

THE INSIDE VIEW™ RATING ★★★★★-(out of five star rating)

Authors: Heidi Lerner, M.A. (with an Foreword from Janis Ruoff, PhD)
Title: GRAY MATTERS: BRAIN INJURY, THE INSIDE PERSPECTIVE
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“The realization and acceptance of living with a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) comes across in GRAY MATTERS: BRAIN INJURY, THE INSIDE PERSPECTIVE, by Heidi Lerner, M.A. This comes with the hard knocks of knowing one’s own limitations. A recorded work of such realization has utmost merit in the hands of those who need to know they are not alone.

Dr. Janis Ruoff’s introductory words are accurate, ‘*Ms. Lerner’s book will no doubt raise public awareness about thoughts, feelings, and needs of someone with a brain injury, as well as the need for increased support and education regarding this disability.*’ For what GRAY MATTERS is as a calling card to those with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), to let them know they’re not alone, GRAY MATTERS is very effective in its conveyance of abstract angst and recitals of author Heidi Lerner’s own affirmations that everything is going to be ok. How? Lerner, slices and dices what she went through and as a guide from where she came, it also serves as common frame of reference from which those who hear or read it, nod “Yes” as in that’s what I am going through..

Early on, GRAY MATTERS reads as a new found open diary of one’s most intimate thoughts. The seven chapters being un-numbered has significance in itself, is as a sign that the book is Lerner’s *process of elimination* of finding herself after all she could possibly write and illustrate about the workings of the brain and the results as an echoing of all she had been through as a survivor of brain injury. Her raw identification of her own thoughts is refreshing; and almost as though to say, the brain is important in its functionality but the person behind the brain, as a salvaged presence, is even more important. Across seven chapters is her process of elimination lending readers to her outlook on just what a society’s perception of a whole being is. What remains divvied across seven chapters, after that process of elimination (and interweaving *what a person is* with *what about life has less value*), is undoubtedly other than what people peg her as after the injury she sustained. GRAY MATTER thus serves as an etched in record open dialogue to her inner self and has the benefit, therefore of giving her continued solace because the book is as dialogue which confirms that ‘*Everything is going to be ok because I can rationalize my way out of my limitations because I am still a presence.*’ Just what societal norms and expectations *rule people towards judging themselves against* is most predictable in Lerner’s world of GRAY MATTERS; because the senses and their distinctions —as described in chapters 3-6 (Rehabilitation, The Brain, Academia, and Nature’s Touch)— are connections to the world all pointing towards one thing, the need for a Circle of Support (Chapter 7). Why the need for a Circle of Support? Answer: Because there is a huge difference between one’s faculties used to ascertain what one is *judged against* and what one is *judged as*. The *Circle of Support* helping mostly with the latter (how one with a brain injury judges themselves as) brings with it the benefit if getting those with brain injury to not be too hard on themselves. Meaning its bad enough that how they see themselves is in connection with the world they live in and its expectations, let alone to compound those external influences with what one brings on one’s self (expectation wise).

Make no mistake though, from the Table of Contents, in which each letter of the Table of Contents appears designed to look as centipede legs, to what likely is a metaphorical connection to what walks on two legs can swim to freeness, as for the references to the ocean by book’s end. To carry through with the metaphor, land is sanity to which survivors of brain injury get to swim to; as GRAY MATTERS’s message travels onward as an organism whose true simplicity is in being, instead, as an affectionate walk able pet leashed by Lerner’s words and preserved in book form for those with a brain injury who need to know that someone can relate to what they are going through. GRAY MATTERS lives up to its subtitle, BRAIN INJURY, THE INSIDE PERSPECTIVE, which appears on the cover page inside the book. Actually, GRAY MATTERS is *all that* and much much more. GRAY MATTERS exposes Lerner’s self-affirmations of the need to concentrate on herself on a daily basis but too exposes

the importance to be weaned off such self-centrality. The book once served her as it's words and nuances were a necessary reminder (to Lerner's self) that changes have occurred and no matter what those changes have been or are, people's opinions can't take away one's innate right for existence. Getting others to realize they have that *suchness* too is continually confirming to Lerner and reinforcing just how she believes that *intellectual, psychological, and emotional* support come in gradual measures from associating with those who have had a brain injury. Why? As she writes on, and I will paraphrase, *unlike other seeable injuries, many people can't even begin to imagine* what realm the departure one enters after a brain injury. Those without a brain injury have that vacant look, as if they are clueless to the needs or how to support their love ones who recently had a brain injury and are in need of Lerner's support group as a common lendable *frame of reference*. From *it all*, a thankfulness pervades (page 171); and the little things in observation are what come to mind as what about life those with brain injuries can bring forth.

What reads between the lines of GRAY MATTERS: BRAIN INJURY, THE INSIDE PERSPECTIVE is that not even those without a brain injury have a clue at all the wonder they miss by not indulging in some of the things that those with a brain injury have only a recourse to but ponder longer; without a brain of full faculty to be distracted that much more by the lures of the world and societies conditioning; as those without a brain injury are evoked into more so.

The book's back matter has online references. Her connection to nature no doubt is why Lerner not only currently facilitates the GRAY MATTERS Support Groups in the community of San Diego and metropolitan San Diego, but also volunteers as well at The Pegagus Rising Project where horses and those with TBI—from military active duty—are brought together in a doctor prescribed treatment program. GRAY MATTERS gives readers a true sense that, although one has a brain injury, to salvage the functionality within takes a *conviction of heart* and relentless concentration on aspirations as Lerner conveys early on.

Why a four star rating (out of five stars)? I love the book for what it is and can be. I know people who could use the book to help them get away from self-centrality and back to *the meaning of life*, which is to be brought closer to others. The photos on page 176 – 179 show that it is people that matter most and that (as for the photos on page 171 – 181 as a whole) caring matters. These **gray areas** (subjectivities) that those without a brain injury take for granted are the lifeblood and survival mechanism that a support group for brain injury brings. What would it take to get GRAY MATTERS (the book) to be rated as five stars instead of four? I would love to see the next edition of GRAY MATTERS include what instructional educational exercises might possibly be added by (the writer of the Foreword) Janis Ruoff, PhD –Special Education Administration, Director, Center for Education and Human Services in Acquired Brain Injury, George Washington University. This aspect of *want* is not from a standpoint of GRAY MATTERS as a knowledge base but instead to then use the 2nd Edition of GRAY MATTERS as a spring board to steer others to a calling of just how to instruct others with standardized tools (flowchart and framework for making post-injury decisions); pulling in an interdisciplinary approach. With that addition, a literary agent might even chime in.

As for author Heidi Lerner, M.A., she's crawled out from a life of self-central indulgence (which is what a brain injury leaves one with ala page 58's *Self Importance* segment) of seeking to identify the difference in one's own mechanic (comparing before the brain injury to after the brain injury). Lerner has survived a near fatal brain injury and—having such a book used as a record of what *thought process* she went through to get out from under that self-centrality— she is now poised, as an author, to be the one whose book shows her and others time and again where she has been and why it is important to have others know that they too can swim to a safer shore away from feeling less than complete.”

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