

"A riveting adventure through life and psyche that proves hard to put down"

MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW BOOKWATCH

# LOVE FOR A DEAF REBEL

DERRICK KING

*Schizophrenia  
on Bowen Island*

eBook Edition



## Reader Comments

*I have been moved in so many ways by your story. You have made me laugh, and you have made me cry. I am in awe and want you to know your story has taken me to places inside of me to remember that nothing lasts and we must cherish things as they are. The light and the dark, the good and the bad, are intertwined. Looking back at our adventures and experiences, we see the truths in our life.—J.P.*

*This book is powerful! It is amazing. I loved it! I read the book three times, and it has been in my thoughts since my first reading. The author put his heart and soul into this book. His telling of the journey taken by Pearl and him is brilliant, heart-wrenching, and insightful. I can't tell you how much I enjoyed all the characters; I feel like I know them. Thank you so much for writing it and sharing it.—D.G.*

*I couldn't put this book down. What crazy shit the author went through—he lived the lives of a thousand men!—D.B.*

*This book is fascinating and moving, an exotic love story however contorted the love. New Pearl was there all along, the alter-ego lying in wait to be discovered after the honeymoon. The author truly loved Pearl and was heartbroken by her ultimate failure to recognize his true love; how sad for her indeed! I hope this book goes viral.—P.W.*

*The author has done a masterful job of documenting Pearl's journey. Schizophrenia is very complicated and not easily understood. The book would be very helpful to anyone with a schizophrenic family member or friend.—G.G.*

*This book is fascinating. The author is a good writer and my goodness but he has had an eventful life. We have all had our sagas of love lost, and it is unfortunate that each generation has to learn the lessons again with all the heartache.—I.V.*

*The book pulled me in right away. The author knows how to capture detail and make the story interesting; readers would like to be there with them. It is touching how the author never stopped loving Pearl despite everything that happened. He tried to make things work instead of rushing towards divorce like she did.—D.L.*

## Press Reviews

*The bond that grows between strangers living in two worlds is compellingly described, bringing revelations about prejudice, acceptance, handicaps, and equality. Deafness and schizophrenia are seen through intense love and personal growth that brings a “you are here” feel in a way few memoirs achieve. The role of friends and family is examined as King stands by her while her mental health collapses. Anyone interested in mental illness or in the interactions between deaf and hearing lovers will find the book infused with a passion that makes it a riveting adventure through life and psyche that proves hard to put down.*—Midwest Book Review Bookwatch  
<http://donovansliteraryservices.com/june-2021-issue.html#lft>

*King’s powerful memoir is about the difficulty of dealing with a loved one’s mental illness and disability, and how falling in love with a deaf woman changed his life. His love for Pearl is well conveyed in concise, accessible terms that capture the challenges of falling in love with a person who sees the world in a different way. The coverage of the sexual, physical, and psychological abuse that she experienced is sobering. King’s narration strives to authentically capture his feelings in the moment. Rating: 4 out of 5.*—Clarion Reviews Foreword  
<https://www.forewordreviews.com/reviews/love-for-a-deaf-rebel/>

*This candid account of the author’s marriage to a deaf person vividly details their motorcycle adventure to Guatemala and life on Bowen Island. This poignant love story is well written and becomes a platform for facts about the life of deaf people, also delving into issues such as schizophrenia, blindness, and diabetes. Those interested in the stress that disabilities can place on relationships may wish to read this. Rating: Recommended.*—The US Review of Books  
[www.theusreview.com/reviews-1/Love-for-a-Deaf-Rebel-by-Derrick-King.html](http://www.theusreview.com/reviews-1/Love-for-a-Deaf-Rebel-by-Derrick-King.html)

*King’s love story and memoir opens when he is approached by Pearl, a charismatic deaf woman. Their chat, scribbled on napkins, flows easily, and friendship blossoms. He learns sign language. They move together to isolated Bowen Island, sharing a life of livestock and ferry rides, where her behavior becomes increasingly erratic. King tells this honest and emotional story in crisp, quick prose, with insights and slight suspense, respecting Pearl’s story right up to its bittersweet finish.*—Publisher’s Weekly Booklife  
[booklife.com/project/love-for-a-deaf-rebel-schizophrenia-on-bowen-island-55735](http://booklife.com/project/love-for-a-deaf-rebel-schizophrenia-on-bowen-island-55735)

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**eBook Edition**

*Love for a Deaf Rebel: Schizophrenia on Bowen Island*

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*eBook Edition*

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*This is a true story. Most written conversations are abridged from transcripts.*

*Signed and oral conversations are recreations from notes and records. The author tells the story as he experienced it, with Pearl's earliest history revealed last. The names of living persons have been replaced by pseudonyms.*

*To Pearl*

*Sometimes with one I love, I fill myself with rage,  
for fear I effuse unreturn'd love;  
But now I think there is no unreturn'd love—  
the pay is certain, one way or another;  
(I loved a certain person ardently,  
and my love was not return'd;  
Yet out of that, I have written these songs).*

Walt Whitman  
*Sometimes with One I Love, 1860*



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# Part I: Together in Love

## Under the Clock

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I walked into a roar of conversation, bought sushi, and shuffled through the lunchtime chaos of the Pacific Centre Food Court, looking for a seat. Umbrellas and overcoats dripped water onto the white tile floor.

A black-haired woman sat under the clock, her back to the wall, scanning the crowd with radar eyes. Her porcelain face, brown eyes, and high cheekbones gave her face a long-distance presence, yet her elegance was neutralized by a brown dress and a perm. Her drab style contrasted with the gaudy colors and big hair of the 1980s. She wore no makeup or jewelry. Her radar locked on to me as I looked for a seat.

The seat opposite her became vacant. I elbowed my way through the crowd and sat down. I was wearing a blue suit with a white shirt and a silk tie; like most bankers, I only removed my jacket on the hottest of summer days.

I loosened my tie. I ate while she studied me with the barest hint of a smile. I smiled at her and looked away. She looked at me while she ate fish and chips and sucked down the last of a Coke with a gurgle.

“What are you staring at?” I finally said.

She pointed to her mouth and then to her right ear.

“Are you deaf?” I said, at first puzzled and then surprised.

She nodded.

I took the gold Cross pen from my suit pocket, picked up a napkin, and wrote, “*Spicy horseradish.*”

I turned my napkin to face her. She read it and smiled at me as if she expected me to write more.

*“I wondered why you looked at me. I never met a deaf person before.”*

*“I watch lips. If you speak and I ignore you will think I am rude. I don’t want hearing to think that deafies like me are rude.”*

“Can you lipread?” I said.

The woman shook her head.

## Part I: Together in Love

*"Most people never look at each other. They only look at the floor. That's why I spoke to you."*

She smiled. *"We are 200,000 deafies in Canada. Our language is ASL—American Sign Language."*

*"I'm getting an ice cream. Do you want one?"*

The woman scribbled on the tattered napkin and pushed it across the table.

*"Almond."*

She smacked her lips, grinned, and put the napkin in her purse.

I bought two ice cream cones at Baskin-Robbins and stuffed a handful of napkins into my pocket. The music of Madonna played in the background. We sat on a bench in the mall and continued to write. I noticed her fingernails were badly chewed.

*"Congenitally deaf?"*

The woman shrugged.

*"Born deaf?"*

*"Mother had measles at 4 months pregnant. Lucky not 2 months or I am blind and deaf."*

I smiled. *"That's life."*

*"That's me. I accept my deafness. My children will be hearing."* She looked at her watch. *"I go back to work. Nice to meet you."*

The woman stuffed the napkin into her purse and disappeared into the crowd as I watched her walk away.

I went back to the food court just before noon. The silent woman was sitting at the same table under the clock. She looked up and waved at me. I sat down. She looked at me expectantly. She seemed to be about my age, almost thirty, yet her face hadn't a wrinkle.

I reached into my suit and pulled out a few sheets of paper and my pen.

*"I remember you."*

She put down her chopsticks and wrote, *"Ha-ha."*

*"How are you today?"*

*"I feel bothered about my real estate. I am stuck to pay mortgage and apartment rent."*

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*"You must have a good job to afford two places."*

*"I work at the post office. I sort mails. Managers and union fight. Something not nice to work there. Good pay but I have Medical Lab Technician diploma at St. Paul Technical Vocational Institute. They have interpreters there."*

*"Then why do you work in the post office?"*

*"After divorce I come back to Canada to Vancouver because a lot of deafies in Vancouver so I can get a good job. But no hospital would hire me. All refused because I am deaf. I got a temporary job at the post office."* She turned the paper to face me so I could read it and then took it back and continued writing. *"Six years ago. Temporary. Ha! But I am lucky to have education and job not to be unemployed. Most deafies are unemployed—80%. 1/3 quits high school."*

*"I studied too. Electronics engineer, but I work for a Dutch bank. Boring but better than a post office job! I study Spanish at night school. I will start an MBA in September. I want to work in another country. I taught at night school, so a teacher and a student at the same time. My name is Derrick King."*

*"Pearl."* Pearl pointed at herself, looked up to check the time, and mimed punching a time-clock. *"I must go. 15 minute walk back and PO is strict. Bye!"*

Whenever I went to the food court at my usual time, just before noon, Pearl was sitting under the clock, and we started writing.

*"I met my husband at TVI in St. Paul but he is from North Dakota."*

*"How long were you married?"*

*"9 months. Then I found him in a gay bar in Fargo!"* She stuck out her tongue and hung her wrist limply. *"I lost my mobile trailer down payment from mother—my wedding gift. All my furnitures. That was 7 years ago."*

I pointed at "Fargo." *"My wife and I were married in ND too! A strange coincidence."*

*"How long were you married?"*

*"7 years."*

*"Who left who? And why?"*

*"She left. She said she didn't want to be married anymore. She said she*

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*was a feminist so she needed to be single. As soon as she could support herself she told me she didn't need a husband."*

*"Respect is important. Did you want her to stay?"*

*"Yes."*

*"I want a family with Mr. Right. Children are first then the husband is second."*

*"I'm Mr. Write! Kids need a house. Nowadays that means two incomes."*

*"Two incomes until children are small. Then wife should be home to be mother if husband will afford. Depends on location."*

*"Yes. Where do you live?"*

*"Kitsilano near the beach."*

*"Me too, 2125 2nd Ave."*

Pearl grinned. *"2168 2nd Ave."*

*"That is the other side of the street! Another strange coincidence."*

A man with a gray comb-over was sitting at the table next to us. He wore several sweaters. He leaned over to Pearl with a big smile, as if we were his grandchildren, and said, "And what kind of game are *we* playing?"

Pearl shrugged and turned to me for an explanation.

"She's deaf, so we are writing to each other."

He pulled back as though I'd said we had leprosy. "I'm so sorry!" He stood and walked away.

I told Pearl what he had said, and her face became flushed with anger. *"I HATE when hearies make pity."* Her pen plowed into the paper.

"Hearies" was a new word to me, and I was one of "them." Pearl slurped her Coke and grinned.

*"You carry a paper in your pocket now."*

I laughed. "It is for starting fires."

I jogged downhill to Granville Island Public Market. As I approached the market, I spotted Pearl walking with a woman. They carried their groceries in shoulder bags and backpacks to leave their hands free to sign.

Pearl looked over her shoulder as if she had eyes in the back of her head. She waved at me. I waved back, wiped the sweat off my brow, and

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walked through the crowd.

“Hello, Derrick,” said Pearl’s friend in a hollow voice.

“Do you know me?”

She grinned. “Pearl tells me everything.”

Pearl tapped her arm. “Tell him you’re hard-of-hearing and can interpret,” Pearl signed, as the woman interpreted. I was astonished at the transparency of her interpretation; it was as if Pearl had spoken to me herself.

“So *fast!* I’ve never heard Pearl speak before,” I said, as the woman interpreted.

“When people hear my accent, they don’t realize I’m hard-of-hearing. They think I’m Swedish,” she signed and said. She pulled her long hair back to reveal a finger-sized hearing aid behind each ear. “I’m Jodi.”

“Don’t interpret everything,” Pearl signed, as Jodi interpreted.

I laughed. “I must be careful about what I say.”

“Derrick is curious—his eyes sparkle,” signed Pearl. “Will you eat with us?”

“No. I can’t jog home with a full stomach.”

“Then rest with us,” signed Pearl, “so you can run faster on your way home. Today we will eat Vietnamese food.”

We sat down at the Muffin Granny. Pearl put her bag in Jodi’s lap for safekeeping and went to buy food.

“Is it hard for hearing people to learn sign language?”

“That depends on you,” said Jodi. “How badly do you want to learn?”

“That depends on Pearl.”

Pearl and I became friends slowly and cautiously, seeing each other for lunch two or three times a week for two months before we progressed to a date. Our first date was on 14 April 1984—for dinner, at Pearl’s invitation. With a bottle of wine, a box of chocolates, and a notepad, I walked across the street from my apartment, one of the best-kept buildings on the street, to her apartment, one of the most run-down.

At the entrance, I studied the intercom. Her suite was the only unit

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with OCCUPIED instead of a name. I rang the buzzer. A few seconds later, the electric door opened. I walked down the corridor and saw Pearl peering from a door. She grinned and waved. I followed her into her one-bedroom flat, and she bolted the door behind us. Pearl accepted my gifts with a nod, a smile, and a sign I didn't understand. She handed me a corkscrew and two glasses. I poured the wine, and we raised our glasses in a silent toast.

Pearl's apartment was simply furnished and tidy. A crochet project lay on her coffee table. The wooden-cabinet TV played silently while white-on-black text scrolled across the bottom of its screen, decoded by the Sears TeleCaption decoder sitting on top. I had never seen captions before, but now I could read the news line by line.

I walked over to her TV and tried to turn its green tint into natural color, but its picture tube was worn out. Pearl didn't have a videotape player, so her home entertainment was books and green-tinted TV.

Next to the sofa stood a bookcase with *Reader's Digest*, *Introduction to Psychology*, two *McCall's Cooking School* binders, and a *Hume Moneyletter* binder. On her desk sat a telephone, lamp, keyboard device, and a box with wires leading around the room and up the wall to the doorbell panel and the bedroom. Charcoal drawings and oil paintings hung on the walls, original artwork.

We sat at the kitchen table and smiled.

*"How did you know I was here?"*

*"Deaf Aids. If a doorbell rings the lamps would flash slowly. If the telephone rings, the lamps would flash fast. Those pictures that my youngest sister Carol who is artist drew."*

*Silent News* and the *Dictionary of American Idioms for the Deaf* lay on the kitchen table. I picked up the dictionary and browsed through it.

*"Do you know many idioms?"* wrote Pearl.

*"I know all of these."*

*"Idioms confuse and cause a problem to have deep English communication. Now captions teach me. Before captions I don't understand TV."*

The telephone rang, and the lamps in the living room and bedroom began to flash. Pearl sat down at her desk and put the telephone handset



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on the keyboard device, a Krown Research Porta-Printer. It beeped as green fluorescent text flowed across its one-line screen and text printed on a strip of paper, like a receipt scrolling from a cash register. Pearl typed her reply, removed the handset, and hung up.

I sat on her sofa and wrote, *"What computer is that?"*

*"TTY, not computer."*

*"What does TTY stand for?"*

*"Telecom? Device for the Deaf. TDD or TTY. Before 1980 deafies must ask hearies to phone. Now all have TTY. This is new. \$600."*

I tried to imagine living without understanding television or being able to use a telephone.

*"When you call me you can call the telephone company MRC—Message Relay Centre. I have unlisted number. I don't want hearies to call without a TTY. Some deafies put number in phone book. Bad! Thieves know owner is deaf and rape if name of woman."*

*"I see a hearing aid on your shelf. You are not deaf."*

*"I am deaf. I understand nothing with a hearing aid. Only noise."* Pearl jammed her little finger in her ear and wiggled it to show me it was itchy. *"I never use hearing aid. School force kids to use. I did not like."*

*"You must have had a hearing test."*

*"Many. I tested myself too. I hear birds fly, stars twinkle, and sun shine. Do you understand?"* Pearl smiled. *"But I can't hear my TV without captions."*

I laughed. Pearl fascinated me. She pulled a folder from her neatly labeled files and handed me an audiology report. It charted a trace of hearing at low frequencies in her right ear and no hearing whatsoever in her left. Pearl's ears were useless.

I pointed to the chart. *"140 decibels in your good ear. You hear a jet fly like I hear a pin drop."*

Pearl put a battery in her hearing aid, put it in *my* right ear, and turned it on. Feedback made it howl painfully loudly. I removed it.

*"My breathing sounds like a vacuum cleaner!"*

*"Ha, your problem. Maple syrup spareribs are ready. My favorite."*

We took turns writing and eating.

*"You need a decoder to see CC. When I was a child I could not*

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