



The Zookeeper's Wife: A War Story

By Diane Ackerman

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The *New York Times* bestseller soon to be a major motion picture starring Jessica Chastain.

A true story in which the keepers of the Warsaw Zoo saved hundreds of people from Nazi hands.

After their zoo was bombed, Polish zookeepers Jan and Antonina Zabinski managed to save over three hundred people from the Nazis by hiding refugees in the empty animal cages. With animal names for these "guests," and human names for the animals, it's no wonder that the zoo's code name became "The House Under a Crazy Star." Best-selling naturalist and acclaimed storyteller Diane Ackerman combines extensive research and an exuberant writing style to re-create this fascinating, true-life story?sharing Antonina's life as "the zookeeper's wife," while examining the disturbing obsessions at the core of Nazism. Winner of the 2008 Orion Award. 8 pages of illustrations

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The Zookeeper's Wife: A War Story By Diane Ackerman Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Significant Seven, September 2007: On the heels of Alan Weisman's *The World Without Us* I picked up Diane Ackerman's *The Zookeeper's Wife*. Both books take you to Poland's forest primeval, the Bialowieza, and paint a richly textured portrait of a natural world that few of us would recognize. The similarities end there, however, as Ackerman explores how that sense of natural order imploded under the Nazi occupation of Poland. Jan and Antonina Zabiniski--keepers of the Warsaw Zoo who sheltered Jews from the Warsaw ghetto--serve as Ackerman's lens to this moment in time, and she weaves their experiences and reflections so seamlessly into the story that it would be easy to read the book as Antonina's own miraculous memoir. Jan and Antonina's passion for life in all its diversity illustrates ever more powerfully just how narrow the Nazi worldview was, and what tragedy it wreaked. *The Zookeeper's Wife* is a powerful testament to their courage and--like Irene Nemirovsky's *Suite Francaise*--brings this period of European history into intimate view. --Anne Bartholomew

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Ackerman (*A Natural History of the Senses*) tells the remarkable WWII story of Jan Zabinski, the director of the Warsaw Zoo, and his wife, Antonina, who, with courage and coolheaded ingenuity, sheltered 300 Jews as well as Polish resisters in their villa and in animal cages and sheds. Using Antonina's diaries, other contemporary sources and her own research in Poland, Ackerman takes us into the Warsaw ghetto and the 1943 Jewish uprising and also describes the Poles' revolt against the Nazi occupiers in 1944. She introduces us to such varied figures as Lutz Heck, the duplicitous head of the Berlin zoo; Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, spiritual head of the ghetto; and the leaders of Zegota, the Polish organization that rescued Jews. Ackerman reveals other rescuers, like Dr. Mada Walter, who helped many Jews pass, giving lessons on how to appear Aryan and not attract notice. Ackerman's writing is viscerally evocative, as in her description of the effects of the German bombing of the zoo area: ...the sky broke open and whistling fire hurtled down, cages exploded, moats rained upward, iron bars squealed as they wrenched apart. This suspenseful beautifully crafted story deserves a wide readership. 8 pages of illus. (Sept.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Jan Zabinski, the innovative director of the Warsaw Zoo, and Antonina, his empathic wife, lived joyfully on the zoo grounds during the 1930s with their young son, Ryszard (Polish for lynx), and a menagerie of animals needing special attention. The zoo was badly damaged by the Nazi blitzkrieg, and their bit of paradise would have been utterly destroyed but for the director of the Berlin Zoo, Lutz Heck, who wanted Jan's help in resurrecting extinct "pure-blooded species" in pursuit of Aryan perfection in the animal kingdom. Resourceful and courageous, the Zabinskis turned the decimated zoo into a refuge and saved the lives of several hundred imperiled Jews. Ackerman has written many stellar works, including *A Natural History of the Senses* (1990) and *An Alchemy of Mind* (2004), but this is the book she was born to write. Sharing the Zabinskis' knowledge of and reverence for the natural world and drawing on her poet's gift for dazzling metaphor, she captures with breathtaking precision and discernment our kinship with animals, the barbarity of war, Antonina's unbounded kindness and keen delight in "life's sensory bazaar," Jan's daring work with the Polish Underground, and the audacity of the Zabinskis' mission of mercy. An exemplary work of scholarship and an "ecstasy of imagining," Ackerman's affecting telling of the heroic Zabinskis' dramatic story illuminates the profound connection between humankind and nature, and celebrates life's beauty, mystery, and tenacity. Seaman, Donna

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Cheryl Alexander:

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Pauline Lipman:

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