awards from the Public Media Journalists Association. Her feature debut, *The Gerda That Remains*, aired on PBS Utah in February 2022. Her work has been seen on PBS, Frontline, The Atlantic Selects, Short of the Week, NPR, NPR's Science Friday, NPR Utah, Slate and film festivals around the world.



SALLY SHAUM Producer

Sally is a Producer/Director whose career at PBS Utah spans three decades. She is drawn to stories about social justice and the underserved, with an emphasis on creating empathy, compassion, and understanding.

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BOOK SYNOPSIS



TURN OF MIND

A New York Times bestseller, *Turn of Mind* is a thriller about a retired orthopedic surgeon suffering from dementia and accused of killing her best friend. With unmatched patience and a pulsating intensity, Alice LaPlante's debut novel brings us deep into a brilliant woman's deteriorating mind, where the impossibility of recognizing reality can be both a blessing and a curse.

Told in White's own voice, fractured and eloquent, a picture emerges of the surprisingly intimate, complex alliance between these life-long friends—two proud, forceful women who were at times each other's most formidable adversaries. As the investigation into the murder deepens and White's relationships with her live-in caretaker and two grown children intensify, a chilling question lingers: is White's shattered memory preventing her from revealing the truth or helping her hide it?

A startling portrait of a disintegrating mind clinging to reality through anger, frustration, shame, and unspeakable loss, *Turn of Mind* examines the deception and frailty of memory and how it defines our very existence.



Alice LaPlante Author

Alice LaPlante is an award-winning writer, editor, and teacher of writing, both fiction and nonfiction. A Wallace Stegner Fellow and Jones Lecturer at Stanford University, Alice taught creative writing at both Stanford and in San Francisco State's MFA program for more than 20 years. A *NY Times* bestselling author, Alice has published four novels and five non-fiction books, as well as edited best-selling books for many other writers of fiction and nonfiction. She regularly consults with Silicon Valley firms such as Google, Salesforce, HP, and Cisco on their content marketing strategies. Alice lives with her family in Palo Alto, California, and Mallorca, Spain.

- 1) Alice LaPlante's novel *Turn of Mind* is told from the point of view of Jennifer, who is a retired surgeon and a woman with dementia. How is the story told, and how does the structure and style of the story reflect Jennifer's experience of dementia?

Jennifer writes in her journal, while Gerda, the subject of the **The Gerda That Remains**, keeps a blog called "Living with my Dementia." What might the value be of writing through one's experience of dementia, and what difficulties might these writers encounter? How do our expectations or experiences of stories change when the storyteller has dementia?

- 2) *Turn of Mind* includes a murder mystery. Other mysteries are revealed and explained over the course of the book, regarding the finances of Jennifer and her husband James and the parentage of Jennifer and James' daughter, Fiona. As someone with dementia, Jennifer also becomes the target of confessions and unburdening of secrets by Detective Luton, Magdalena, and Fiona.

What messages about friendship, family, identity, and human nature come out of the unfolding of these mysteries? Why are these hidden stories of crimes and harms included in this book about dementia? What action does Jennifer take at the heart of the book's murder mystery in relation to her friend Amanda? Is this an act of cruelty, love, redemption, or something else?

- 3) Both *Turn of Mind* and **The Gerda That Remains** depict women who had accomplished careers, excelling in difficult intellectual and professional fields, and defining themselves by their "life of the mind" and their skills. For Jennifer, in surgery/medicine and mathematics and for Gerda, literary creation. How does the advancement of dementia change these women's experiences (and sense of self) as professionals? Both women are also mothers. How does their dementia change their experiences as mothers?

- 4) In **The Gerda That Remains**, we see Gerda engaged in routine daily tasks: a phone call to a health provider, going on walks, visiting a medical professional, dressing for the day. In *Turn of Mind*, Jennifer takes a walk to the store (in the rain), eats a meal at a restaurant, spends time in a park, and mistakenly returns to work at a place where she used to volunteer her medical expertise. During these activities, what aspects of the world prove hostile or inaccessible and which prove supportive? How do other people's expectations/behaviors, interpersonal norms, or social systems make life more difficult — or more welcoming — for those with dementia?

- 5) Both *Turn of Mind* and **The Gerda That Remains** focus, at times, on what kinds of things or activities provide pleasure or enjoyment. What things give Jennifer pleasure, and how does her dementia affect her ability to find pleasure? What pleasures persist, even during her experience of dementia? What things or activities give Gerda pleasure, and how does her access to these activities change or persist during her experience of dementia?

- 6) *Turn of Mind* depicts Jennifer's institutionalization, in contrast with **The Gerda That Remains**, which shows that Gerda's family network, and particularly the assistance of her husband, have kept her at home and out of institutions. What perceptions of institutionalization are provided by *Turn of Mind*? What alternatives might there be to such institutionalization, when family members are not able to provide the kind of support that Gerda receives? Jennifer has a great deal of wealth, while Gerda and her family have enough financial stability that they can remain comfortably housed and access health care. What differences might there be in people's experiences of dementia when they lack this kind of economic wellbeing?

- 7) Gerda discusses her plan to end her life at a certain point. She uses a set of criteria to help guide this decision, for instance, having Peter ask her if she remembers the names of friends and family, if she

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communicates well enough to make her intentions known, if she is rational in her decisions, and if she wakes up most days feeling joyful and excited about her new day (37:48-40:18). Gerda expresses fear of losing control, recognizing that she is not always rational, and worrying about reaching a point where she will not be able to recognize family members or will be “mean” to them. Jennifer, meanwhile, experiences many of these changes, having difficulty recognizing her son and daughter, sometimes lashing out at those around her, wandering off and getting lost.

Understanding that everyone will have differing views on this complex and fraught topic of euthanasia or assisted suicide, how do we approach the question of determining what a worthwhile life looks like for ourselves? What kinds of biases shape our assumptions about what is or is not a good life — for

ourselves or others? How do we value personal choice and autonomy while allowing for changing modes of being?

- 8) Using these texts as touchstones, how might we imagine a positive future for people with dementia and their loved ones? Gerda comments: “As your own trust in your intellect diminishes or fades away, I slip into modes of being where the love that flows in more than makes up for the intellect that I’ve lost. I just succumb to it and think, ‘Here I am,’ and the love just flows in and kind of holds me in this space” (29:28-30:00). What kind of economic supports, physical spaces, and friend/family/communal relationships are required to support people with dementia, providing a sense of enjoyment and meaning in their lives, while also sustaining their loved ones and caregivers?



ANGELA MARIE SMITH

Angela Marie Smith is a friend of Gerda Saunders and her former colleague at the University of Utah. She is an Associate Professor of English and Gender Studies and director of Disability Studies. Her research examines the dynamics of disability in cinema, television, and online media. She is the author of *Hideous Progeny: Disability, Eugenics, and Classic Horror Cinema* (2011) and has published in the journals *Literature and Medicine*, *Post Script*, and *Antipodes* and in the edited collections *The Matter of Disability* (2019), *Monsters: A Companion* (2020), and *Embodying Contagion* (2021).



PASTA POMODORO

Recipe courtesy of Fresh Tastes on PBS Food.

In *Turn of Mind*, Jennifer escapes from her care home, goes into a restaurant and enjoys this dish from the menu. Find out how this easy pasta is often the most poorly done and enjoy this recipe for a sure-fire win.

INGREDIENTS

12-16 ounces pasta, boiled according to package direction
3 tablespoons olive oil
6 medium cloves of garlic smashed and roughly chopped
4 large vine ripened tomatoes, peeled and chopped
1-2 teaspoons salt
basil leaves, julienned

INSTRUCTIONS

1. The sauce should take about 5 minutes to cook, so time your pasta accordingly. Use the boiling water for the pasta to parboil the tomatoes for about 30 seconds to make them easy to peel.
2. Add the oil and garlic to a large frying pan and heat over high heat. Fry until the garlic is fragrant, but don't let it brown.
3. Add the tomatoes and sauté until the liquid left in the pan isn't watery anymore.
4. Add salt to taste.
5. When the pasta is done, drain and add to the frying pan along with the basil.
6. Toss to coat, top with parmesan (if desired).



SOUTH AFRICAN ROLY POLY BAKED DESSERT

“From a South African cook book, but translated and adapted by our family through the years.

It’s a calorie bomb, but what good is it to have a sugar-free, butter-free dessert! And then there’s the whipped cream on top...” — Gerda Saunders

INGREDIENTS

5 cups flour (500 ml)
7 1/2 teaspoons baking powder (15 ml)
1 teaspoon salt
4 sticks butter (22 oz)
5 eggs, beaten
milk, a few tablespoons, see instructions
2 teaspoons vanilla
apricot jam

Sauce:

4 1/2 cups boiling water (375 ml)
2 1/2 cups sugar (250 ml)
5 tablespoons butter (30 ml)
2-3 teaspoons vanilla

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350° F/180° C.
2. Grease a 13 x 9 1/2” oven-safe dish.
3. Mix the flour, baking powder and salt, and rub in the butter. (Can be done in a food processor.)
4. Add the beaten eggs, and then add just enough milk, tablespoon by tablespoon, to make a fairly firm dough.
5. Roll the dough into a out thinly into a rectangle on a surface sprinkled with flour.
5. Spread the dough with apricot jam.
6. From one of the long sides, roll your dough up like a swiss roll.
7. Cut the roll into 1” long slices using a serrated knife. The jam WILL ooze out.
8. Pack the slices, cut sides up, closely together in the greased dish. Scoop any lost jam on top of the rolls.
9. In a pot, mix the boiling water, sugar, butter and vanilla, and stir until sugar dissolves.
10. Ladle some of the sauce evenly over the slices. (Do not use all of the sauce — keep 1 1/2 - 2 cups.)
11. Bake for 40-45 minutes.
12. Carefully pour the extra sauce over the center of your baked dessert. (Use as much or as little of the sauce as you’d like.)
13. Serve hot with custard, ice cream, or sweetened whipped cream.