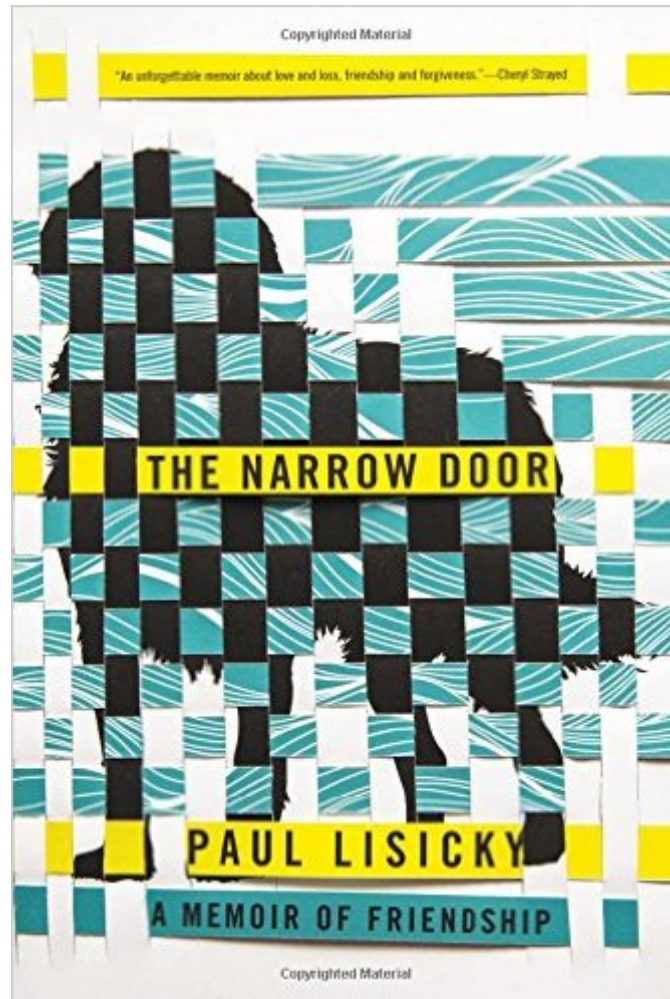


The book was found

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

Complete review can be found at [HereWeAreGoing](#), here:

<https://herewearegoing.wordpress.com/2016/02/01/reading-not-little-lives-by-garth-greenwell-and-paul-lisicky/>Mr. Lisicky wrote *Lawnboy*, a novel lush with longing and the search for identity I much loved. Now, he invites us into his heart as it grows and breaks and mends and mourns through two relationships, two loves. Mr. Lisicky explores the boundaries of romance and self and what effort is required when people are evolved enough to recognize that "Love" doesn't necessarily fit into the confines allowed and defined by the culture in which we live; sometimes love is smaller, lower-case l, and sometimes Love is larger, capital L, than we have words and rules and understanding for, and we must "as individuals, couples, trios, menages of many sizes,

communities, evolving societies â€” learn to make space, make sense, make okay the shapes our loves and our lives take. Mr. Lisicky writes with trenchant insight about love, about having a partner with greater earning power, about being an artist, toiling at oneâ€™s art and having to make a living in other ways, about making sense by finding peace in the lack of discernible pattern in life, love, energy, the cosmos. Listen: How tempting it is to do the alchemical now. To turn darkness into light, bread into flesh, tin into gold, wine into blood. Itâ€™s what the narrative wants of us, at least this part of the narrative. It wants to comfort, not that we should necessarily link comfort to weakness. Couldnâ€™t there be some rigor to comfort? Iâ€™d like to think the story could give it that, to give the hurting in us strength and power. So we will not leave the page without reserving a pasture for darkness, inscrutability.

â€œThe best book about friendship Iâ€™ve ever read.â€• Thatâ€™s what I wrote, some years ago, about "Letâ€™s Take the Long Way Home", Gail Caldwellâ€™s memoir of her friendship with Caroline Knapp. Two writers, private in the important ways, both triumphantly sober â€” and then Caroline was diagnosed with cancer and died, seven weeks later, at 42. Caldwellâ€™s writing is restrained, but no matter. Her book rips your heart out.â€œThe Narrow Doorâ€• is just as good. But much more complicated. When Paul Lisicky meets Denise Gess in the early 1980s, heâ€™s 23, a fledgling writer, a graduate student at Rutgers. Sheâ€™s 30, a teaching assistant, author of a much-praised novel, Good Deeds. Their professional differences are the least of it. Heâ€™s an introvert, in the closet, nervous in the classroom. Sheâ€™s open, inspiring, the kind of teacher who collects disciples. And yet they become close friends, â€œa little bit in loveâ€ | and not able to say it.â€• All this changes over the years. She has an affair with a Famous Writer (John Irving), who spurns her; he has an affair with a Famous Writer (Mark Doty), and marries him. His books get published; hers have trouble finding a home. And then there is the not small matter of her personality. Her smile â€œcould turn diamonds to black powder,â€• but Denise is also contentious, redlining emotion on a calm day â€” at some point, sheâ€™d make Jesus look for the exit. And, of course, she dies. Lung cancer, brain cancer, even cancer in her heart. But on the way to that slow, painful death, she is fiercely herself â€” that is, emotional and grateful. Which is where the book starts: Election Night, 2008, a few months before her death. Weâ€™re in Philadelphia, in Deniseâ€™s final apartment, the one she moved to because she could no longer climb the stairs.

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