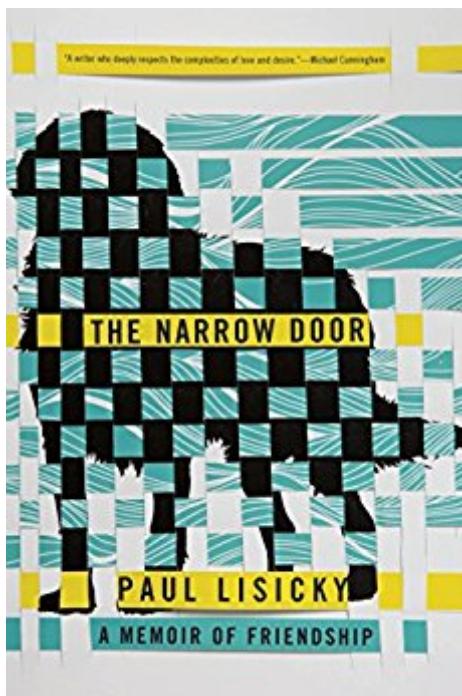


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The Narrow Door: A Memoir Of Friendship



Synopsis

In *The Narrow Door*, Paul Lisicky creates a compelling collage of scenes and images drawn from two long-term relationships, one with a woman novelist and the other with his ex-husband, a poet. The contours of these relationships shift constantly. Denise and Paul, stretched by the demands of their writing lives, drift apart, and Paul's romance begins to falter. And the world around them is frail: environmental catastrophes like the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, natural disasters like the earthquake in Haiti, and local disturbances make an unsettling backdrop to the pressing concerns of Denise's cancer diagnosis and Paul's impending breakup. Lisicky's compassionate heart and resilience seem all the stronger in the face of such searing losses. His survival--hard-won, unsentimental, authentic--proves that in turning toward loss, we embrace life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Paul Lisicky is an exquisite writer. He writes sentences that you have to stop and read aloud for the sheer visceral pleasure of them. He is one of our most lyrical writers of nonfiction, but this book never feels as if it is sacrificing the sharpness of its observation in service to its lyricism. It tells the whole, sometimes unpretty, truth about the complicated, ambivalent nature of friendship --

especially friendships where ambition, competition, and impossible-to-satisfy longing play a part -- in short -- probably every friendship. Lisicky actually tells the story of two relationships in this book -- a friendship that ends in tragic death, and a marriage that ends turbulently. He also weaves in strands about natural disasters, the music of Joni Mitchell, and what it feels like to try to write, or even concentrate, in a world where Youtube, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and every other form of promised instant connection and gratification tug at our attention. Ironically, through these multiple strands, Lisicky teaches the reader what a gift it is to really pay undivided attention to our friends, lovers, the world, ourselves. This quality of acute attention may be what most distinguishes this book.

This book is simultaneously memoir and mirror. There is something purely magical about Paul Lisicky's ability to weave events from a broader social and environmental context with the ephemeral, minute-yet-significant details of intertwined lives that gently invites the reader to do one's own emotional archeological dig, to polish the bones of lost relationships to find their meaning.

This was a lovely tale of a close friendship that survived many years of typical stops and starts that so often happen in long term relationships. The interweaving of the author's own personal relationship as it changed over the some of the same years made for poignant reading.

A lot of readers throw around the word "brave" when describing art. I was always put off by that kind of accolade, until I read Lisicky's memoir. Until I read *The Narrow Door*, I didn't understand the courage it takes to write. Specifically, Lisicky writes honestly about the tragic loss -- and wonderful life -- of his friend Denise; and I wonder about the pressure of trying to do justice in prose to a loved one's life and death. Lisicky writes unapologetically about his relationship -- its life and death -- with longtime partner Mark; and I can't help think about how Mark might read about himself, about how Lisicky had to not think about how Mark might read about himself. Not that the author disparages the people who appear in his memoir, but to lay bare the emotional life of others without flinching should be praised. But it's the way Lisicky splays open himself, lays bare his emotional life, that is the true triumph and bravery of *The Narrow Door*. Sure, other memoirists do this, or try. Rarely, however, do they do so with a beauty and purity that puts you in the author's own heart and mind -- not watching the characters of the memoir from a distance like some reality TV show. Ironically -- or maybe it's not ironic -- but I had the same emotional experience reading *The Narrow Door* as I did Mark Doty's memoir, *Dog Years*. Perhaps *Dog Years* isn't as "brave" as *Narrow Door*, but both

render emotions beautifully and honestly. Here are a few lines from Paul Lisicky's memoir that illustrate the kind of emotion I'm referring to, but really, you have to read this book to get its full scope. "Yes, this is how I will care for you. I will tune out my light until the fire stays completely inside, maybe unreachable to you. It doesn't even occur to me that you might want to warm your hands on that fire, that you might need it in order to forget." "Loss can corrupt your thinking. Loss can trick you into believing bad things happen because you must be a bad person. Loss -- too much of it at once -- is sinister that way." "I'm remembering my friend. It would make sense that someone so attached to her writing -- the allure of the perfect shape, which must always be rejected -- would want to mess things up a little at the end."

I was lucky enough to have Paul Lisicky as a writing instructor at Sarah Lawrence College and I have to say this memoir delivers on every level. Raw, honest, and beautifully written. Just a great piece of writing and a great story.

Well developed characters

Great book, incredible blend of lives.

A beautiful, thought-provoking book about friendship, but really about finding oneself through the people one knows and the pain and beauty they bring to a life. This is one to re-read.

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