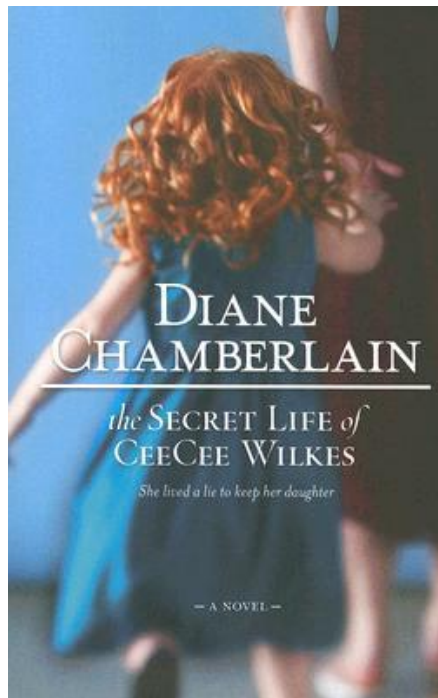




The Secret Life of CeeCee Wilkes

Diane Chamberlain

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In 1977, pregnant Genevieve Russell disappeared. Twenty years later, her remains are discovered and Timothy Gleason is charged with murder. But there is no sign of the unborn child.

CeeCee Wilkes knows how Genevieve Russell died, because she was there. And she knows what happened to her missing infant, because two decades ago she made the devastating choice to raise the baby as her own. Now Timothy Gleason is facing the death penalty, and she has another choice to make. Tell the truth and destroy her family. Or let an innocent man die in order to protect a lifetime of lies.

The Secret Life of CeeCee Wilkes Details

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Author : Diane Chamberlain

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From Reader Review The Secret Life of CeeCee Wilkes for online ebook

Lisa says

I loved this book. It was so hard to put down. If I had not needed sleep, I would have read it in one sitting.

Cate says

The worst sort of crossover novel--the only reason I am glad I read it as an ebook is that some trees were spared. It is to literature what Cheez Whiz in a can is to a triple cream brie. This is not a book for reading; this is a book for avoiding.

That's right, I didn't like it.

What is it that makes this book so painful to read? Is it the utter unbelievability of the plot? The flatness of the characters? The awkward and embarrassing writing and the gratuitous and entirely off-putting "romance?" Could it be that the mix of all of these is what makes the whole so toxic?

The book starts with the late afternoon lovemaking of the presumably agoraphobic Corinne and her fiance of five years, Ken. Corinne wants to tell Ken her "big news"--she drove on a freeway today! But he doesn't like to be talked to before sex, or afterwards, either. He's also not terribly happy that she's pregnant, and he's not willing to set a wedding date. So after an entirely unsexy sex scene, and the nap, Ken finds out that he's been taken off a news story for some reason that his boss doesn't explain. Cory's phone is full of missed calls and unlistened-to voicemails. Something is going on with some other people we don't know, and there's going to be a press conference.

And suddenly, we're back in 1977 with a 16 year old diner waitress in North Carolina: the titular CeeCee Wilkes. She meets her soul mate, a 22 year old psychology student named Tim Gleason. CeeCee's mother passed away four years ago, and CeeCee's only recently sprung from her series of bad foster homes and is living on her own. Tim's parents are also dead, but he's living in their mansion with his PTSD Vietnam vet brother Marty--CeeCee thinks Marty is creepy, but finds personal fulfillment in cleaning up after the Slovenly Brothers. Dirty underwear draped over the edges of bureau drawers? No problem, because they are *Tim's* dirty underwear.

But there's another sibling--the missing Andi, who is in prison on death row for murdering a photographer who came to the house one day and raped her. So the Slovenly Brothers' Brain Trust comes up with a plan to commute her sentence: they will kidnap the governor's wife and hold her hostage until Andi is freed (I guess? Not clear if they'd accept life without parole). But they need CeeCee to be the guard.

Why does she agree to do this? Because there would presumably be no book if she doesn't. Oh, sure, there's some "twoo wuv" mumbo jumbo, but it's not even remotely credible. They Brainy Boys tell her they are part of a group called SCAPE, and some of those members are going to help. It's going to all work out just fine--they'll get the governor to cave into their demands in about half an hour, they'll all go underground and change their identities.

The only question CeeCee really wants an answer to is "how will we be together after this all goes down?" She never gets it. But she agrees.

And at this point? I gave up. I went to the library and spent about 40 minutes scanning the rest of the book. And I only did that because this is for my book club.

The governor's wife is eight and a half months pregnant, and prone to hemorrhaging. CeeCee is left alone with no phone, no way to contact the Smart Boys, and of course the woman goes into labor, hemorrhages and dies. CeeCee delivers the baby and runs away with it. This happens in about 8 hours. We are then treated to tedious chapters of how CeeCee changes her name, covers her tracks, relies on the kindness of strangers and grows up, raising the baby (Corinne--had you guessed it?) as her own.

Blah blah blah--a skeleton is discovered when breaking ground for a subdivision. Within seconds, dental records confirm it is the governor's wife, missing these 30 years. Twelve hours later, Tim Gleason is located in California, extradited to North Carolina, and now CeeCee/Eve watches the proceedings on television, worried that Tim will name her.

When he doesn't, she does it herself, setting up a mother-daughter drama of betrayal and lies of a melodramatic and self-indulgent sort. Not only did my mom lie to me about who my real family was, but she also made me OCD! That bitch! But Eve's got rheumatoid arthritis, so she's especially pathetic in prison, so that's enough to reconcile them. Plus, the governor is easily manipulated into giving up his quest for vengeance--carefully raised and nurtured all the years his wife was missing--after a 45 second conversation with Cory. (So--maybe the scheme to force him to release Andi *might* have worked?

Everybody has a happy ending, Cory gets to have TWO! families that love her and want to give her money and support and yadda yadda, and she finds out her fiance of the last 5 years never actually got around to divorcing his wife and she decides she doesn't need him and by the way, she's over her agoraphobia without therapy or medication either. But she keeps the baby and blah blah blah resolutioncakes.

All this in under 250 pages--and I didn't even mention that CeeCee's dead mother wrote her a bunch of letters as she lay dying, for CeeCee to open at various times in her life, so she could offer guidance. Too bad it didn't occur to her to write a letter about not appearing in bad novels.

Britany says

What a twisted web of lies that was spun... slowly losing control, and finally letting it catch up to you...

CeeCee Wilkes met a handsome man while waitressing at a diner. Tim Gleason was 12 years older than her and quickly had CeeCee wrapped around his finger. She was sixteen, and made a decision that would haunt the rest of her life. A scheme to kidnap the Governor's wife goes horribly wrong and CeeCee makes a decision that will impact everyone's future. Twenty years pass, and just when she thinks she's put this behind her-- It comes back up into the news.

I was wavering between 3-4 stars on this one. Couldn't put it down once I started it, but the ending felt rushed and a little too perfect for me. I struggled to believe that Cory would completely abandon her family to fall for Ken- didn't seem realistic to me, and while I appreciated the ending, I also felt rushed through it all, and it didn't feel quite as legitimate as the rest of the book was.

One thing is certain: I will be reading more by Ms. Chamberlain!

Julie (jjmachshev) says

What makes a mother? Genes? Childbirth? Love? And once a mother bonds with her child, is there anything that can break that bond? Diane Chamberlain's novel "The Secret Life of CeeCee Wilkes" gives us the story of a teenage mother and her child. But there's a lot more to it than just that and one small review can't possibly describe the incredible and fascinating twists and turns the story takes.

CeeCee's mother died when she was just twelve. But she left her daughter a legacy of letters. Each letter intended for different days, some special some not, in CeeCee's future life. And each chapter in this book that's about CeeCee opens with quotes or paragraphs from one of those letters. An intelligent and gifted child, CeeCee completes her schooling early and is currently working towards getting into college and waiting tables when the book opens. But CeeCee is starving for love and naïve as only a 16 year old can be. Even when the reader sees the train wreck coming, you still wince and want to rail at CeeCee for her actions. Her love and longing for love results in her involvement in an unspeakable crime—at 16. Now, she's on the run with a newborn and before she can figure a way out of this mess, she's in love again...with the newborn she names Cory. Thus begins the live of Eve, formerly CeeCee.

Eve lives as a single mother and eventually loves and marries. But she can never stop looking over her shoulder. And 26 years later, the dead mother's body is discovered. Now a man stands accused of murder and CeeCee/Eve is the only one who can prevent his death. To admit her involvement will destroy her family and their careers. To do nothing will destroy her.

As I read this story, I found myself trying to think of what I would have done if I were CeeCee. Lured into something she would never have considered...except for love. Forced into circumstances she could never have imagined...except for love. Then trying to build a life and find some happiness. And finally having to make decisions I couldn't imagine in my worst nightmare. Does this make her strong? Or weak? Ms. Chamberlain's ability to blur the absolute lines of right and wrong is incredible. Her portrayal of life in a southern college town is scarily bang on. Her characters become people you know or people you would like to know, to talk to, to ask questions of. But you're still aware it's fiction. And you quietly thank whatever deity you prefer that it is.

"the Secret Life of CeeCee Wilkes" is about motherhood and mothers. It's about family and what makes a family. It's about love and forgiveness and repentance. This is a book I'm glad I read. It made me think and made me reconsider absolutes. This is one I can't recommend highly enough for those who are looking for more than a quick escape read...because this is surely not that. But it is a book that will draw out your emotions from one end of the scale to the other. And sometimes...that's just what we need.

Kelly says

Wow, I could not put this book down! This book would make a great movie. I can't wait to read others by Diane Chamberlain!

Marina says

I reluctantly abandoned this book at about 60% as it'd become a chore rather than a pleasure to read. It felt very long – like I'd been reading it for months and, apart from events at the beginning of the book which had been pretty much flagged up in the blurb, nothing much seemed to happen. I guess it's a story about relationships but, aside from the letters from the mother to her child(which I enjoyed) I found the relationships pretty dull. And the bits about SCAPE seemed far-fetched. It just didn't work for me.

Sherri Thacker says

This is my 5th book by Diane Chamberlain and once again, I love another one of her books. She drew me in from the very first page to the very last page and I could not put it down! 5 stars!!

Andrea says

Generously rounding up to 3 Stars

Unpopular opinion.....

I struggled though this one. All the primary characters I disliked, making one bad decision after the next. I couldn't find sympathy...ugh.

BUT...this will not deter me from Chamberlain's books. I have loved all the others.

♥ Marlene♥ says

I have read more than 100 pages and to be honest I think the story line is making no sense what so ever. Totally unrealistic. So stupid.Can't say more without spoilers, so I will shut up. For now!. Not sure if I can finish this book with so many idiots in it.

Update May 17 2012: Well, I nearly quit reading this book after what I wrote above.Glad I stucked with it, only because there were so many raving reviews.

What I do not like:

The story is crazy, very unrealistic: Especially the kidnapping. It was so weird, giving a 16 year old such a big job to do while she did not know what she had to do. If you are kidnapping someone,you want to be sure the person who is in care of the prisoner, can handle his or her own. In this book that was not the case at all.

2: The coincidences all through this book. 1 example: All of a sudden the husband of the kidnapper pops up to be the president of the school where Eva is teaching.

If this is not enough, then her daughter go's to the exact same school Ceecee was in. Come on now!

What I do like about this book:

I like that her subjects are not doing the most obvious things. I liked that Eve's daughter did not like her

mum, and that Eve made a lot of mistakes bringing her up. Normally the main character is the best mum on the planet. I liked the mental illnesses that were in this book.

I am not done yet. Still have to read about 30% but it is getting better and better.

Update May 18 2012. Okay finished it. I think this is a book I would consider a beach read. It is easy to read, sometimes it can be annoying but if you do not expect too much it is a nice read. Sometimes I am in the mood for easy reads so I will try another Diane Chamberlain book. 3.5 stars.

Alison says

Overall, a really great book. Despite the gumption she often showed as a teenager, with all of her big plans, I really believed that CeeCee was still naive enough to succumb to Tim's charms.

My one criticism is in the character development of Cory during the last quarter of the novel. CeeCee/Eve was incredibly fleshed-out as a character, but I found Cory a bit lacking. First, the transition of her from a girl too scared to stay in college at Chapel Hill alone to one that cuts off her family completely to move in with a boyfriend is just too fast. Perhaps it would take a separate novel to illustrate the complicated Cory-and-Ken relationship. Then, I didn't really believe Cory's initial reaction to the revelation that she was Russell's daughter. She got to the "Will they accept me?" question far too quickly.

Still, a pretty fantastic book!

?Susan? says

3.5 stars for me. This was a pretty good "what if" book. A young girl who has not had a proper bringing up, is duped into doing something for love that changes many lives. It's hard to pick a side of right or wrong in this one and it's hard not to say too much without revealing the plot. Good writing and good narrative.

Mariah says

This was my July Pick-For-Me book for Goodreads' Bibliophile Beauties Group (<https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/...>). I get really nervous when someone picks a book for me because on my to-read list I have a lot of popular reads and they always select one that is extremely popular, just like this book. Most of the time I end up being disappointed because the hype doesn't actually match the quality of the book. BUT this book's hype did!

This was an extremely good book! 4.5 stars!! I rounded up to 5.

Now onto the book:

This was a 500-page page-turner. I felt so attached to this book by the end and caught my self a couple of times tearing up. The sadness that CeeCee experienced as a kid and her youngness and wanting for love was heartbreaking. I believe a lot of young criminals that act with older people had exactly the same experience that CeeCee had. All she wanted was to be loved again.

The letters of love and advice from CeeCee's mom throughout the book was really touching and it gave great

knowledge to CeeCee's mother.

The love that Eve and Cory had was amazing. Reading about how Cory realizes that her mother did the best that she could to raise her, and she shouldn't resent her mother for that was amazing. As a daughter this really opened my eyes and will stay with me for a long time.

This book also taught me that blood is one thing and that helps set the bond between people, but so does being there for each other. And being a part of each others' lives. You don't have to be blood related to be a family.

All in all, this book was amazing and I highly suggest it to everyone. It had great: strong female role models, well developed characters and a lot of life lessons (without making you realize it).

I am so glad this book was picked for me because to top it all off, it is also my S book for the A-Z challenge. (I just realized that while writing this review- hehe!)

Aoibhinn says

Set in the state of North Carolina, *The Lost Daughter* tells the story of a vulnerable and naive sixteen-year-old orphan, CeeCee Wilkes, whose mother passed away when she was just twelve-years-old. CeeCee never knew who her father was, and after spending the past four years of her life in various foster homes, CeeCee finds herself working as a waitress in order to save money to eventually go to college. Due to her mother's death and her years in foster care, CeeCee is starving for love and affection. This need in her results in CeeCee falling for a despicable man, Tim Gleeson, who seduces and manipulates her and gets her involved in an unspeakable crime. Soon CeeCee finds herself having to change her name and identity and go on the run with a newborn baby girl. CeeCee can never stop looking over her shoulder as she finds herself having to live a life riddled with lies to try to hide her past crime.

The novel is compelling and captivating with a lot of unexpected twists and turns throughout the plot. The book was completely unpredictable; I just couldn't predict what was going to happen next. I was engrossed from the very first page, which is something that doesn't happen to me very often. I found Diane Chamberlain's ability to blur the lines between right and wrong incredible. The author has a fantastic writing style which kept me gripped from chapter to chapter. The book really made me think about what I would have done in if I was in CeeCee's place. The moral questions it raises over and over again constantly make you question your own morals.

Diane Chamberlain's characters are all complex, interesting and well-defined, especially the characters of CeeCee and Cory. I found myself finding it easy to empathise with them. The novel follows CeeCee throughout 30 years of her life and I found it interesting how CeeCee changed over the course of the story. While I wouldn't make the choices CeeCee made, I understood why she did what she did and I truly believed that CeeCee had felt she had done the right thing.

Diane Chamberlain is often compared to Jodi Picoult, but in fact, she's is a much better writer than Picoult. This is one book that will have you thinking about it long after you've finished reading the final page. I really enjoyed this novel and I look forward to reading more of this author's books in the future!

A well-deserved five stars!

Please note, this novel as known as *The Lost Daughter* in Europe and as *The Secret Life of CeeCee Wilkes* in the United States.

Karen says

Why? Why do I do it to myself? Why do I, once a book finds its way onto my bookshelf, feel a personal responsibility to usher it safely, chapter-by-chapter, to Read-dom and its ultimate resting place (be that the 'favourites' bookshelf or the charity shop)?

The cover even warned me: "For fans of Jodi Picoult this is a must read". I've had my fill and then some of JP and her creative writing class assignments.

But somehow I'm still labouring under the misapprehension that, if only I could just get rid of the crap, my bookshelves would be an ambrosial orchard, heavy with literary fruits ripe for the re-reading.

More likely, I'll be lying on my deathbed saying, "I wish I hadn't read so much shit"...

Trish at Between My Lines says

This review was originally posted on [Between My Lines]

Two facts about The Lost Daughter by Diane Chamberlain

Fact 1 : It is known as The Secret Life Of CeeCee Wilkes in the US (no idea why it's different over here, I prefer the US title).

Fact 2 : It is an emotional timebomb. The counter starts ticking on page one and it's just a matter of time until you explode with some very messy conflicting feels.

First Line of The Lost Daughter by Diane Chamberlain:

"She couldn't concentrate on making love."

My Thoughts on The Lost Daughter by Diane Chamberlain:

In some ways this is a very typical Diane Chamberlain book. It features complex characters, moral dilemmas, social workers and family life. But even though it has all the typical elements, her books never feel the same. And that is because her characters are so unique and so lifelike that they draw you and demand all your attention to their story.

CeeCee is the main character in this book and when we meet her she is sixteen years old. Her beloved mother died when she was twelve and since then she has lived in various foster homes. So when she meets Tim, she is gullible and screaming out to be loved. He has his own agenda and uses CeeCee to further his own goals without much thought for the consequences for her.

“You got dealt some crappy cards. But you're the one who has to decide how to play them.”

CeeCee finds herself out of her depth and it all ends with her living under a false identity to hide her past. In some ways I want to reach into the pages and shake sense into her. In other ways, I remember what it was like to be sixteen and in love for the first time and how much you just want to please that person. So I understand just why she did what she did. And I tore up inside for how conflicted and torn she was by her decisions.

“She felt happy these days, yet there was always an undercurrent of sadness just below the surface”

What I love about this book is that CeeCee makes awful decisions but is the very opposite of an awful person. She is a tough cookie in many ways and she suffers endlessly for her youthful impulsiveness. This is a book that puts you in her shoes and you do wonder what you would do if you were her. Despite her regrets, she build a new life and it is a fulfilling life with love and laughter. Unfortunately, in books and in life, secrets never stay buried for long and she is going to have to face the past with devastating consequences for all those who love her.

“The cost of doing something would be terrific; the cost of doing nothing even greater.”

This all makes no sense if you haven't read the book. So I think I'll shut up now and just tell you go read the book if you want an emotional read with memorable characters.

Who should read The Lost Daughter by Diane Chamberlain?

I strongly recommend this book to you if you like well-developed characters, books that make you face moral dilemmas and books about being a mother. Fans of Diane Chamberlain's other books should also enjoy this one. I'd also recommend if you like authors such as Liane Moriarty or Jodi Picoult.

Talk to Trish: If you knew a secret that would tear up your family, would you reveal it or keep quiet? Even if keeping quiet is the morally wrong thing to do? Quite honestly, I don't know. I might just zip my lips to protect those I love. I'd love to hear your thoughts, especially if you've read the book.