

Review

film: *Still Alice*

You are more than what you can remember [and] you are more than what you do for a living.' So says Lisa Genova, the author of the book on which this film is based. *Still Alice* was inspired by Genova's recollection of her grandmother's experience of Alzheimer's. She wanted to depict what it might feel like to look in the mirror, and not be certain of who you see; to work so hard to build a successful career and make fruitful relationships, but have them torn away from you as your memory fades.

Still Alice tells a heartbreaking story about the brilliant Professor Alice Howland, who lectures on Linguistics at Columbia University. After experiencing worrying symptoms of memory loss aged 50, Alice is diagnosed with the rare and rapidly progressing Familial Early Onset Alzheimer's Disease. The condition worsens month by month until Alice struggles to remember her children, has to give up her career, and relationships within her family become strained.

One scene in the movie was particularly heartrending. Alice watches a video she prerecorded for herself in the past, which tells her how to commit suicide once she's no longer able to cope with the memories she's lost. As she tries to follow the instructions, she inadvertently forgets



the steps to take, and has to watch the video again and again before she finally gets interrupted mid-attempt, and spills the lethal pills all over the bathroom floor. In that moment, I felt so sad to see the angst Alice felt being fed up with living as the shadow of her former self.

So, what can we learn from all this? As medics, we are certainly at risk of making our careers what drives us most in life. The desire to achieve excellence in the medical profession is a wonderful one, but if my identity is my career, what will be left of me when I can no longer work? Alice's story reminded me that I must live my life for so much more. We have no idea what will happen tomorrow, and this life really is just vapour that will vanish away.¹ However, the joy of the Christian faith is that I can live with the knowledge of the hope I have in Christ: his return will restore all things to perfection, including our broken bodies and minds. ■

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