

Blind Spot
By Laura Ellen

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About the book:

Winter stops hiding Tricia Farni on Good Friday. When a truck plunges through the thinning ice of Alaska's Birch River, Tricia's body floats to the surface—dead since the night she disappeared six months earlier. The night Roswell Hart fought with her. The night Roz can't remember.

Missing things is nothing new to sixteen-year-old Roz' she has macular degeneration, an eye disease that robs her central vision. She's constantly piecing together what she sees—or thinks she sees—but this time her memory needs piecing together. Yet how can Roz be sure of the truth if her own memory has betrayed her? Can she clear her name of a murder that she believes she didn't commit?

Laura Ellen draws on her own experiences with vision loss in an emotional and suspenseful page-turner that straddles the world of special needs and the minefield of high school.

Laura Ellen was born and raised in Fairbanks, Alaska. She has a MA in Children's Literature and is a former Language Arts middle and high school teacher. She now writes full-time from her home in Scottsdale, Arizona where she lives with her husband, three children, and a dog. Blind Spot is her first novel. She is also a contributor to the Dear Teen Me: Authors Write Letters to Their Teen Selves which releases November, 2012 from Zest Books. You can find more about Laura on her website: www.lauraellenbooks.com

Author Interview:

1. When did you first know you wanted to be a writer? Who are some of your favorite writers?

I think I wanted to be a writer from the day I taught myself to read at age three. I loved the world created by the writer; the way the words formed such awesome pictures in my head and carried me to these new places. I can remember actually SAYING I wanted to be a writer though when I was in second grade. It is really hard for me to choose a favorite author because, like music, different authors and books are my 'favorite' at different times depending on what I am doing. BUT if I had to choose I'd say Jane Austen, Mark Twain, Jennifer Donnelly, Lois Duncan, and Holly Black.

2. What's the best piece of writing advice someone ever gave you?
At a writer's conference, I heard an author say "NOBODY gets it right the first time, not even Shakespeare." I knew that. I did. But I kept beating myself up for all the revising I was doing. I had it in my mind that 'real' writers wrote perfect first drafts. That advice made me see that my way of throwing it all on the page and then picking through it to find the gems was a perfectly acceptable way to write.
3. What do you hope people take away from your story?
Foremost, I want readers to be able to say they were entertained, but I also want them to walk away from my book understanding that some things aren't as they appear to be, so always give someone the benefit of the doubt and don't make assumptions or judgments until you know the facts.

Pre-reading:

What do you think this book will be about just by looking at the cover? What makes a good mystery?

Discussion questions:

1. How would you describe Roz as a person? Do you think she'd make a good friend or not? Why? What does she reveal about herself?
2. Roz could be considered an unreliable narrator, why? How did that impact you as you were reading?
3. Roz really fights her identity as someone disabled. She says, "Disabled, however, opened a whole can of labels that stripped me of my identity." Do you think she's right to fight this permanent label to herself? How would you feel if others tried to identify you like this?
4. Describe Roz's first day of her sophomore year. What would be the worst part of what happened that day? What would you do? Does anything about her high school remind you of yours?
5. How would you describe Dellian as a teacher? Have you ever met a teacher like this one? Does he seem to have it out for Roz? How do you deal with a difficult teacher? Friend? Boss?
6. Describe Tricia Farni. How does Roz become connected with her? What does she do to try to help her? Do you think she would've even considered such a move if it hadn't been for Jonathan?
7. Greg or Jonathan? Jonathan or Greg? What are the good and bad of these two boys who are vying for Roz's attention? Who really cares about her? Is that enough?

8. When Roz goes to the party with Jonathan she feels like, "I'd crawled from the heap of rejects into the Land of the Chosen and found Normal." What was she willing to put up with to feel this way?
9. Describe Roz's day at the museum with Greg. How in many ways are they better matched? Why won't she see it? How did she develop the odd fascination with UFO's?
10. Who are Roz's friends? What makes them a friend? Who used to be her friend? What happened between them? How many friendships do you think make it through high school?
11. What does Roz come to believe is going on between Tricia and Dellian? What are the facts that make her think this?
12. Describe what happened at the Homecoming dance. How does she handle Jonathan? After the dance what happens? At the party afterward what happened? What did Roz actually see? Why is her memory broken of this event?
13. What predictions does Roz make about Tricia's disappearance? Why aren't people too worried about her? Who does seem concerned? What evidence does she see in Dellian's desk concerning Tricia?
14. Describe what happens between Greg and Roz. Do you think it is a better match when they finally get together? Why does she hold out dating him publicly for so long? Is she embarrassed of him?
15. How does Fritz end up in life skills? What kind of person is he? What does he add to the story?
16. When Greg and Roz finally start going out their first date goes terribly wrong. Why does this sometimes happen?
17. How does Roz handle her showdown with Dellian as the novel builds to its conclusion? How does she stand up to him in the field trip? In AP History? How does it almost land her a suspension?
18. When Tricia's body is discovered why does Roz become part of the investigation? Why doesn't she tell the officer the whole truth?
19. Who does Roz trust? Who should she trust? How does she finally learn who her true friends are? How does she almost lose Greg? How is the truth "like alien life?"
20. Why does Roz help Jonathan in a scheme to gain access to Dellian's apartment? How is this the biggest mistake she makes in the novel? What are the consequences for her to trusting Jonathan again? How do you know who to trust and when?
21. In the end, what does Roz discover about Tricia's disappearance? What does she learn about herself in the process? How do you think she will be changed in the future? How does the title 'Blind Spot' reflect what Roz just went through? What did you learn by reading Roz's story?

Extension Activities:

Health/Science:

Roz's classmate, Tricia, suffers from drug addiction and tries to handle these issues herself. Research the best known ways for people to overcome an addiction using reliable sources. Then, make a resource list or website to share what you learned.

Spend some time in the library researching macular degeneration, the visual impairment that Roz is diagnosed with in the novel. What are the warning signs? How can you be helpful to someone with a visual impairment without offending them?

Music:

Music is a really important aspect of Roz's existence. Try the game Roz and Greg played on the bus with one of your own friends. Then, together, make a playlist that you think would best work for the soundtrack of this novel.

Art:

Make a collage which represents the conflicts in the novel. Don't just think about figures but color, shape, size, and texture. Discuss your choices in a short paragraph.

[Tracie Vaughn Zimmer](#), an author and teacher, created this guide.