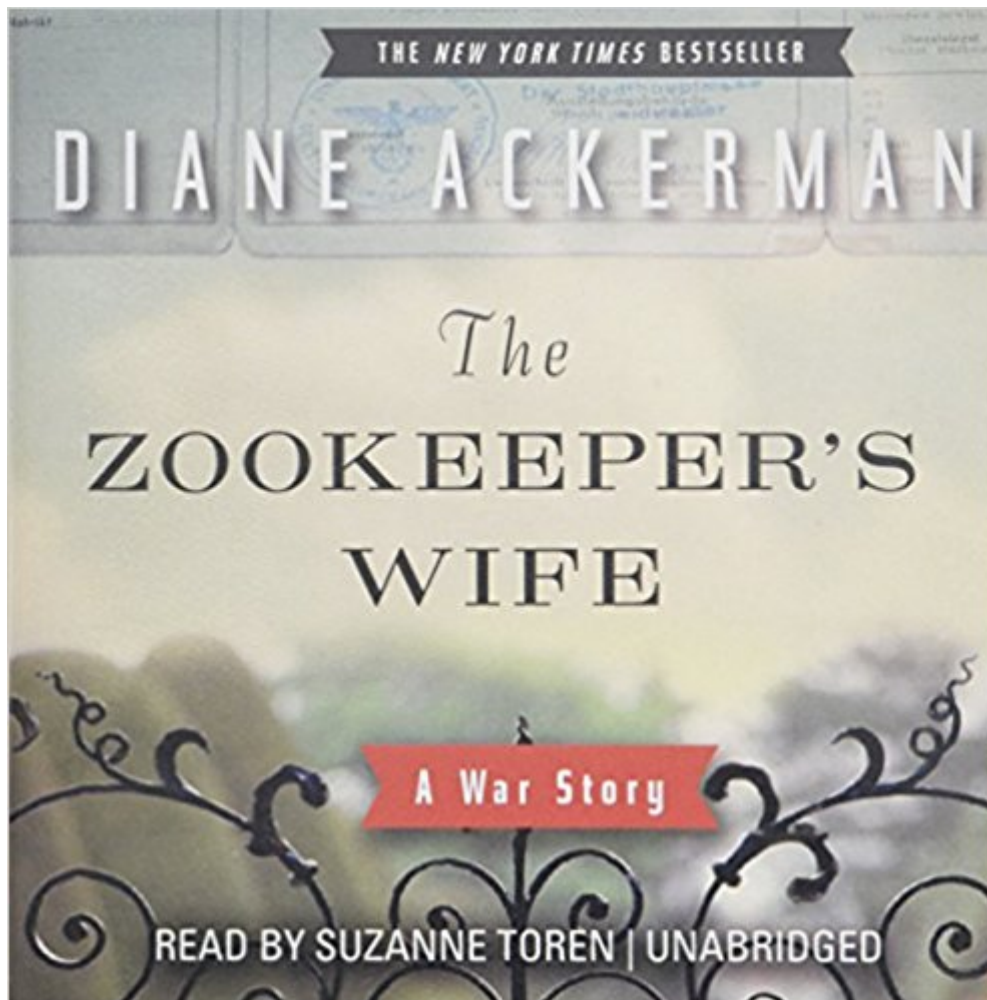


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# The Zookeeper's Wife



## Synopsis

[Read by Suzanne Toren] Combining historical sources with the diary of Antonina Zabinski, Diane Ackerman recreates the story of the Polish family who defied the Nazi regime to shelter, refugees, resistance, and animals. Jan and Antonina Zabinski were Polish Christian zookeepers horrified by Nazi racism, who managed to save over three hundred people. Yet their story has fallen between the seams of history. Drawing on Antonina's diary and other historical sources, bestselling naturalist Diane Ackerman vividly re-creates Antonina's life as "the zookeeper's wife," responsible for her own family, the zoo animals, and their "guests": resistance activists and refugee Jews, many of whom Jan had smuggled from the Warsaw Ghetto. Jan led a cell of saboteurs, and the Zabinski's young son risked his life carrying food to the guests, while also tending to an eccentric array of creatures in the house (pigs, hare, muskrat, foxes, and more). With hidden people having animal names, and pet animals having human names, it's a small wonder the zoo's code name became "The House under a Crazy Star." Yet there is more to this story than a colorful cast. With her exquisite sensitivity to the natural world, Ackerman explores the role of nature in both kindness and savagery, and she unravels the fascinating and disturbing obsession at the core of Nazism: both a worship of nature and its violation, as humans sought to control the genome of the entire planet.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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 --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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 Żegota, 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.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

*The Zookeeper's Wife*, a true story set in Warsaw, Poland at the onset of WWII, is both horrifying and endearing on a scale I've not experienced in years. Antonina lives with her husband and small son in a villa on the zoo grounds. They are extremely knowledgeable about the animals in their care; each one with their individual quirks, and all loved like family. The zoo is well ahead of its time in providing natural habitats for its residents. Laid out

like a lush garden, it's as if it were a world famous showplace, a haven for both people and animals. Then the Nazis come with their tanks and bombs and total disregard for life. Drunken Gestapo agents shoot animals in their cages for sport. A pig the son is caring for is snatched away and butchered. But somehow the family manages, by one clever ploy after another, to remain at the villa where they daringly rescue Jews and work in the resistance. Yet through all the fear and deprivation, the spirit triumphs. Yes, at times Ackerman indulges in excessive scene-setting, eulogizing linden trees, for instance. Or she'll go off on a pages-long explanatory tangent - which, despite my impatient nature, nearly always proved fascinating. But all-in-all, I'd have to rank *The Zookeeper's Wife* right up there with Leon Uris' *Mila 18* for a story that will haunt you forever.

I wanted to like this book. The premise is great and I like that the author tried to incorporate actual quotes from diaries and other historical sources into the story. Unfortunately, this is a case of an author who desperately needed a more assertive editor. There were very long and boring tangents that lost my attention. I put this book down/away multiple times and even considered not finishing it, but then forced myself to finish it because I was reading it for my book club. The thing that I despised most about the book was the changing voice in the writing. Sometimes it was told in first person and then it would suddenly shift to third person. In other words, it would say, "So and so did such and such", and then, "She probably felt X based on this passage" (that would then include a quote from her diary). I would have been OK with either writing style, but the constant switching back and forth was irritating.

Some readers say this book jumps around explaining reasons for others or herself, reasons for thinking or acting a certain way, but I completely enjoyed this. I felt the book explanations were very fit and needed. These events in Poland were not only horrible, but complex. Just the trust of neighbors alone were enough, but being involved in the underground and hiding of the Jews. I can't imagine how she kept it together! You're going to enjoy this!

Fantastic book! It does a great job of talking about the war, the Zabinskis, the people they helped, and the animals all together seamlessly! Can't wait to see the movie.

I was waiting to see the movie before I wrote my review.....This book was amazing.....I learned so much about what Warsaw Poland had to deal with during WW2.....it is unbelievable how they accomplished all they did and how many were saved because of this underground network....and

this family's willingness to help....they must have all been terrorized fearing what could happen if they were caught....the people and their helpers were an amazing group of people.....I kept trying to picture our (US) having to go through something like this.....it's horrifying.....the parts about the actual zoo and the animals and the ones they kept in their homes....was a nice touch to add some pleasure among so much heartache.....and what they did to those poor animals.....well, between the people and the animals.....I cried many times....I had to shut the book sometimes.....because I was so sad....It is on my list as one of my favorite books I have read.....now to the movie.....I think it is always better to read the book first.....you learn so much...that being said.....no movie has ever been as good as the book....because they just couldn't make a two hour movie and get everything in the movie.....the movie, however, was very disappointing.....I think they could have done a much better job....if you don't want to be disappointed, I'd read the book and forget about the movie....the book is amazing and so well written.....if you only see the movie, you will be missing out on the entire experience that the book avails you.....you will not really have learned anything about this chapter in WW2.....

Surprisingly easy fast read, but was sad by how much cruelty the zoo animals & pets kept facing. Was pleased though by how the story developed to include the whole occupation of Warsaw by Germany, felt like a very interesting history assignment. So glad I read this but my heart feels numb.

The Zookeeper's Wife tells the true story of Antonina and Jan Zabinski and the horrors they experienced in Nazi occupied Poland during WWII. Antonina and Jan were keepers of the Warsaw zoo and they along with their young son were able to save the lives of 300 Jewish people even though they were within close proximity of the Nazi soldiers at all times. The author, Diane Ackerman, did an excellent job of researching this little known story of extreme heroism by talking to those involved including the son to get first person witness accounts of the bravery and courage of the Zabinski family amid inconceivable hardship and deprivation.

A well written story about WW II in Poland. I was captivated immediately and never lost interest.

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