

What Alice Forgot by Liane Moriarty. 2011, Amy Einhorn Books, 423 pages.

When Alice Love regains consciousness on the floor of a gym, she is baffled. She's the kind of girl who loves sleep and chocolate and detests exercise. Alice is eagerly awaiting the birth of her first child, and blissfully married to Nick, the man of her dreams. Renovation of their dream house is ongoing, and the rooms are in various states of disrepair. At least, that's what she remembers.

Actually, Alice's first child is ten years old. She's a fitness fanatic with three children, who spends her days organizing school events and shuttling the kids to various afterschool activities. Her ramshackle home has become the dream house she pictured, and her perfect marriage has fallen into shambles. Her best friend, Gina, who she doesn't remember at all, has been dead a year. With one bump on the head, Alice has misplaced ten years' worth of memories.

It seems that everything has changed in a decade. Alice and her sister, Elizabeth, are barely on speaking terms. Elizabeth's struggle with infertility has hollowed her out, leaving her bitter, brittle and unable to reach out to the sister who's too busy to see how desperately she's needed.

Alice has a whole new set of friends she doesn't recognize. Her mother has married her father-in-law. Nick can't stand to be in the room with her, and, honestly, Alice isn't sure she can stand to be in the room with herself.

29-year-old Alice was sweet, bubbly and optimistic. 39-year-old Alice is controlling, cynical, angry, and BUSY! She spends her days rushing from one commitment to the next, striving to be the "perfect mom," and giving only the most perfunctory attention to the relationships that were so important to her when she was 29.

Alice fumbles her way through a week's worth of daily life, leads meetings she doesn't understand, lets the children eat and do things she would never allow under normal circumstances, and tries to navigate the awful and unfamiliar landscape of her current relationships.

Memories come back to her in bits and pieces at random times, but she's like a driver traveling cross-country with only the tiniest parts of a map. The more Alice remembers, the more she realizes that ultimately, all roads lead back to Gina.

Looking at her 39-year-old life through her 29-year-old eyes, Alice is mortified. She simply can't understand how she could have gone so far from the happy, slightly scatterbrained girl she once was. Most importantly, she doesn't see any problems so far gone they're unfixable, but she's missing ten years' worth of perspective.

Alice is a stranger in her own life, and author Liane Moriarty masterfully doles out the details piecemeal, keeping her readers in the dark as well. Each newly-remembered joy is delightful, and readers' hearts break with Alice's at each rediscovered pain.

What Alice Forgot is a funny, bittersweet look at the way the years change us. I couldn't put this book down, and I couldn't help but contemplate what 31-year-old Heather would make of my life today.

Heather Holley-Hall is the Head of Branch Libraries with Alamance County Public Libraries. She may be reached at 336-570-6730 or [hhhall@alamancelibraries.org](mailto:hhall@alamancelibraries.org).