

Book Review

Words in My Hands: A Teacher, A Deaf-Blind Man, An Unforgettable Journey
by Diane Chambers. 263 pages.

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When I agreed to read and review Ms. Chambers' book, I expected something like *Tuesdays With Morrie*. A little volume of reminiscences, celebrating the precious frailty of life and the human spirit, blah blah blah. *Mea Culpa*, I know, but that's what I expected.

What I got was, indeed, all that, and a whole lot more. Ms. Chambers has woven four stories together into one inspirational book. The first and foremost is, of course, the story of her teacher-student relationship with the 86-year-old deaf-blind Bert Riedel, and her quest to reconnect him to life through signing communication. Fleshing out that narrative is his personal history, gathered from friends and relatives, bringing him alive to us not as a subject but as a human being, surrounded by his own universe of memories and experiences, and with his own particular philosophy of life. The third story is the history of the author and how she came to be an interpreter for the deaf as well as their advocate. And through it all is interwoven the history of the Deaf community, American Sign Language, and the hearing world's perception and treatment of the deaf.

These four stories combine to produce many *Aha!* moments. Ms. Chambers' explanation of what obstacles the deaf/blind experience in their everyday lives goes beyond the merely obvious. I have had experience with deaf and blind in my teaching life. I do not consider myself naïve nor insensitive to their problems. Yet over and over again while reading this book, I found myself stopping and saying to myself, "I never knew that. I never even thought of that."

Ms. Chambers is a writer. Never pretentious or awkward, her story flows easily towards its inevitable conclusion. A bonus is her footnoted references (which never get in the way of the reading), and her extensive bibliography, which ranges from Erma Bombeck to scholarly dissertations for those inclined to further study.

When I agreed to read *Words in My Hands*, I expected something like *Tuesdays With Morrie*. What I didn't expect, but got anyway, was a book I really enjoyed reading, that taught me more than one book should be able to teach me, and, yes, that left me feeling good about the precious frailty of life and the human spirit. It also reminded me of who I am and why I do what I do. That's a lot for a small package.

Words in My Hands is available from Ellexa Press, LLC, 32262 Steven Way, Conifer, CO 80433, for \$15.95 plus \$4.20 shipping and handling, or visit them at www.ellexapress.CityMax.com.