



Why She Left Us

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It was the summer of 1985, and she was young and inexperienced, but longing to love and to be loved in return, when he entered her life.

At the same time, while she was desperately seeking the love and approval of a mother who never wanted her in the first place, events totally beyond her control claimed her as their victim, leaving those she left behind unable to cope with the enormity of her absence.

"WHY SHE LEFT US" is written as a series of diary entries, the events seen through the eyes of several different people.

But at its center is a love story chronicling a romance that transforms the lives of two people who, for too brief a period of time, experienced the greatest happiness they had ever known.

Why She Left Us Details

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From Reader Review Why She Left Us for online ebook

Jenna says

2.5/5 stars

I was provided a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

The summer of 1985 proves to be the disastrous undoing of a whole family in David Dennis' Why She Left Us. The book is written in a series of diary or journal entries authored by five main characters - three sisters, their aunt, and the boy loved by one of the sisters.

The characters each date their journal entries and, if you aren't paying attention to the dates, it's very easy to get very confused right from the start! Each of the narrators tells the story in his or her own voice with his or her own biases and slants. The only "true narrator" seems to be eldest sister Betsy, whose entries are in chronological order, while the others are at a date after The Event.

It's a little tricky to write about the main plot of the book because, trying to unfold just what happened and how each of the characters are involved is one of the strengths of Why She Left Us. The unfolding mystery of The Event that all of the narrators are referring to - and that Betsy is building up to - is probably what I liked best about the book; it kept me turning the pages to find out just what, exactly, happened and who did what when.

I say that Betsy seems to be the only "true" narrator because her voice and perspective, to me, were the most honest. Good or bad, self-deprecating or full of praise, she kind of simply laid out the events of the day as they happened. The other characters, with perhaps the exception of Aunt Lucille, tell such pieces of the story that are heavily marred by their personalities that it's hard to trust the information they provide.

David Dennis gives each narrator a distinct voice, which is quite the accomplishment. Many authors struggle to utilize such distinctness in the varied voices of their narrators. And the story is quite heartbreaking . . . and yet, it's also disturbingly dysfunctional. At times the voice of Betsy seems too odd and out of place to maintain belief, but I liked Betsy. I rooted for her and was rather sad when The Event came to the climax.

Why She Left Us is an interesting read. A puzzle and a romance of sorts, with a moral reminiscent of "It's a Wonderful Life."

Camie says

Why She Left Us by David Dennis was a repetitive series of diary entries leading up to and following the destruction of a very dysfunctional family. The five characters' diary entries alternate throughout the novel (I liked this part.); however, the characters frequently told the same information in the same order without any new details or character revelations. In addition, I didn't much like any of the characters in the story. All of them had their faults which makes them human, I know, but the group just didn't go together in a realistic way, making it hard for me to feel much more than annoyance for many of them. The three sisters were SO dramatically different and the oldest sister's character doesn't act in accordance with the way she is presented. I'm afraid more details/specifics would include spoilers.

T.E. Ridener says

Oh my lord, I wish I had adequate words to describe what this book has done to my emotions and my heart. I can't find the words, and it is with trembling fingers that I even attempt to review it while it is so fresh in my head.

I admit, I was most interested in reading this book because it took place in 1985-the year I was born. With that said, moving on....

When you start this book, you immediately connect with Monica. She sucks you into the book on the first page and after that, well, good luck to you. I was completely enamored with this book. I had to keep reading. I had to know what happened next, and for the love of all that is holy, I don't know if I'm going to recover.

People are always talking about how books like "The Fault in Our Stars", etc mess with their feels. Well, just let me warn you now, Why She Left Us will do about 278% more damage to your heart, but it's worth it. It's a tremendous read. I was engaged with this book the entire time, and I felt that I knew the characters by the time I was finished. I hated a few of them quite a bit, but I really loved some of them, too and my heart weeps for them.

This book is told from five different points of view, it's not as confusing as you'd think if you only took the time to pay attention to who begins each chapter and what time frame it happens in. I rarely feel the need to smack writers for what they do to their characters..but I want to smack David. NO OFFENSE. I'd not really do it...but lord have mercy, Man. I want to wrap Betsy, Monica, and Wayne up in my arms and keep them there forever and ever. Shame on you for messing with my feelings in such a way! But bravo on writing such a brilliant story. I give Why She Left Us 5 stars.

Amy says

This one was really good but it hurt, my friends.

Of course I recommend it. ;)

Evan Bollinger says

How often can a story, a tragedy, a tale of the darkest valleys and warmest peaks, be expressed so uniquely? The series of diary entries require a level of commitment to story and character, but this commitment is certainly merited. Other reviews will expound upon the various struggles of the family and the sisters, how interludes of pain and pleasure are never as cookie-cutter as we would love to believe. However, what I find most impressive in this epistolary novel is the way the stories are interwoven. You have to follow the crumbs and nothing is ever revealed too hastily or too melodramatically (a pitfall of many works that touch on tragic families). Even more, Why She Left Us is a sound meditation on love. From the 'piercing eyes' of one man to the Byronic qualities of another, the author seems quite adept at chronicling how love can bring us to our knees in both reverence and resignation. Furthermore, the psychic distance of the epistolary approach allows the reader a sort of fly-on-the-wall perspective, one that delivers a level of 'realness' that is quite refreshing. All in all, this novel is complex and rewarding, the type of puzzle you want to figure out, but that you have no problem savoring along the way. Kudos!

Karen Perkins says

Told through the diary and memoirs of five narrators, *Why She Left Us* is a darkly chilling tale of wasted life, exploring the psychology of the book's events and their effects on the survivors as well as the different ways people deceive themselves as well as others.

The narrators' voices are powerful and unique as they recount the events leading up to a number of family tragedies: Monica – despairing, depressed and suicidal, though unrepentant despite being locked in a hospital for the criminally insane. Ellen – bitter and full of rage, confined to a wheelchair. Betsy – beautiful, overeager, overkind, overgenerous, with very little self-esteem, desperate to be loved. Aunt Lucille, world-weary and worried, trying to hold together the remnants of her family and Carl – egotistical and twisted to the point of narcissism. A weak man trying to convince himself and the world that he is strong. There is one more main character, Wayne, who deals with grief and loss through silence, and so his voice is missing – which in itself makes a loud statement.

Despite having five narrators, it is very easy to follow each of their characters and timelines as they slowly build a picture of tragedy from separate points of view. Although, as you get further into the book, tragedy is not an adequate word to encompass the events that have had such an extreme effect on so many lives, and we are left guessing as to the true horror until the very end.

It isn't all chills and thrills, though, there are tender moments, romantic interludes and glimpses of hope amongst the secrets and betrayals, A gripping read.

Ronald Fischman says

It is difficult to write the Great American Novel. F. Scott Fitzgerald did a good job with *The Great Gatsby*, but that novel is in its dotage, requiring extensive sociology to appreciate fully. Jonathan Franzen engages society in the 21st century with brilliance and aplomb in *Freedom*, (<http://www.facebook.com/notes/ronald-...> for my review in free verse) but derogates his working-class characters to the extent where they beat up or murder the members of the middle class. John Steinbeck is of a different era in *The Grapes of Wrath*, and therefore his formula of opening each chapter with something like a sermon feels like an anachronism, but at least his treatment of the working poor is ennobling, even though haunting. Now comes David D'Aguanno, writing under the pseudonym of David Dennis, with his entry into the fray, *Why She Left Us*.

The central family is headed by a mother, Jean, who seems more than anything to be a sex addict, with nondescript employment and a taste for nondescript men. Jean's sister, a forty-year-old spinster, can't get through a diary entry without mentioning how horrid men are because of her one adult relationship that ended badly. Jean's three daughters, Monica, Betsy, and Ellen, are the real story here. At novel's dawn, Monica is in an asylum, Ellen is in wheelchair, and Betsy, well, that would be a real spoiler if I tell you what she is doing. None of the women have last names, even though the men, Carl Peters (Monica's husband) and Wayne Brown (Senior and Junior, significantly) carry these badges of pedigree. Leave it to the sociologists to put this in its perspective; from my middle-to-working-class background, this rings true even today that women from low socioeconomic status backgrounds might find their identities through the men in their lives.

Each girl struggles to find fulfillment in their own way. Monica wants the ring and the fantasy, marrying

Carl Peters, the Most Popular and Most Likely to Succeed from their high school class. Ellen inherited the propensity for sexual addiction, and Betsy, who writes with literary flair that befits someone whose route to the middle class will come through her apprenticeship at the library, seeks true, holy, passionate love. Though she finds everything she prays for in the arms of illiterate but basically noble Wayne Brown Jr., her outcome is the darkest of all the characters.

D'Aguanno's gift to the literary world is that he dignifies and honors the struggles, travails, and passions of these humble people for whom college attendance would be like completing a marathon for most of us. There is no sermon anywhere in here. Even the most spiteful act is understood; lust is accepted, and when coupled with a rush of spirit, is honored. Only one character shows ill throughout, and that is Carl Peters, who lives in resentment that the world hasn't given him his every whim. Carl shows a horrid dark side, which will allow this book to be used as a study in psychopathy. However, even Carl's malevolence evolves over the course of the book.

Why She Left Us is a dramatic book. I don't envision it on the silver screen, but I can imagine an effective staging of the book as theater. A director would have to manage the parallel timelines between the crucial summer of 1985 and its grim aftermath in 1986. The author crafted the '85 and '86 scenes with absolute precision. At 428 pages, this qualifies on some Goodreads lists as a "big book," and I found that it required work to get through. However, I found the characters accompanying me through my work day, reacting to events in my own life. The absolute surprise at the end wouldn't be enough if the characters weren't so lovingly treated, so don't read this like a whodunit. But if you want to experience real life, with real emotions and a unique take on the eternal question of love, then you should make sure that Why She Left Us is part of your world.

Jana Petken says

If you like stories that don't necessarily have a happy ending, I can safely recommend this one. The characters are all well-defined, and I even got a kick out of one of the "bad guys" because his antics were so over-the-top. There are some dark, powerful scenes here, and an ending that I found quite moving. I was very impressed with this one!

Karl Wiggins says

Why did she leave us anyway?

I think a good way of opening a book – be it title or first line - is to throw a question of some sort in there, leaving us thinking why, how or tell me more, and that carrot is used as an incentive to hook us.

David Dennis does this expertly. Why did she leave us? Who left us? How did she leave us? Did she get the bus? Did she run away screaming? Did she jump off a cliff? Did she elope with another man? You've got to read on to find out.

As I read the book I'd convinced myself I was going to give it a four Star rating, simply because the chronology is so confused. It's an excellent story but it flits from present to past and backwards and forwards again at such an alarming rate that until the reader settles into the rhythm of the book it can be slightly

bewildering.

This in itself may be enough to put off certain readers but my advice is to stick with it.

There's great debate as to whether male authors can write female characters (or vice versa), but for a male author to cruise the emerging battles of the sexes with the skill that Dennis utilises is quite remarkable. Bringing an intricate and puzzling female character to fictional life is daunting enough for a man. Occupying their actual voice is even more so, yet Dennis manages this with not just one female character, but four of them, all completely different.

When a male writes a female you tend to encounter women who are a variation on one or more of four themes; virgin, whore, mother, bitch. Sometimes they begin as one (usually virgin) and progress through the others as characters develop. In this book we have all four.

You've got the patronising, condescending, think-good-of-absolutely-everyone, Betsy. The crippled and brazen slut Ellen. The institutionalised Monica. And the spinster Aunt Lucille. And that's not to mention the fast-and-loose mother, who's the biggest hussy of them all, with all the morals of a hungry pride of lions. I'd like to have read HER diary.

On top of all this we have the two main male characters.

Suffice to say, not everything is as it seems in this story, and why I eventually decided to give it a five Star rating is because of the twist in the tale at the end. I didn't see that coming at all.

Writing a surprise ending with a twist in the plot is fraught with peril. Give the reader too much information and when the rabbit is finally pulled out of the hat, everyone rolls their eyes and says, "I saw that coming right the way through the book."

There are hints, but you don't realise these at the time. David Dennis successfully manages to walk the tightrope of concealment and exposure to create an ending that I promise you won't see coming.

A well deserved five Stars.

Anthony Hulse says

Scenes of beautiful simplicity alternating with those of piercing sadness all add up to a tremendously moving reading experience. This is one that I will never forget!

Janda Revans says

I was so excited for this book because there are so many good reviews. The idea that you are reading about a woman who has killed herself and that you are uncovering the reasons through several different diary and memoir entries was super intriguing. But the idea alone could not save this book in my eyes. About 30 percent in, I was bored with all of the characters. The language style was not fit for the time period (1980s). Phrases like "I daresay" or "would that I could" just made the characters sound like they stepped out of a Jane Austen novel. The ending was the worst in my opinion. I was patient enough to sit through 500 pages of

character whining for a cop out ending made just for shock value. 2 stars because at least I wanted to get to the ending. Honestly, do yourself a favor, read a spoiler, and pass on this one.

Lavinia Urban says

I stepped away from the normal genre I read and decided to read this book. From the outside it looks great and sounds great too. I definitely was not disappointed.

I am so glad that I read this and it is one of the only books where i have wondered how to write the review, because i do not want to give anything away.

This book is so refreshing. I love how the author has done this. Yes the diary entries are from different people at different times but I can understand why it needs to be this way.

You have three sisters Betsy, Monica and Ellen who are all different in their own ways.

Betsy the eldest is quiet and loves nothing more than to help others out and spends her time dreaming about love whilst burying her head in books.

Then there is Monica who is similar in personality to Monica but a bit more out there and has a boyfriend called Carl (who also has diary entrants)

Then we meet Ellen who believes she is the prettiest one. With Ellen it is all about her and all about her putting it out there with the boys. The one day she is involved in a car accident with her best friend and 2 boys resulting in the death of her best friend and putting Ellen in a wheelchair for life.

Betsy is the main person who does everything around the house whilst her mum is out until all hours putting herself about with the men (you can see where Ellen gets it from). She doesnt appreciate Betsy but Betsy prays that one day her mum will take her in her arms and tell Betsy that she loves her and thank her for all the hard work that she does.

Then there is Aunt Lucille, who we also get to read bits of her diary too. She is Jean's (the girls mum) sister and she is the complete opposite to her sister. She is very much a spinster and hates all men after her man left her for another woman 12 years ago.

Then throw in the towns bad boy Wayne who Carl hates and both Ellen and her mum have bedded and you are in for a rollercoaster of a ride.

Now I predicted everything in this book but it did not stop me from crying at the end.

It is truly a beautiful and well written book that I recommend it to everyone.

Mareena says

It was the summer of 1985, and Betsy, as the oldest of three sisters, was still young and inexperienced.

However, she was longing to love someone and to be loved in return, when Wayne entered her life. Quiet, painfully shy, and lacking in proper social skills, he came across as a shady person to others because he was unable to look anyone in the eye. At the same time, while Betsy was desperately seeking the love and approval of a mother who never wanted her in the first place, events totally beyond her control claimed Betsy as their victim.

In the wake of these catastrophic events, those who were left behind are unable to cope with the enormity of her absence. Why She Left Us is written as a series of diary entries, the events seen through the eyes of several different people. But at its center, Why She Left Us by David Dennis is a love story that chronicles a romance that transforms the lives of two people who, for too brief a period of time, experienced the greatest happiness they had ever known.

After experiencing minor trouble getting into the story because of the multiple points of view, as well as the

shifts back and forth in time from the summer of 1985 to the winter of 1986, I really started to enjoy this book. My difficulty with reading the story only lasted for the first couple of chapters or so, and then I got into the style of writing and was completely drawn into the story. I have to say that while reading this book I found exactly three characters to be entirely likable - the rest were characters that I became infuriated with, and wanted to slap or shake some sense into - figuratively, of course - at various points in the story.

Overall, I found this book to be truly haunting and give it an A! Why She Left Us by David Dennis does contain strong language, implied sexual situations and drug usage, and is not for the faint of heart. However, I do recommend this book to others and look forward to reading more from David Dennis in the future.

InD'tale Magazine says

2.5/5.0

“Why She Left Us” is as heartbreaking as Steel Magnolias and Romeo and Juliet but lacks the lingering loveliness.

Full review in April 2013 issue of InD'tale Magazine.

Christoph Fischer says

"Why she left us" by David Dennis on the surface is a compelling tale about three sisters and their muddled love life. Their mother, a amorously restless and seemingly selfish and disinterest woman, and their aunt, unhappy and single, have little influence on them.

Not surprisingly it is two young men who drive the plot forward, and the rivalries over the two and between the two men as well.

On a deeper level the book deals brilliantly with the issues of self worth and the desire to be loved. Told by various separate narratives the book allows great insight into the motifs and the thinking of five characters within the story. Although this had me at times a little confused about the plot, it allows us to feel intensely the pain, confusion and desires of those chosen characters. It also works incredibly well for the unfolding of the story and some of the twists and surprises to come. A lot is implied but not said until much later, keeping suspense and interest at a high rate.

What distinguished this book from coming of age and superficial teenage literature and makes it so precious is the non-stereo-typical characterisation, the clever plotting and the raw insights the author provides into his characters' psyche.

This is an intense and emotional read, one that is hard to forget easily and one that should do well in literary circles.

Sue Scheets says

Not my favorite. I did like the idea of learning the story through diary entries. A lot of repetition of thoughts. I didn't think it was well -written

Rabid Readers Reviews says

You'd think that reading a novel with 5 first person points of view would really get confusing. You'd have to backtrack and keep a chart of who does what. Not so in this novel. Dennis gives us 5 main characters each with a unique writing voice and style. Monica, Betsy, Ellen, Aunt Lucille and Carl all shine with personality and varied life experience. Despite the fact that a majority of the storyline is re-telling, this reader never got bored thinking "been there, done that" because their outlook was so unique that they almost seemed to be separate events.

The first diary entry is written a year after the events and we find Monica in some sort of mental institution. The implication is that she is criminally insane. She tells us that she was once someone happy and that everyone thought would do well in life and someone who was so much in love. From that moment the reader is drawn in. The feeling of the stream of consciousness narrative gives realness in the characters.

It can be said that a male writer would have a challenge writing the inner subtext of not only a woman but also a young girl and Dennis has that down. Not only is he able to write convincing young adults but he also writes his male character with a voice that while introspective and philosophical, like the woman, but seems a complete departure from the way of thinking of the other characters he wrote. Carl is a destroyed man who lives in fear. Dennis shifts from the entry of a suicidal young girl to Carl who tells us:

I'm scared. I'm scared of him, I'm scared of tomorrow and I'm scared of just plain living. (Kindle location 572)

The impact of the writing style, depth of emotions and the complexity of the storyline bring together a tale of love, murder and betrayal that resonates on the page. Love, love, love this novel. Well written, well plotted, engrossing. If you like philosophical and human stories, "Why She Left Us" is the story for you.

Michelle says

Why She Left Us by David Dennis is a meandering mystery. It's a composite of the baseness of human nature--and also its virtues. The story of the star-crossed lovers, Betsy and Wayne, is told discontinuously by 5 narrators and in the form of diary entries. This unique narrative method requires attention be paid to who's diary you are reading and to the date of each entry, but this minimal effort is worth it.

I don't want to give away too much of the story since that's the meat of this psychological chiller, so I'll just say as a love story and psychological twister, it works; it's sweet, disturbing and plausible. The cast of characters in this ill-fated love story are: Lucille, the bitter divorced aunt; Ellen, a borderline sociopath; Monica, high achieving and mentally unstable; Carl, Monica's pompous jackass of a husband; and Betsy, a tenderhearted naif searching for love and worth. With so many perspectives, we can never be sure whose versions of events are genuine--everyone has their own motives and baggage.

The writing was flawless and that leads me to my only criticism--it was a little too well written for diary entries, especially for the diary of a 16-year-old girl.

Why She Left Us will knot your stomach with the tale of these damaged people and their wretched lives.

Cianna Sunshine & Mountains Book Reviews says

“Why She Left Us” is a general fiction novel, mixed with a lovely tale of romance. The writing was quite well done, details were stunning and well organized. The five different points of view can be a bit overwhelming but it all plays well throughout the book. This isn't a book for one of those people who like to have things laid out for them up front, the stories give you pieces of the story, one at a time, and you have to lay them out and piece the story together. It kept me reading. The only reason this has a B+ instead of an A, is because I think it takes a little too long to get the important pieces all figured out. I think that's the only thing that really holds this book back.

Each perspective is unique, interesting and stands out. This book deals beautifully with self worth issues, and the struggle and desire the people have to be loved. The 3 sisters has this muddled love life, and the two men are who really drive the storyline. This story deals a lot with grief and anger, each character dealing in their own way, and trying to come to terms with their life and the personal battles. The story is beautifully written, has a well thought out plot, and clever uses of humor and suspense. The author had solid ideas, mixed with interesting stories, and it makes for a wonderful read for lovers of general fiction with a romantic undertone. You won't regret picking up this book, and once you start reading it, I assure you, you'll be drawn into the wonderful world David Dennis creates here.

** I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review. All opinions are my own **

Loretta says

Depressing, happy, sad, really plays on emotions

Liked it at times, other times I didn't. But couldn't stop reading it. Sad how people's lives are so different
