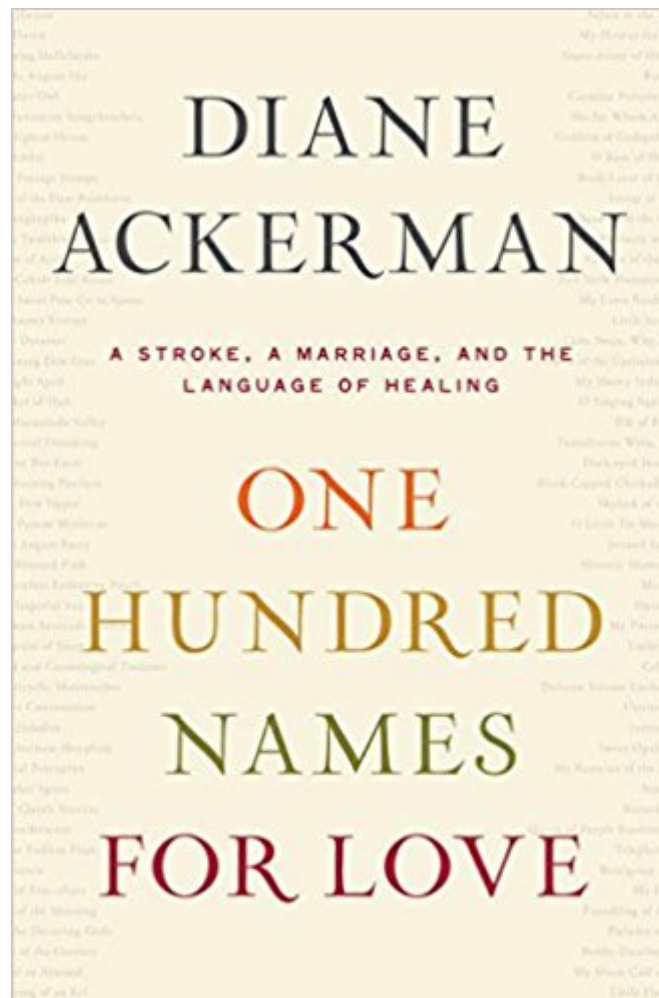




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One Hundred Names For Love: A Stroke, A Marriage, And The Language Of Healing



Synopsis

Finalist for the Pulitzer Prize Finalist for the National Book Circle Critics Award "Diane Ackerman's most enjoyable, intimate, and heartrending work yet." —Atul Gawande Everyone who cherishes the gift of language will cherish Diane Ackerman's narrative masterpiece, an exquisitely written love story and medical miracle story, one that combines science, inspiration, wisdom, and heart. One day Ackerman's husband, Paul West, an exceptionally gifted wordsmith and intellectual, suffered a terrible stroke. When he regained awareness he was afflicted with aphasia — a loss of language — and could utter only a single syllable: "mem." The standard therapies yielded little result but frustration. Diane soon found, however, that by harnessing their deep knowledge of each other and her scientific understanding of language and the brain she could guide Paul back to the world of words. This triumphant book is both a humane and revealing addition to the medical literature on stroke and aphasia and an exquisitely written love story: a magnificent addition to literature, period.

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Customer Reviews

Two phrasemakers and longtime married partners had to relearn a shared, intimate conversation post-stroke as Ackerman narrates in her touching latest work. Paul West, Ackerman's 75-year-old British husband (she is 18 years younger), was a retired English professor and the author of 50-plus books, survivor of diabetes and a pacemaker, when he was struck by a massive stroke that left "a small wasteland" in his brain, especially in the key language areas. For literary minds like West and

Ackerman, his inability to formulate language (reduced to repeating numbly the sounds "mem, mem, mem" in anger and confusion) was a shock to them both: "o be so godlike, and yet so fragile," his wife writes in despair. Her memoir of this terrible time, first in the hospital, then at home, records the small victories in his speech making and numerous frustrating setbacks; she even took it upon herself to make up humorous but challenging exercises for him to do, Mad Libs-style. Contrary to the bleak prognosis, West gradually made progress, while their journey makes for goofy, pun-happy reading, a little like overhearing lovers coo to each other. (Apr.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved.

Starred Review Two wordsmiths enthralled by the glimmering pleasures of the life of the mind have lived together in literary camaraderie for decades. So when novelist, memoirist, and critic Paul West was hit with a stroke in 2005 that left his brain scorched and his body battered, both he and his wife, Diane Ackerman, a poet and the lushly original author of such seismic books as *The Zookeeper's Wife* (2007), had a lot to lose. But West never succumbed to his impaired vision, frozen right hand, or, most remarkably, bewildering and silencing global aphasia; and Ackerman, who by fortuitous prescience had conducted extensive neurological research for her book *An Alchemy of Mind* (2004), proved to be an ideal caregiver. Writing with her signature empathy, curiosity, brilliance, and mirth, Ackerman chronicles West's heroic battle to reclaim words and mobility and her tailoring of West's speech therapy to match his spectacular vocabulary and unique intelligence. A master of vivid metaphors and multifaceted narratives, Ackerman candidly addresses the profound demands facing caregivers while explaining the cruel consequences of aphasia, charting West's against-all-odds return to conversing and writing (*The Shadow Factory*, 2008) and marveling over the healing powers of language and intimacy. A gorgeously engrossing, affecting, sweetly funny, and mind-opening love story of crisis, determination, creativity, and repair. --Donna Seaman

I had mixed reactions to the book. On one hand, how can anyone but root for Diane and Paul, and suffer along with them as they struggled through the horror of these circumstances? I felt happy as clarity surfaced in Paul's damaged brain, and wanted to give Diane a hug during the early days when she went through her caregiver role as a zombie. Yet there were some difficulties in the book. At times, Diane overused metaphors in a way that obscured rather than clarified her points. Here's an example of overwriting, wherein she describes her mannerisms changing to accommodate Paul's limitations: "I now seemed to quarry words, one by one, presenting them like bright bits of

jasper. I was not slurred in a wash of flurried adjectives when I spoke to Paul. Sometimes with a flutter of agitated worry that felt like a beetle was trapped inside my ribs. But I savored the delicious warm touch-ribbons of silent affection, uniting and comforting us, even when words failed. And I followed the stew of sympathy from friends, whose faces flickered with unrefined sorrow-compassion-pity. "Also, I was disappointed that Diane, while knocked back by the overwhelming load of caregiving, adapts to it somehow, yet she declines to explain those successful strategies. What a great service that would have been. Here's an example of what most of us either have gone through or will in the future: "My body also felt derelict and un-lived in. Every little thing, no matter how small, putting on makeup, changing my clothes, washing my hair seemed to add boulders to an already unbearable weight. I felt as if a spare particle would make me collapse. I kept forgetting to eat, and, anyway, the refrigerator was bare because I hadn't the energy to shop." Like many people, I've been there. What did she do about it? How did she handle it? Not said. And: "...caregiving had its hopes and charms, but on the downside, this meant that every hour was interruptible. My days no longer contained adjoining hours in which to work. Yet I had a new book to write... So while Paul was straining mentally to reclaim language, I was straining to learn the peculiar skill of concentrating on my work in attention gulps... while keeping one ear open for signs of discord or trouble." Again, I know that feeling of interruption, and the frustration that makes one want to throw everything in the trash and say the heck with it, I'll just give up being a person and dedicate my life to caring for you. Diane struggled with this, but she doesn't say how she surmounts it. She also reveals that she's married a man who is quite a bit older than her, who was in the past given to alcoholic rages and verbal abuse. The balance of power in this relationship is striking. I say this realizing I'm commenting on the apparent nature of their relationship, which is none of my business and not the point of the book. Still, it's like an unacknowledged third protagonist. In summary, Diane Ackerman has done a good job of describing one stroke, one man, and one dedicated wife. The potential for teaching others how to deal with a similar situation remains unrealized, regrettably.

This book would probably not be for everyone, but I liked it. It is a very detailed account of how the author helped her husband find his way back, more or less, from a devastating stroke. I found her patience and upbeat spirit admirable. It is truly a story of a great love written by a great lady. She did have her challenging and discouraging moments, but seemed to always rise above them. He is a very lucky man to have her

My mom suffered a ruptured brain aneurysm 2+ yrs ago. She's 74 now, does not have use of her right side (she's left handed:) and suffers from Aphasia. Other than that....she is doing very well, good spirits, amazing patience and grateful for everyday she spends with those she loves. She's amazing. I hate seeing her struggle to "find the words" and my father's need to "rescue" her or correct her. His intentions are all good but it's better for her to exercise her verbal communication, so the struggle is part of it. Married 51 years now, and I think they love each other more everyday. But, love is not always enough and although I bought the book for my mom, my dad is reading it now...absolutely necessary to get a better understanding of what "normal" is now. Thank you for a beautiful book.Jodes

While I thought this book would be appropriate for pre-medical undergraduates as they learned more about aphasia, I learned that the book's message was better suited for those who want to know about coping in a care-giving relationship. Learning about stroke victims was interesting, of course, but far better was learning about how one manages to take care of a partner. Her writing is poetic! One will learn from Diane Ackerman; as for me, I will buy more of her books!

Beautiful, moving book about the power of love and dedication. I was a physician until I was felled by a brain disorder, so this book was meaningful to me both personally and professionally. Initially I read this as a library book. It was so good, I bought it to re-read as well as copies to send to my physician friends.

Having always been interested in how the brain works and also in the creative use of words, I found this book a gold mine of information regarding the human brain and its functioning in spite of trauma. It is stimulating, inspiring, and at times very emotionally stirring. From tears to torrents of laughter it takes the literary traveler. It depicts genuine love with all its ups and downs; appropriately named, the book shares what it means to really love someone and show it in redemptive ways. I highly recommend this book.

This was surprisingly short of emotional context which made some parts too long and almost boring. I expected to see more of the process of the 100 names for love as they appeared in real life rather than simply having a list at the end. It would have been nice if each chapter were labeled with one of the names so that more of the before and after lives could be shared but clearly that's a different book.

I am totally enjoying the true story written about the author's husband. The same condition my husband is in now. I ordered two by mistake and gave one to one of his nurses whose son fell 25 feet and is suffering the same conditions. Not really crazy about her writing style, but the story line is good.

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