

Love for a Deaf Rebel: Schizophrenia on Bowen Island

Derrick King

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Love for a Deaf Rebel is a moving memoir about the difficulty of dealing with a loved one's mental illness and physical disabilities.

Derrick King's powerful memoir *Love for a Deaf Rebel* is about how falling in love with a deaf woman changed his life.

In the 1980s, King fell in love with Pearl, a beautiful, independent woman who was born deaf. They meet by chance: having lunch in the same food court, King was mesmerized by her elegance. They exchanged handwritten notes, through which Pearl opened herself up to King, describing the abuses she experienced and the difficulties that come with deafness, including having others believe her to be incapable of reacting to the world around her.

At a slow, cautious rate, Pearl and King began having lunch a few times a week; their friendship deepened. But Pearl had seen psychiatrists in the past. Despite his affection for her, King determined that he had to let Pearl go: "Watching Pearl collapse was like suffering the slow death of a partner with no way to say goodbye." Pearl was later diagnosed with schizophrenia.

King's love for Pearl is conveyed throughout in concise, accessible terms that capture the challenges of falling in love with a person who sees the world in a different way well. This most often occurs through records of their exchanges: Pearl asserts that most hearing women would never marry a deaf man, and suggests that hearing men are sexually attracted to deaf women. Compelling arguments about God, religion, and destiny also occur, with Pearl saying: "If there is God there is no deafness, no father death, no rape. Get it?"

And when the book covers technical and medical information related to Pearl's disease, it does so in a manner that's considerate of audiences without expertise: of hearing abilities and disabilities, Pearl shares the comparison of "140 decibels in your good ear. You hear a jet fly like I hear a pin drop." The book's coverage of the physical and psychological abuse that Pearl experienced is more sobering; it also comes in Pearl's words: "I did not resist. No point to shout at a deaf party."

Indeed, the book's most moving portions are its conversations between King and Pearl, which are recreated from transcripts, notes, and records. King's narration strives to authentically capture his feelings in the moment. He reserves his revelations about Pearl's earliest history for last. Though in many ways a scarred and broken woman, she's also memorialized as honest, trustworthy, and real. The book ends with a letter from Pearl's family to King, giving, in brief, their side of the story.

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ANNA MARIA COLIVICCHI (July 20, 2021)

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