

The Perks of Being a Wallflower Study Guide

The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Perks of Being a Wallflower Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Part 1.....	4
Part 2.....	10
Part 3.....	17
Part 4 and Epilogue.....	23
Characters.....	31
Objects/Places.....	34
Themes.....	36
Style.....	39
Quotes.....	42
Topics for Discussion.....	44



Plot Summary

"The Perks of Being A Wallflower" by Stephen Chbosky is the story of Charlie, a young teen who is socially immature, inept, and suffers from ongoing emotional issues. The book is presented in an epistolary format, which tells the story in a series of letters from Charlie to an anonymous source who is never identified. The story takes place during Charlie's year of transition from middle-school to high school student.

Charlie lives at home with his mother, father, older brother, and older sister. He loves his parents and his siblings. He lives in the shadow of his older brother who was a high school football star and won an athletic scholarship to Penn State. His father openly idolizes his older son for his athletic prowess which makes the small, fragile Charlie suffer from low self-image and confusion. But Charlie is not a wimp by any standard. Charlie stands up to and gets into a fist fight with a bully despite the relative size disparity. And when one of Charlie's best friends, Patrick, is embroiled in a fight in which he is outnumbered five to one, Charlie steps in to help him.

Charlie has been haunted for years after the passing of his Aunt Helen who lived with the family. Helen had many personal problems that led to drug and alcohol abuse. Once she was rehabbed, she moved in with Charlie's family. Charlie became very close to his aunt who always told him how special he was, was always attentive and affectionate with him and spoiled him at every chance she got. When Aunt Helen was killed in an automobile accident on one Christmas Eve night, Charlie plummeted into a psychological decline from which he never fully recovered. Part of Charlie's problems centered around the pervasive secrecy that was baked into the family. There were just certain things that could not be discussed like abuse, sex, and homosexuality and the expression of one's emotions and opinions was never encouraged. In the tradition of his family, Charlie learned to be a secret-keeper.

Although Charlie was initially friendless at his new school, he was able to make a connection with Patrick, a social outcast himself, who was a senior. Through Patrick, Charlie met Sam, his step-sister, and a small circle of other friends with whom Charlie eventually becomes close. To Charlie, Sam was the perfect girl. She was beautiful and nice to him and actually listened to what he had to say. The friends eventually brought Charlie out of his shell and his tendency to keep secrets won their praise. In fact, they toasted him one night for seeing and not telling - for being the perfect wallflower.

Through his journey of self-discovery sparked by his new and positive friendships and unlocking memories that were repressed and buried for years, Charlie finally gets to the heart of the issues that had been plaguing him for years. When he finally meets his demons, Charlie is able to begin the difficult steps toward full recovery and ultimately liberation from his past.



Part 1

Part 1 Summary

August 25, 1991

Charlie wrote an anonymous letter to an unnamed person. He reached out to this person because he was told that this person would listen and understand and wasn't the type to sleep around. Charlie and other students at his school were upset about the suicide of another student, Michael Dobson. A counselor met with Charlie and other students who were friendly with Michael to allow them to express their feelings. Charlie said that it was painful because no one knew why Michael killed himself. The counselor said that Michael had problems at home and didn't have anyone to talk to. Charlie got upset and said the Michael could have talked to him. He became hysterical and soon his older brother came to take him home.

Charlie lived with his mother and father initially. His father worked hard and his mother took care of the family. His older brother played football at Penn State and his older sister was pretty and had lots of boyfriends. At one time, Aunt Helen had also lived with the family. Something bad happened to her but no one would tell Charlie what it was. When Charlie asked her, it always made her cry. One day his father slapped him for making Aunt Helen cry. His mother had a few glasses of wine and came to his room and told him what happened to Helen.

September 7, 1991

Charlie started high school and wrote that he didn't like it. Susan, who was in middle school with him, matured over the summer and even though she was smart, she acted dumb especially around boys. She stopped speaking to Charlie. She had been Michael's girlfriend, in fact, they were best friends just like he and Aunt Helen were. He was attacked by a boy named Sean. He remembered that his brother always told him to "Go for the knees, throat, and eyes." (7) He got the best of Sean. The other kids were unfriendly to him because he beat up Sean even though he was much smaller. Charlie's mother always urged him to do good in school so he could get a scholarship. His brother got an athletic scholarship. His father hoped that his brother would eventually become a pro and play for the Steelers. His sister was on her way to earning a scholastic scholarship. His mother didn't want to have to worry about trying to pay to send him to college. Charlie wasn't making any friends at school.

September 11, 1991

Charlie wrote that he was reading "To Kill a Mockingbird" for his advanced English class. His brother was featured on a television program. He really missed his brother.

September 16, 1991



Charlie finished reading "To Kill a Mockingbird" and it became his favorite book at least for the time being. Charlie's teacher told him to call him Bill when they weren't in class. His sister was part of the Earth Day Club which was how she met a lot of boys. She was mean to the boys but got away with it because she was pretty. Bill suggested that Charlie write an essay on "To Kill a Mockingbird." One evening when they were watching a movie, his sister got in an argument with a boyfriend. She accused him of being weak for not standing up to a bully. She pointed out that even Charlie had stood up to a bully. He became enraged and slapped her across the face. Charlie was shocked and just froze. He was surprised that his sister didn't react and didn't seem angry. His sister told him not to tell their parents. They seemed to get a long better after that. A few nights later, Charlie accidentally walked in on them in the basement. They were both naked and the boy was on top of his sister. Their parents seemed to think a lot of this boy because he was polite and paid compliments to his older brother on what a great football player he was.

September 18, 1991

Charlie wrote that he was in shop class and had submitted an essay on "To Kill a Mockingbird" into Bill. There was a boy in shop who was called "Nothing." Some kids called him "Patty" because his name was Patrick. He warned them to either call him Patrick or nothing. They chose to call him "nothing" and it stuck. Nothing was the funniest guy Charlie met since his brother left.

September 29, 1991

Charlie wrote that a lot of things had happened over the last two weeks and that most of these events were bad. Bill gave him a "c" for his essay because he ran his sentences together and didn't use the current class vocabulary words. Charlie never could understand why women like to read about movie stars they don't know. His mother reads the magazines. She's always worried about her weight. Charlie thought his mother was beautiful and his father would tell her that she was but she didn't seem to hear him.

Charlie didn't mind going to the cemetery with his mother where his Aunt Helen was buried. He recalled the times when he and his aunt and brother and sister would watch TV together. He recalled when they were all watching the final episode of the TV series, "MASH." Everyone was crying except him. He didn't know what was wrong. He even caught his father crying. His father told him to keep it a secret.

October 6, 1991

Charlie wrote that he went to the high school football game alone. He used to go with Michael before he committed suicide or with Susan before she found new friends. He spotted Nothing in the stands and went and sat by him and a pretty girl named Sam. They went out to eat afterward and both Nothing and Sam were nice to Charlie and interested in him. He was surprised to learn that they were step-brother and step-sister. Nothing, or Patrick, as he preferred being called, explained that his father had married



Sam's mother. Charlie decided he wanted to ask Sam out someday when he could drive. That night he had a dream about having sex with her and felt guilty.

October 14, 1991

Charlie eventually told Sam about having the dream about her. She just laughed and wasn't offended. Sam told him that she was too old for him and not to get any ideas about the two of them. Patrick explained some things to Charlie. He told him that girls like boys who present a challenge for them. Girls have magazines to read to learn how to act, Patrick told Charlie, which reminded him of the magazines his mother read.

At dances and even walking around school, he always saw boys and girls together but stayed in the background just wondering how it all worked. Bill noticed Charlie watching the other kids. He told Charlie that he might be "over-thinking" life. Thinking too much, he told him, could stop him from living. Charlie felt comfortable with Bill and told him about some of the problems he was experiencing at home - especially about his sister being hit by her boyfriend. Bill told him that people accept what they think they deserve. Bill told him that everything would be okay. When he got home, it was obvious that Bill had called his parents. His sister was crying and his father was telling her that she couldn't see that boy any more. He was going to talk to the boy's parents. His sister was upset, claiming that it was her fault that the boy hit her and that she was in love with him. But her father and mother both stood firm. She wouldn't be seeing him again. His sister told Charlie she hated him. His father wasn't an abusive man. He had only slapped him when he made his aunt cry that one time and he was sorry. He told Charlie he'd never touch him again and he didn't.

October 15, 1991

Charlie's father talked to the boy's parents and told them they didn't do a very good job in raising their son. They agreed to keep their son away from Charlie's sister. His sister was still mad at him. But he thought that his father did the right thing and he hoped that he had, too.

October 28, 1991

Charlie began trying to "participate" in life like Bill advised him to. He attended social events arranged by the school like football games and dances. After one game, Sam invited him to a party later that evening. Charlie had never been to a party. The only party he was part of was one at his house that his brother threw when their parents were out of town. He was a young kid but saw a lot of drinking and sex during the party. He witnessed one boy forcing a girl to do things she didn't want to do. It nauseated Charlie. It was a wild party that eventually brought in the police. Charlie's brother got into big trouble with their parents.

Charlie told Sam and Patrick about his brother's party. He realized that the boy had raped the girl. And now that same boy, Dave, was a big football hero who everyone loved. Charlie asked if they should go to the police. Sam said it was part of being in high school and that Dave and the girl were still together and in love. It made Charlie angry



when he saw them at a dance together. He felt like beating the boy up but instead let the air out of his tires.

After the football game, Sam, Patrick and Charlie drove to the party which was hosted by Bob who was already "baked." Everyone was drinking beer but Charlie declined the offer to have one. Brad, the football quarterback, was there. Everyone was older than Charlie but they were nice to him. Bob handed out brownies. They were laced with marijuana but Charlie had no idea and took one. The brownies tasted weird to Charlie but he ate it. Soon, it was obvious that he was stoned.

Sam and Patrick weren't in the room when Bob gave Charlie the brownie. When they realized what happened, Sam told Bob off and took Charlie to the kitchen to make him a milkshake and sober him up. Charlie needed to use the bathroom and walked in on Brad and Patrick kissing. Patrick got Charlie aside and told him to keep what he saw a secret. Brad didn't want people to know. By the end of the party, Brad had left and Patrick told everyone that Charlie was a wallflower. He saw things but kept quiet about them. They all raised a toast to Charlie.

Charlie noticed that Patrick and Brad didn't talk at the homecoming dance. Brad was there with a cheerleader. His sister was dancing with the boy who hit her even though she wasn't supposed to have anything to do with him. On the way home, Sam stood in the back of the truck and let the wind swirl around her as Patrick drove. They all screamed and laughed and felt infinite.

Part 1 Analysis

August 25, 1991

The character, Charlie, is a young boy in his early teens. He is having some emotional stress in his life. A friend committed suicide. There is some tension at home. His father favors an older son who is a football player. Charlie is small and does well scholastically. He probably feels his father is disappointed in him because he is not more like his older brother. He was particularly close to his Aunt Helen but there is a mystery about her - some tragic event happened to her that is not discussed openly by the family. There is mistrust and secrecy within the family.

September 7, 11, 1991

Charlie just entered high school and feels like a misfit. It is difficult for him to make friends. But there is a spirit within Charlie, he's small but he's mighty and doesn't take abuse from a bully at school. The family has some financial problems and there's pressure on Charlie to do well so he can get a scholastic scholarship because his parents can't afford to pay for his college. His older brother has an athletic scholarship playing football at Penn State. His older brother is the apple of his father's eyes. Charlie mentions that his best friend was his aunt - which was not particularly healthy for a maturing young boy. All his problems made him miss his brother more than he naturally would have. Since his brother left, Charlie got more focus which can be good and bad.



September 16 and 18, 1991

The secrecy that resides within the family is underscored when a boyfriend of Charlie's sister slaps her. The girl becomes more interested in the boy after he hits her and she tells Charlie not to tell their parents. He also sees them having sex and he knows to keep that a secret, too. He doesn't understand why his spirited sister didn't seem upset that the boy hit her. Charlie doesn't understand that his sister is suffering from low self-esteem and is in a toxic relationship. Their father likes the boy. The mother seems a little more reluctant about accepting him - almost as if she knows something.

September 29, 1991

Charlie sees that his mother does not have a good self-image. Even though he and his father think his mother is beautiful, she is always dieting and reading magazines about movie stars fantasizing about their "perfect" lives and appearances. Aunt Helen, who Charlie referred to as his best friend, died in the intervening years between Charlie at age seven and current day. There is a tragedy surrounding her but at this point it remains a mystery which foreshadows a yet unrevealed element of the story.

October 6, 1991

Charlie meets a pretty girl, Sam, to whom he is attracted. Part of her appeal is that she is nice to him and doesn't ignore him. He also finds friendship with another social outcast, Nothing aka Patrick.

October 14 and 15, 1991

Sam, Patrick and Bill all see that Charlie is suffering socially and try to help him. During his talk with Bill, he tells him about problems at home including the abuse that his sister suffered from her boyfriend. Bill did the right thing and told Charlie's parents about the situation his sister was in. Even though his sister is upset and tells Charlie she hates him, he did the right thing and his actions served to protect his sister from abuse. One of the family's secrets was revealed and it may serve to bring the family closer together and make them more willing to share their pain.

October 28, 1991

After talking with his older friends, Sam and Patrick, Charlie realizes that he had witnessed a rape at a party his brother had when their parents were out of town. He is confused when Sam tells him that those kind of experiences are just part of high school and growing up. He is further confused and angered when he sees the "rapist" with the girl, who is now in love with him and his girlfriend. The anger probably comes from his still conflicted feelings over his sister's strange acceptance of abuse and her "love" for the boy who abused her.

At Bob's party, Charlie witnesses a gay encounter between two boys - one of whom is the high school quarterback which flies in the face of his father's adoration for the manly sport. Again, Charlie is confronted with someone asking him to keep something a



secret. To encourage him to remain silent, the other kids toast him and dub him with the dubious nickname of "wallflower." They laud him for seeing and not telling but it will only compel Charlie to be more secretive. When Charlie lets out the air in the "rapist's" tires, he shows his anger in a passive-aggressive manner.



Part 2

Part 2 Summary

November 5, 1991

Charlie wrote about Mary Elizabeth, one of the girls at the party. She was a Zen Buddhist and told Charlie how she was connected to everything - the grass and the dogs - everything in nature. Patrick told Charlie about his relationship with Brad. They had met at a party and there was an immediate strong attraction between them and they started fooling around in the basement. At school, Brad tried to blame the incident on his being drunk. Another party followed where they fooled around with each other and again Brad blamed it on drink. Brad remained remote from Patrick at school and even stopped speaking to him there. At one party during the summer, they had sex after which Brad cried uncontrollably. He was so upset that Patrick called Brad's parents and said he was sick and needed to be picked up. Brad's parents sent him to rehab for his drinking and drugging. They didn't want him to miss his chance for a football scholarship. He avoided Patrick for a while but eventually they would meet secretly. Brad still ignored Patrick at school and Patrick put up with it.

November 8, 1991

Charlie began improving his writing skills and getting better grades from Bill. He toyed with the idea of becoming a writer and even started working for a fanzine called "Punk Rocky." Sam and Patrick took Charlie to a showing of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show." He loved the way everyone dressed like a character and acted out the movie in front of the screen. Despite trying to deny it, Charlie felt he was falling in love with Sam. But Sam wasn't interested because she had a new boyfriend named Craig. He wanted Sam to stop seeing Craig who was a hunky guy and even did modeling. He noticed that Craig never listened to Sam when she talked.

Charlie told his sister about Sam. His sister said that Sam had a bad reputation and suffered from low self-esteem. She confessed that she had been seeing the boy who hit her. He wasn't hitting her any more and they planned to get married after they graduated from college. She told Charlie not to tell anyone.

November 15, 1991

Charlie wrote that he was looking forward to the holidays because his brother would be coming home from college. His mother was worried about his brother's grades and eating right. All his father worried about was that he didn't get injured. Charlie was hoping that his brother met a nice girl. When he called home, his brother didn't have much to say only that he wasn't getting very good grades. He said that one of his teammates was destined to be a millionaire. A lot of the guys on the team barely qualified scholastically to get into the school. But they didn't care and just laughed about



it. Charlie played sports when he was little but the doctor said it was making him too aggressive so they had him stop. His father played college baseball but had to quit when his mother got pregnant. He often told a story about hitting a home run and winning a game in the state championship tournament.

November 18, 1991

Charlie's brother couldn't make it home for Thanksgiving. His mother was so upset that she took Charlie shopping for clothes and talked non-stop the entire time. She was worried about Charlie's brother away at school and whether his sister would be accepted at a good school. She invited Sam and Patrick over for dinner after the holidays were over. Charlie was excited. He hadn't had anyone over for dinner since Michael died. His mother heard that Michael's parents recently divorced and that the majority of couples don't stay together after they lose a child.

November 23, 1991

Charlie shared his concern in a letter about holidays and relatives. He was fascinated how family members - like aunts, uncles and cousins - loved each other but didn't like each other. In his family, the fights started after his grandfather drank too much and he grew belligerent. His sister got especially upset by their grandfather's behavior. Many of the cousins wound up drinking too much beer, too. Even Charlie's father, who was not much of a drinker, often would get drunk during these gatherings. He didn't like his father-in-law but generally kept quiet about it.

On one occasion he told Charlie and his brother how he beat their mother and Aunt Helen when they got "C" averages on their report cards. He told the boys that their mother was a good woman which was something he couldn't say to her himself. Even though Charlie's brother couldn't be at the Thanksgiving dinner that year, they played a tape of one of his brother's games. It was an unusual moment of unison for the family. They were all proud of Charlie's brother and watched with great interest. Charlie gave his grandfather a big hug and kiss when the gathering ended. His grandfather wiped the kiss off. He didn't think men should show that kind of affection. But Charlie was glad he kissed him. He would feel less guilty when his grandfather died. He didn't get to kiss his Aunt Helen good-bye.

December 7 through 19, 1991

Sam planned to hold a Secret Santa party at the end of the school year. Charlie got Patrick's name and for his first gift made a tape for him of his favorite songs - something he could play when he was alone and felt down. While Charlie was gathering songs for Patrick, Bill continued to give Charlie great literary classics to read.

Patrick loved the tape that Charlie made for him. Charlie figured that Patrick knew it was from him based on the songs he included on the tape. Charlie got socks from his Secret Santa.



The Secret Santa gifts continued. Charlie got a whole new outfit as the gifts kept coming. The last gift that Charlie gave to Patrick before the party was a book called, "The Mayor of Castro Street," which was the story of Harvey Milk, a gay politician in San Francisco.

December 21, 1991

The Secret Santa party was held at Sam and Patrick's house. Their parents were warm and welcoming to everyone. Charlie gave Patrick a poem as his last gift. Everyone wanted Charlie to stand and read it. Charlie didn't know the source of the poem. Bob had heard it before and thought it was a kid's suicide note written by anonymous. Charlie hoped not. Patrick was Charlie's Secret Santa and gave him a sports jacket as his last gift. Charlie had presents for everyone else at the party although he only got gifts from Sam and Patrick. He gave Sam a record that his Aunt Helen had given him. It was the Beatles song, "Something." He wrote her a note that it was a beautiful song that he kept until he met someone who was as beautiful as the song - beautiful on the inside. Sam was moved. She hugged Charlie and told him she loved him. Sam gave Charlie an old typewriter a testament to his hopes of becoming a writer.

Sam became upset and told Charlie about her first kiss. It was with one of her father's friends when she was seven. She didn't want to kiss the man but was forced to. She wanted Charlie's first kiss to be from someone who loved him. She then gave him a long and tender kiss.

December 23, 1991

Charlie wrote that he was glad that Christmas and his birthday were coming up soon. It would be a distraction since he felt himself going to a dark place like when his Aunt Helen died. It was so bad then that his mother had to take him to a doctor and he was held back a grade. Sam's kiss was also making him hold on. Charlie was born on Christmas eve which had always been a strange day to celebrate a birthday. While Sam and Patrick were gone, he would have plenty to keep him busy. He planned to take his driver's test. He hoped that his friends called him on his birthday.

December 25, 1991

The family spent Christmas Day at his grandfather's. He was sitting alone in his father's old room in Ohio and was not feeling very well. He was starting to feel scared. He wouldn't tell his mother because she would just worry. He would have told Patrick and Sam but they didn't call. He missed Michael and Aunt Helen.

His dark mood began to set in the day before when he went shopping with his mother and sister. His mother hated the lines and the crowds. His sister was cranky probably because she couldn't buy a present for her secret boyfriend. Charlie didn't know what to buy anyone. His father didn't like to read or listen to music. After looking in four stores, he finally settled on a DVD of the last episode of MASH.



Charlie's mother wanted everything to be perfect at dinner that night. His brother would be coming home and it was Charlie's birthday. But snow had delayed his brother's plane which upset his mother. Charlie went to his room to read and was joined by his mother a short while later. His father and brother would be home in about thirty minutes. She asked Charlie if he was thinking about his Aunt Helen. He began to get upset but she calmed him down, wouldn't let him talk about it. Charlie was happy to see his brother and he got nice birthday gifts from his family.

The next morning, they opened Christmas presents. His father liked the MASH DVD. He retold the story about the family watching it but left out the part when Charlie caught him crying. In the car on the way to his grandfather's house, his brother and sister got into an argument about college and sorority and fraternity life and about his new girlfriend, Kelly who was a cheerleader and in a sorority. When his brother said that Kelly would never let a guy hit her like his sister did, his father stopped the car and glared at his brother. His sister was crying - sobbing she was so hurt. His parents sternly warned them not to argue any more. His father told Charlie that he wanted him to drive the rest of the way which scared everyone.

Charlie's father's family was much like his mother's. One big advantage was his grandmother. He really loved her. After hugs and kisses, they settled down inside. They were told that Aunt Rebecca got another divorce but they shouldn't say anything. His grandmother had lost her first husband in the Korean War. She married a truck driver a few years later but he abused Charlie's grandmother, father and his Aunt Rebecca. When Charlie's great uncle Phil found out about the abuse, he gathered up some of his friends, found the truck driver and beat him up. The man died a few days later from the beating. But the abuse had gone on for seven years and Rebecca began to think that it was a normal way of life and as a result picked out abusive husbands. Charlie expressed his fear that Rebecca's daughter would wind up the same way. Charlie's father left home when he was young because he didn't like to see what was happening to his sister. Charlie sensed that his father felt guilty about abandoning his mother and sister.

December 26, 1991

It was a tradition to visit Aunt Helen's grave around the holidays. Charlie and his mother always left off a note and flowers to let her know they missed her. Charlie thought that his mother felt guilty about what happened to Helen. Charlie was forbidden to talk about what happened to Aunt Helen so he felt the need to express himself in a letter. He wrote about the incident in which his aunt was molested. She was young and it was someone close to her. It wasn't her father.

As an adult, Helen drank a lot and took drugs. She was in and out of rehab. When she was on a good pathway to recovery, she moved in with Charlie and his family. She began thinking about her future and taking classes. On Christmas Even in 1983, the police came to the door and told the family that Helen had been killed in a serious car accident. Everyone cried except Charlie who was sure that the policeman had made a mistake.



After he accepted her death, Charlie had an emotional breakdown. He was hospitalized and had to undergo intensive psychological therapy. He missed school that year. His aunt had gone out that night to get Charlie a second birthday gift. If she hadn't gone to get him that present, she'd still be alive.

December 30, 1991

The first place Charlie drove to by himself after he got his license was to Aunt Helen's grave. He told her about his friends and about his sister and brother and everything that was going on. He read "Catcher in the Rye" three times. Finally, Patrick and Sam were coming home and they were all going to a New Year's Eve party at Bob's and Charlie would drive there by himself.

January 1, 1992

At 4 am, Charlie was the only one awake or not having sex at Bob's party. He was feeling sad and left out. To distract himself, he shoveled Bob's driveway. He looked up at the sky and thought he was inside a dome of stars. Back inside, he hated that things were still moving. And although he tried to deny it, he knew that Sam was having sex with Craig. For the first time, he understood the meaning of the anonymous poem he read at the Secret Santa party.

Part 2 Analysis

November 5, 1991

Brad is obviously either gay or bi-sexual. He cannot stay away from Patrick yet he ignores him at school. He doesn't want any public association with him. Patrick shows his lack of self-esteem by passively going along with Brad's wishes. Patrick is a kind of outcast socially and it appears that he is as taken with the high school quarterback as the girls and the fathers of the football players are. Brad is idolized and is not required to "play by the same rules" as the other kids, something that will someday come back to haunt him. This attitude is pervasive in high schools across the nation is fueled by parents, the school and peers who elevate the sports hero, sometimes above all else.

November 8, 1991

Sam is another girl to fall victim to the low self-esteem plague that is hitting Charlie's school. Sam has a new boyfriend who seems more interested in his own "beauty" and abilities. He doesn't listen when Sam talks which indicates that he puts no credibility in her intellect and that their relationship is only a superficial one.

November 15, 18, 1991

Charlie's parents do not share the same concerns for their children. The father seems to be only focused on how well his older son does in sports. The mother is concerned with his well-being and his scholastic performance. The mother knows that there is life



beyond football. The father is living vicariously through his son and is immature in his focus on his son's sports career. His own sports career was cut short when his wife became pregnant. The father probably has a little misguided resentment toward his wife, blaming her for the pregnancy that ended his baseball career. When Charlie's brother is unable to make it home for Thanksgiving, it upsets his mother. She is so upset that she projects her worries about her older son onto her other two children and begins to feel helpless and out of control.

November 23, 1991

To Charlie, family get-togethers at his grandfather's house are unhappy affairs. Many share the sentiment that they love their family but don't really like them. There are signs that alcoholism is a problem on his father's side of the family although his father only seems to drink around his father. There is also evidence that Charlie's mother and his Aunt Helen were physically abused by their father and that the old man had some feelings of guilt about his abuse, confessing to his two young grandsons when he's drunk. When Charlie feels affectionate toward his grandfather and kisses him good-bye, he wipes his kiss off. It was not a good thing, apparently, in that family for men to show emotions. That was not a positive experience for a young boy like Charlie who is trying to find himself and figure out where he fits in both socially and within his family.

December 7 through 19, 1991

Charlie's friendships with Sam and Patrick mean everything to him. He gave a lot of thought to the gifts he got for Patrick. He taped songs that would make him feel better when he's alone and sad. Patrick must have periods of depression or at least that is Charlie's perception. His depression could be over keeping his relationship with Brad a secret.

December 21, 1991

Charlie is a sensitive boy who gives Sam a very meaningful and endearing gift. He feels he is falling in love with her. She reveals that she too was the victim of childhood sexual abuse. She wants Charlie to get his first kiss from someone who loves him. She kisses him passionately. Although he loved the kiss, it will not turn out well for Charlie if she is giving him false hope that there might be a chance for a relationship between the two of them when there probably is not.

December 23, 1991

More is revealed about Charlie's emotional problems. After his Aunt Helen died he had to see a psychiatrist and was taken out of school. Since he missed a whole year of school, the problem must have been a protracted and deeply felt one.

December 25, 1991

As many people do, the Christmas holidays brings a dark mood to Charlie. He thinks of loved ones that are no longer there. He thinks of new friends who seemed to have



forgotten him. He is feeling very alone. His sister is suffering from her secret-keeping and has put her in a foul mood which doesn't help Charlie's fragile state. Although Charlie's mother is loving and cares and worries about his mental and emotional state, just when he is on the verge of sharing his pain, she literally puts her hand over his mouth. She shoves the emotions that were about ready to emerge from his tortured soul back inside. She does so because she fears that having his words float out there in the air would be too painful for her.

Charlie's father came from dysfunctional roots. His widowed mother chose a second husband who was cruel and abusive to her and her two children. Charlie's Aunt Rebecca maintained the family tradition and chose several husbands who were abusive. Charlie's fear that Aunt Rebecca's daughter may follow in the same pattern are not without cause. Charlie's father left when he was young - he felt he had to in order to survive. However, he has carried the guilt of abandoning his mother and sister all those years.

December 26, 1991

Another example of the secrecy under which Charlie and his entire family suffer is that it is taboo to talk about what happened to Aunt Helen. The woman is dead and gone but still her life, her tragedy remains a topic that cannot be discussed. The family is so dysfunctional and so accustomed to keeping secrets that they do so even when there is no logical reason for it. But it is finally revealed that the secret that cannot be openly discussed is that she was molested and abused as a child. Although Charlie knows the identity of the molester, he cannot even write it in the letter to his unnamed friend - it would be pushing the envelope and revealing too much. But what is the danger? It has been so many years and all the principals are probably dead. But it is the learned tradition of the family to be secret keepers. It is revealed that much of Charlie's angst is due to his misguided guilt over the death of his aunt.

December 30, 1991

Charlie cannot let go of his aunt. When he needs someone to talk to, he visits her grave. For his health, he must learn to cut that tie and find a living person who he can trust and confide in.

January 1, 1992

Charlie is going to a dangerous place. In his pain over his family and the secrets they keep and his hurt that Sam is with someone else, Charlie's mind turns to thoughts of suicide.



Part 3

Part 3 Summary

January 4, 1992

The next morning, Charlie went to mail the letter to his anonymous friend. Afterward he became sick and threw up. His thoughts were all jumbled. The police found him outside asleep and nearly frozen to death. His parents picked him up at the emergency room. He didn't want to upset his mother so he didn't tell her about the goings on at the party. The doctor at the emergency room had suggested that Charlie start seeing a psychiatrist again. When they got home, Charlie and his father watched a tape of his brother's game the live version of which they had missed because of the incident. Charlie knew that his parents were scared to death about his mental state. Even his sister was especially nice and warm to him. She offered to fix his hair. He didn't know that anything was wrong with his hair. He had no memory of cutting off big chunks of his hair with a pair of scissors. His sister trimmed it up as much as she could but it still looked strange. Back at school again, Sam and Patrick thought his hair was cool. Charlie was convinced to never take LSD again.

January 14, 1992

Charlie had a problem getting back to normal after the incident. He found it difficult to read and even talk to his brother on the phone. Things still didn't look quite normal to him. At school, Sam and Patrick were sympathetic with Charlie's "bad trip" but told him he would be okay. Sam told him he shouldn't do acid again. Things began to settle down. Bill thought his paper on "Catcher" was his best yet. Charlie started smoking cigarettes and was up to about ten a day.

January 25, 1992

Charlie felt great again, like his old self. He began having sessions with his psychiatrist. Charlie had a fear of being blamed for something he didn't do. The psychiatrist considered the revelation a breakthrough. He liked the magazines in the doctor's office. He read an article about Nirvana there. Charlie and his friends went to Big Boy after a showing of the Rocky Horror. He mentioned the Nirvana article which sparked a discussion about music. Someone said that the Beatles were only great because there was no one to compare them to. Charlie felt he was "participating" like Bill told him he should do.

February 2, 1992

Charlie read "On the Road" but Bill didn't require him to write a paper. But he did ask him to come by his office to discuss it. Bill even let Charlie smoke there but did tell him he should quit. Instead of discussing the book they talked about "things." They talked about Charlie's family and friends. He told Bill that he was seeing a psychiatrist but he



didn't tell him about the party or that his sister was again seeing the boy who slapped her.

Bill told Charlie about his education. He went to college in the west and did his graduate work at Brown University. He probably would teach for another year or so and then move to New York and write plays. Charlie, always concerned about love lives, asked Bill if he had a girlfriend. He said he didn't but seemed kind of sad. Bill gave Charlie "Naked Lunch" by William S. Burroughs. The man wrote it when he was high on heroin. Charlie couldn't make heads or tails of what he wrote. Later, after a break, he went back to the book and it began to make more sense.

February 8, 1992

Mary Elizabeth invited Charlie to the Sadie Hawkins dance - the dance to which girls invited boys. She was in charge of the Punk Rocky fanzine and was grateful for the hard work he had done on the issue that week. Craig hadn't shown up for a recent showing of the Rocky Horror and Mary Elizabeth asked Charlie to play Rocky, the muscular robot. Charlie was nervous and fearful that he wouldn't do a good job but it turned out to be the most fun he ever had. Part of the fun was that Sam played opposite him. It was that evening that Mary Elizabeth invited him to the dance.

February 9 and 15, 1992

Charlie hoped that Sam would be jealous about his date with Mary Elizabeth but she wasn't. In fact, she gave Charlie a few tips on how to treat Mary Elizabeth. Charlie and Mary Elizabeth went to the dance. She talked about herself almost non-stop. It was obvious that there was no spark between them. She asked him if he wanted to go out again some time. He said he did but really didn't know if he could take another night of her incessant talking about herself. Craig made an excuse and didn't go to the dance so Sam took Patrick. Sam looked really upset. His sister and her illegal boyfriend were there but had a huge fight on the dance floor. Charlie tried to catch up with her but he couldn't find her.

Charlie found his sister in the basement crying when he got home. After she screamed at him to leave her alone she suddenly hugged him. Then she told him what was wrong. She was pregnant. Her "boyfriend" said it wasn't his but, of course, it was. She asked Charlie to drive her to the clinic that weekend.

February 23, 1992

Charlie sat in the lobby of the clinic for over an hour waiting for his sister. He couldn't concentrate on his book or the magazines. His mind wandered to when he and his sister were younger. She had blossomed into such a pretty young girl so quickly and was surprised when the boys were suddenly interested in her. Charlie got antsy and went outside and sat in his car where he could smoke. His sister found him out there and was outraged that he was smoking. Of all the ironies, after what she had just gone through she was upset about him smoking a cigarette. His sister lay down in the backseat on their way home.



Their father wanted to know where they'd been all day. His sister told him they went to McDonald's and then to a movie. She even told him which one. Later, after their parents were asleep, Charlie got the pillow and blanket from the car and went to his sister's room. She was very tired. She was going to tell the boy that it was a false alarm. She made Charlie promise to keep the whole thing a secret. She told him to stop smoking because she loved him.

March 7, 1992

Charlie went out with Mary Elizabeth again. He agreed to go out with her but this time he would drive. After interrogating Charlie about his date, his father gave him permission to use his car. After Charlie came home from the date, his father had the "little talk" with him and told him to use protection. His father was somewhat relieved about the turn of events. When Charlie was little he used to kiss a little boy in the neighborhood. His father was afraid that his attraction for boys would last and therefore was very glad to hear about Mary Elizabeth.

Charlie and Mary Elizabeth went to a movie downtown. It was foreign with subtitles. Mary Elizabeth loved it but Charlie thought it was a bore. After the movie, she took him to an underground record and media store. She felt bad for not getting him a Christmas present so she bought him an old Billie Holiday record. She suggested they go to her house to listen to it.

Mary Elizabeth got them some brandy and they went to the basement to watch the movie. She came on to him and they messed around for quite a long time until they heard the garage door opening.

March 28, 1992

Mary Elizabeth told Sam and Patrick about their night together. They were both happy for Charlie. Mary Elizabeth was acting very nice towards him and called him all the time. But Charlie was always at a loss at what to say to her. She still dominated the conversation and when she asked a question it was really a statement of her opinion to which Charlie could only say yes or no. She kept thinking of reasons for them to get together. He invited Sam and Patrick for dinner. Mary Elizabeth walked up to him in the hall and asked him what time dinner was. He hadn't invited her and didn't really want her there but he was stuck. She came to dinner and as usual talked the whole time. Charlie was disappointed because his parents didn't get to know Sam and Patrick which, in Charlie's mind, was the whole idea for the dinner.

Charlie's sister had the good sense to not get back together with her ex-boyfriend who wanted to make up with her. Charlie talked to his sister about Mary Elizabeth - minus the sex part. She said Mary Elizabeth was suffering from low self-esteem which is what she had said about Sam. Mary Elizabeth wanted to show off how intellectual she was so she'd appear to be superior to Charlie. She wanted to control him. His sister and psychiatrist told him he should be honest with Mary Elizabeth and tell her that her incessant talking was getting on his nerves. But he took Sam's advice and continued to



be nice to her - at least for the time being. He tried to get hold of his brother to ask his advice but his roommate said he wasn't there.

April 18, 1992

Mary Elizabeth brought Charlie a book of poems by e. e. cummings. She kept insisting that he show it to everyone. He should have been grateful because it was a nice gift but he wasn't. He was so resentful that he went to the bookstore and returned the book. He was crying by the time he got home. His sister drove him back to the bookstore and he bought the book back. On the phone Mary Elizabeth asked where he'd been. When he said he went shopping with his sister, she asked if he got her something. He lied and said he did. He went back to the bookstore and bought "To Kill A Mockingbird" for her. She thought it was sweet although she already read it disagreed with it.

Craig had a party one night where they played Truth or Dare. Charlie kept taking the "dares" because he didn't want to tell Mary Elizabeth the "truth." Patrick dared him to kiss the prettiest girl in the room. When he kissed Sam, Mary Elizabeth was hurt and left the room. Patrick took Charlie home and told him to stay away from Mary Elizabeth for a while.

April 26, 1992

Charlie hadn't heard from even one of his friends since that night. He spent Easter break reading Hamlet for Bill. He called Mary Elizabeth to apologize but she was through with him. His brother came home for a few days. Kelly broke up with him when she found out he was cheating on her. Charlie knew that something was really wrong with him and wished someone would tell him what it was. He called Bob and bought some pot with him and started smoking it regularly.

Part 3 Analysis

January 4, 1992

Charlie's LSD trip was a call for help. It rattled his - parents who live in a world of denial. But after their son was found asleep in the freezing weather, they could no longer turn their heads. It was obvious that Charlie needed psychiatric care. His parents love him but they are so laden with guilt and past abuses that it is "safer" for them to bury new problems and with the hope that they do not re-emerge.

January 14, 1992

The impact of the LSD stayed with Charlie perhaps enough to discourage him from trying it again. His friends were sympathetic with Charlie and his reaction to acid but fortunately they urged him to stay away from the drug. He may heed their advice more than that of his parents or even doctors because he thinks so much of them. They are his peers and he feels they understand him more than adults do.



January 25, 1992

Through his therapy, the guilt that Charlie has been suffering under emerges. It is a breakthrough and an issue that his psychiatrist can focus upon to bring out the pain that Charlie has buried for years and has learned to do so from his parents. Charlie is a product of his parents' dysfunction. Family therapy is probably in order to enable Charlie to attain fully recovery.

February 2, 1992

Although Bill seems to be unusually interested in Charlie. Hopefully, it is a healthy interest. Bill even lets Charlie smoke - although he tells him he shouldn't. That's a rather mixed message, in fact, just as mixed as his relationship with the young student. When Charlie asks if Bill has a girlfriend, the teacher replies that he does not. But he looks sad when he responds - a bit of foreshadowing that may be picked up in a later entry.

February 8, 1992

Charlie is able to express himself and feel free by playing a character in the Rocky Horror Picture Show. Playacting is a positive way to get out emotions that are trapped inside and perhaps that was the freedom he was experiencing.

February 9 and 15, 1992

Charlie's budding relationship with Mary Elizabeth is doomed for failure. Mary Elizabeth is self-centered and smothers Charlie. She wants to control him and be superior to him. Charlie is not able to express himself with Mary Elizabeth which is something he sorely needs to do. Charlie's problems are dwarfed, at least temporarily, by his sister's.

February 23, 1992

Charlie is able to play the hero in his sister's life. By supporting her in her hour of need, Charlie and his sister grow closer and create a bond that will probably never be broken. The downside of the event is that it is yet another example of secret-keeping to which Charlie is subjected and with which he must comply. It reinforces that toxic family tradition of suppressing the truth.

March 7, 1992

Charlie is having a difficult time dealing with Mary Elizabeth and her aggressiveness. It is obvious that she is not his ideal and he feels at best uncomfortable with her. Although he liked messing around with her - it was his first such opportunity - there isn't much else that is appealing about her for him.

Charlie's father's fear of homosexuality is probably what drives his obsessiveness about sports which, in his mind, is a testimony to maleness.

March 28, 1992



Charlie is still holding onto the hope that he could have a relationship with Sam. He likes her because she lets him be himself, lets him express himself and does not judge him. That she is pretty and attractive is the icing on the cake. He is disappointed that Sam is not jealous of his relationship with Mary Elizabeth. In fact, to his chagrin, she gives him some pointers in winning the girl over. Sam has so much control over Charlie that he takes her advice over others including even his therapist.

April 18, 1992

Charlie shows his passive-aggressiveness in several ways in this entry. First, he returns a book, a nice gift from Mary Elizabeth that he would have normally loved. It was his way of proving to himself that she wasn't in control of him. When he chooses to kiss Sam as the prettiest girl in the room, he rejects Mary Elizabeth. Charlie needs to work on his ability to confront issues head-on instead of through the back door.

April 26, 1992

Charlie, at least in his view, is being abandoned by his friends. Feeling alone, he turns to pot - something that he hopes will dull his reality.



Part 4 and Epilogue

Part 4 and Epilogue Summary

Charlie returned to school after Spring break. He walked the halls staring at kids and teachers wondering what they were all doing there. Since he wasn't having anything to do with his friends, Charlie began going to the mall everyday after school to people watch. He saw a little lost boy be reunited with his mother. He saw old men and little kids and tried to imagine what their stories were.

One day he was stoned and saw Susan surrounded by a bunch of boys making sex jokes, which she tried her best to laugh at. He walked up to her and asked her if she missed Michael. They all stared at him. He apologized to her. He heard the boys ridiculing him as he walked off.

May 2, 1992

Charlie went to get more pot from Bob. He heard from Bob that Brad's father caught Brad and Patrick together. Brad's father must not have had an inkling about his son because he became very upset and beat him. Brad hadn't been to school for a week. Patrick was apparently taking it very hard. Charlie wanted to call him but felt awkward about it. Instead, he went to see the Rocky Horror show and watched as Patrick, Sam and Mary Elizabeth and the others put the show on. He didn't join them afterward.

When Charlie got home, his sister was watching a movie with her new boyfriend, Erik. He wanted to sit and watch the movie with them but they wanted to be alone. Charlie really needed to be with someone.

May 8, 1992

Brad returned to school but no longer walked with the bounce he previously had. Charlie watched at a distance as Patrick confronted Brad who just walked away from him. Outside having a cigarette, Charlie spotted Patrick who was crying. On another occasion, Charlie saw Patrick approach Brad in the cafeteria. Brad was sitting with a bunch of other football players. Patrick became upset and Brad called him a "fag." Patrick charged the table but Brad just repeated his insult. Patrick threw the first punch and soon he and Brad were in a vicious fight. Brad's friends came to his rescue and soon it was five on one. Charlie rushed in to help his friend. Charlie warned Brad that if it ever happened again, he'd tell everyone the truth.

Patrick was suspended for a week for starting the fight. Brad's friends were suspended for three days. Brad and Charlie got a month's detention but no suspension. At detention, Brad seemed more subdued and thanked Charlie for stepping in. Sam was proud of Charlie for coming to Patrick's rescue. But he had unfinished business. He needed to make a sincere effort to apologize to Mary Elizabeth. He took Sam's advice



and apologized to Mary Elizabeth who had moved on. She accepted his apology and they became just friends again.

May 11, 1992

Patrick was in need of Charlie's friendship. He picked Charlie up late one night. Patrick had been up all night and still had the same clothes on from the day before. Patrick was in an upbeat mood. He told Charlie that he'd come out of the closet when he went to college. No more hiding who he really was. They drove to the golf course where Patrick and Brad used to meet. They exchanged stories about the sexual escapades of students they'd heard about that were probably half-true and half-legend. They smoked and drank and enjoyed each other's company. Patrick thanked Charlie for stepping in on the fight and for listening to him. His upbeat mood disappeared and he began to cry and talk about Brad.

May 17, 1992

Charlie and Patrick began hanging around a lot together. One night they went to a pick-up park. Patrick told Charlie just to avoid eye contact with the men there. Charlie was sitting alone on a bench when a man asked him if he had another cigarette. The man began to come on to him. Charlie was astonished to recognize the man as the guy who does sports on TV. When Charlie asked him about his job, the man quickly got up and walked away. Another night they went to a place that sold "poppers" a drug that is inhaled. They were out of poppers but had another drug that was contained in an aerosol can. Patrick bought it and they both took a sniff. The stuff was potent and they both thought they were going to have heart failure.

On some of their outings, Patrick would pick up a guy but was always sad afterward. On one night at the gay park, they saw Brad with a guy. Brad was too involved with the guy to notice Patrick and Charlie. Patrick drove Charlie home in silence. He didn't try to kiss him goodnight like he had before.

May 21, 1992

The school year was almost over. The seniors - like Sam and Charlie's sister and Mary Elizabeth - were all making plans for prom and graduation. Bill decided not to move to New York. He liked teaching. Bill continued to give Charlie books to read and even told him about some good movies to watch. Bill had just broken up with his girlfriend, he confessed to Charlie, but then apologized for bringing his personal life into their friendship. Eventually, Bill made up with the girl and was living with her. The last book he gave Charlie was the "Fountainhead" which he told him to read with a skeptical eye. Charlie was well on his way to getting all As on his report card. Patrick stopped drinking and seemed to be over Brad and was focusing on college and on his future.

May 27, 1992



Charlie started thinking about his own future and what it would be like to be a senior and graduate. He fantasized about going to his prom with Sam. He also hoped to be class valedictorian.

June 2, 1992

Patrick was accepted at the University of Washington. Sam decided to go to Penn State. Charlie thought that was great because he could visit his brother and Sam at the same time. The thought that Sam and his brother could start dating flashed through his mind. But that could never be, he figured, because they were so different from each other. Charlie's sister was going to Sarah Lawrence. She got a scholarship and was number two in her class. She got a B when when was going through her boyfriend problems. Mary Elizabeth was going to Berkeley.

Reading the "Fountainhead" was quite an experience for Charlie. He liked the sentiment of living for oneself. He hoped that he was skeptical enough when he read it. His psychiatrist persisted in asking about his childhood years but Charlie kept repeating the same memories.

June 5, 1992

It was the last day of school. His sister even let him hug her in the hall. It was celebrations all around. Patrick, Sam and Charlie all walked up on a hill near school and raced down, symbolizing the freedom they were feeling. Charlie's sister came to her first showing of the Horror Show. Afterward, she declined an invitation to Craig's party because she and Erik were going to another party. Charlie came to the party solo so he played dee-jay. His brother was coming home for his sister's graduation. His brother told him that if he made it to the pros, he'd pay for Charlie's college education.

June 9, 1992

It was prom night and all of Charlie's friends were gone from school. Sam would be leaving for Penn State in just two weeks. The others would be busy preparing to leave. The only person Charlie had to talk to was his psychiatrist. He kept pushing for answers about Charlie's childhood. Charlie had a lot of schoolwork in preparation for finals which kept him busy and distracted. He hoped that everyone had a good time at the prom and that no one had a car accident.

June 10, 1992

Charlie had two finals which he felt he did well on. Bill invited him over to his town house to spend Saturday afternoon with him and his girlfriend. Sunday would be graduation and a party afterward followed by just two more days of school before summer break. Charlie was feeling very lonely.

June 13, 1992



Craig and Sam broke up. She found out from Mary Elizabeth's new boyfriend, Peter, that Craig had been cheating on her since they began dating. There were apparently a lot of girls and Peter grew fond of Sam and thought she should know the truth. Peter had talked to Craig about it. Craig promised to come clean with Sam but kept putting it off. When Craig said that since Sam was going away to school there was no need to tell her anything, Peter decided to take action. Sam was devastated and Craig didn't even try to comfort her. Sam left the party with some of the girls. Craig and Peter got into a screaming match after Sam left.

Charlie and Patrick drove around for a while but couldn't find Sam and the other girls. That night before he went to sleep he realized that he really loved Sam. He wasn't happy that Sam broke up with Craig like he thought he would be. He was just worried about her and didn't want her to be sad. His love for her was unconditional and selfless. His afternoon with Bill held a big surprise. Bill told Charlie that the reason he gave him all the extra work and reading was because he was the most gifted person that he'd ever known - not just the most gifted student, the most gifted person. He told Charlie that he was really special. Charlie was humbled by Bill's words and appreciated them. When he drove home, he recalled that the last time someone told him he was special was when Aunt Helen was still alive. It had been a long time.

June 16, 1992

Charlie was glad to see his brother back home. His father asked him about football. His mother asked about his studies and his sister asked about what she should expect at college. Charlie mentioned meeting the TV newsman who had mentioned his brother on TV but panicked when his father asked where he met him. All kinds of responses flashed through Charlie's mind but finally he blurted out that he met him in the park when he was with Patrick. The answer seemed to satisfy everyone and no one didn't push for more details. Charlie tried to call Patrick and Sam but couldn't get hold of them.

The entire family came for brunch before graduation. Sitting in the bleachers, he spotted Sam and Patrick marching with the other graduates. Charlie's mother cried when his sister gave her speech. Charlie and his brother each grabbed one of her hands which made her cry all the more. At home after his sister opened her gifts, Charlie received a call from Sam. She invited him to go celebrating with them. His father put his foot down - Charlie couldn't meet them until his relatives left. Charlie told Sam he would catch up with them later. It was nearly ten o'clock when the relatives finally left. Charlie loaded the gifts he had bought for Sam and Patrick and his other friends in the car and was on his way to meet them. He caught up with his friends in a dance club.

Charlie gave everyone their presents - all books he had read. He gave his favorite books to Sam and Patrick with a note saying that he was giving them his favorite books because they were his two favorite people. They were really touched. When Charlie got choked up, Sam pulled him aside. She told him that she was afraid to be alone at college just as he was afraid to be there alone. They made a deal to call each other whenever they felt scared.



Charlie got home late and couldn't sleep. He felt horrible at school but at least the finals were over. He said good-bye to Bill who told him to call him anytime he had any questions or wanted to talk. Charlie got all As on his report card.

June 22, 1992

Sam was busy shopping and saying her goodbyes all week. She had lunch with Craig to get some closure. He apologized to her and told her she was right to break up with him. The night before she left, she got together with her close friends including Charlie. They recalled all the fun and silly times they had together. Everyone left except Charlie. Sam asked him to stay while she finished packing.

Sam asked why he didn't ask her out after she broke up with Craig. Charlie didn't know what to say - only awkwardly that he was only worried about her happiness. She told him sometimes a girl needed more than a guy's support, she needed some arms around her. She told him he needed to be himself and express his thoughts and needs. A good friend was honest with people, she told him. She had learned that the hard way. She hadn't been honest with Craig about her needs. They started kissing and petting and when it went further, Charlie froze up. He didn't know why. Sam wasn't upset with him. She was worried about him and told him to stay and sleep on the couch. He said, "I can't do that anymore," (203) but he wasn't talking to Sam. He had a dream that Aunt Helen was doing what Sam was doing. Then he woke up and had breakfast with everyone and said goodbye to Sam. She hugged him tight and told him to take care of himself.

Charlie thanked the person he wrote all his letters to. He had overheard a girl at school talking about him and about how nice and understanding he was. That's why he decided to write him. He wished him a good life and told him goodbye.

Epilogue

August 23, 1992

Charlie wrote that he just got out of the hospital after a two-month stay. After Sam left, Charlie devolved into a psychotic state. He wouldn't talk to anyone and couldn't recognize anyone, even Patrick who came to see him. Through intensive therapy it was revealed that Aunt Helen had sexually abused him from the time he was seven until she died. After a while, Charlie came around and began to communicate and had many visitors. He got letters from his aunts and cousins and grandfather. Bill and his girlfriend came to see him. They had plans to get married that fall and wanted Charlie to come to the wedding. Charlie tried to figure out who was really to blame. If Aunt Helen's father hadn't hit her, maybe she wouldn't have abused him.

At the end of summer, Sam came home for a visit. They all went out like they used to. This time, it was Charlie who stood in the truck and let the wind rush over him. He felt infinite.



Part 4 and Epilogue Analysis

Part 4

April 29 1992

Charlie seems to be heading to a very dark place. He is becoming the "wallflower" an identity that his friends thrust upon him. He is observing others and not participating in life. When he confronts Susan about Michael, he is really confronting himself about his lost friend.

May 2, 1992

Feeling more and more alone, Charlie begins to turn to marijuana for comfort. Relationships are ending in sadness and violence. Charlie needs to be with someone but no one seems available to him.

May 8, 1992

Charlie proves his courage and his loyalty to a friend by breaking up the fight between Patrick and Brad and Brad's friends. Sam is proud of him but she tells him that he was wrong to hurt and embarrass Mary Elizabeth and that he needs to apologize to her. It is wise advice from Sam because Charlie finds it difficult to face people and express his feelings. It will be a good exercise for Charlie.

May 11, 1992

Patrick pretends that he wasn't hurt by Brad's rejection of him. However, reality finally sinks in and he pours his heart out to Charlie who is, of course, sympathetic. Patrick is edging toward a new and healthy freedom - to live his life openly and to be who he is.

May 17, 1992

Patrick isn't using the best judgment in placing Charlie in a potentially dangerous situation by taking him to the gay pick-up park. He also is leading Charlie, an obviously fragile person, down a pathway to dangerous drugs. Patrick is in an emotional state from his breakup with Brad and isn't thinking right. He really cares for Charlie and considers him a close friend, but he allows his own pain to override his good sense and protective instincts for a younger person.

May 21 and 27 1992

Since all of Charlie's best friends and his sister are seniors, they are busy with preparations for graduation, prom and college. Charlie tries to envision how it will be for him to be a senior and be ready to go off to college. Loneliness is beginning to set in with the reality that his friends will soon be leaving.

June 2, 1992



Charlie's psychiatrist is focusing on his childhood, pressing him for more memories from those days. The psychiatrist strongly suspects that Charlie had some traumatic experiences as a child that he has repressed and buried. If the psychiatrist is correct, he knows that Charlie will not have peace until he faces those demons.

June 5 and 9, 1992

Charlie is trying to distract himself from the fact that all his best friends will soon be gone. His psychiatrist continues to push Charlie for more information about his past. The psychiatrist is picking up hints from Charlie that he may have suffered from abuse as a child. There were many incidents of abuse on both sides of his family so it would follow that Charlie may have been a victim of some form of abuse himself. There is a deep pain within Charlie that he struggles with.

June 10 and 13, 1992

Loneliness and sadness is closing in on Charlie. Sam's boyfriend is exposed for his cheating ways. The incident makes Charlie realize that he really loves Sam. His love for her is pure; he did not rejoice at her break-up with Craig. He is only concerned for her and that she is not sad. At the young age of sixteen, Charlie is wiser than many people twice his age. He has discovered what a true and selfless love is.

Charlie's deteriorating emotional state is given a lift when Bill tells him he is the most gifted person he ever met. Charlie is a very special person - something which he hadn't heard since his late Aunt Helen told him that.

June 16, 1992

Charlie panics when he almost broaches the subject of Patrick's homosexuality with his father who has a latent fear of it. The subject is another topic that cannot be discussed openly in the family. Although it is difficult for Charlie to express himself, he conveys his love for his friends in the best way he knows how - through the books he loves. He gives his favorite books to his favorite people, letting them know in his unique way how much he loves them. Sam's sensitivity to Charlie's fears of being alone and without his friends eases some of his worries. Bill bolsters Charlie up a bit by telling him that he will be there for him.

June 22, 1992

Sam confronts Charlie about his inability to express his feelings and needs. She is not subtle when she tells him that a girl needs a pair of arms around her sometimes. The two succumb to an attraction that has always been there between them. Charlie panics when things escalate. He is dismayed by his own behavior but particularly so because he doesn't even know why. When he says aloud that he "can't do that" any longer, he is not talking to Sam. But who is he talking to? Perhaps he is talking to the abuser of long ago that his psychiatrist suspected was there in the repressed memories that are buried deep within Charlie.



Epilogue

August 23, 1992

Although having a complete emotional and psychological melt-down was tragic and horrifying, it finally led to the truth - the truth that had eluded and haunted Charlie from the time he was a young boy. That his aunt had abused him was a secret hidden within him. His family had taught him to hide things that were unpleasant. He had learned the lesson well. In the end, Charlie finally felt the freedom of being himself and beginning to understand who he was and what made him who he was.



Characters

Charlie

Charlie is the protagonist of Stephen Chbosky's "The Perks of Being A Wallflower." Charlie is a young teenager. At fifteen, he is making the transition from middle school to high school. Charlie has had ongoing psychological issues since he was a young child. The source of his emotional distress is not clear to the reader or to Charlie himself.

Charlie tells his story through a series of letters to an anonymous source who he does not know but who he heard was kind and understanding and didn't "sleep around." Through his letters, Charlie is able to express the fears, pain and emotion that is incapable of expressing directly to his family or to his friends. Charlie's "specialness" has not gone unnoticed. His Aunt Helen was particularly fond of him and always told him how special he was. His English teacher gives him extra reading and writing assignments, eventually confessing that Charlie is the most gifted person he ever met.

When Charlie was a young boy, his favorite aunt was killed in an automobile accident. After her passing, Charlie declined into a psychological state that required hospitalization and on-going therapy. Charlie never recovered from her death and eventually it is revealed that he blamed himself for her passing. But that revelation just touched on the surface of the emotions and fears that Charlie had repressed all those years.

Through the honest friendships that Charlie is able to develop and through another psychological meltdown and the resultant therapy, Charlie is finally able to face all his demons and begin the difficult road to real recovery and liberation from a troubled childhood.

Sam

Sam was a senior at Charlie's high school. He had just started high school and had no friends. He became friendly with another outcast in shop named Patrick. Later, he saw Patrick at a football game with the prettiest girl he'd ever seen. He thought she was Patrick's girlfriend but it turned out she was his step-sister. Charlie was not only attracted to Sam because she was pretty, she was nice to him and actually listened to him and wanted to know what he thought about things.

Sam was smart and intuitive and knew that Charlie had a big crush on her. She confronted the situation directly and told him that she was too old for him. He was deflated and tried to put her out of his thoughts but he couldn't. When he went out with another girl, Charlie was hoping that Sam would be jealous but instead she encouraged him and gave him tips about how to endear himself to the girl.



Sam began going with a boy named Craig. She learned later from another friend that Craig had been cheating on her with multiple girls. She broke up with him and began to realize that a nice boy like Charlie, even though he was a little younger, really cared about her and would never hurt her. Sam was abused by a friend of her father's when she was a young girl and it may have been difficult to reject Craig but she was strong and put him out of her life. As the story ends, Charlie and Sam become closer and she lets Charlie know that she is interested in him. She was leaving for college but she told him she'd be back before the summer was over.

Patrick

Patrick was a senior that Charlie met in shop class. Patrick was gay and was teased by the other kids. They called him "Patty." He told them to either call him Patrick or nothing. They chose to call him "Nothing" and it stuck. Patrick and Charlie became close friends.

Charlie's Mother

Charlie's mother, who is never named in the book, was always worried about her three children. She was most concerned with her kids doing well in school so they could get scholastic scholarships because the family could not afford to pay their tuition.

Charlie's Father

Charlie's father, who is never named in the book, was most concerned with sports. He was proud of his older son who won a football scholarship to Penn State. His father was a college baseball player but had to give up his career when his wife became pregnant.

Charlie's Sister

Charlie's sister, who is never named in the book, was a pretty and popular girl. She got into bad relationship with one boy who hit her and who got her pregnant but denied paternity.

Charlie's Brother

Charlie's brother, who is never named in the book, was a high school football hero. His father was proud of him because he received a football scholarship to Penn State. His father hoped his son would eventually go Pro and play for the Steelers.



Mary Elizabeth

Charlie dated Mary Elizabeth for a brief time. She was self-consumed and talked about herself all the time. She was older than Charlie and had a controlling personality. Their relationship didn't last long.

Bill

Bill was Charlie's English teacher. He gave Charlie extra reading and writing assignments. After the school year ended, he told Charlie that he was the most gifted person he had ever met.

Brad

Brad was the high school quarterback. He was involved in a secret gay relationship with Patrick. Once his father found out, he beat his son. Brad refused to acknowledge Patrick after that.



Objects/Places

Charlie's House

Much of the story of Charlie, the wallflower, takes place in his home. He lives with his parents, older sister, and older brother.

School

The story spans the first year of high school for Charlie. It is there that he meets a group of seniors with whom he becomes best friends.

Epistolary

"The Perks of Becoming A Wallflower" is written in an epistolary format. An epistolary is a collection of letters.

Ohio

Charlie's family drives to see their "Ohio" relatives on holidays. The Ohio relatives live about two hours away from Charlie's house.

Charlie's Books

Bill, Charlie's English teacher, gives Charlie extra reading and writing assignments. He gives Charlie such classics to read as "To Kill a Mockingbird," "The Catcher in the Rye," and "The Fountainhead."

Penn State

Charlie's older brother has a football scholarship at Penn State. Sam, the girl that Charlie has a crush on, decides to attend Penn State after graduation.

Rocky Horror Picture Show

Charlie and his friends often go to a showing of the cult film, "Rocky Horror Picture Show." His friends dress up like characters and act out their parts while the film is running.



Pick-Up Park

When Patrick is depressed over a lost love, he brings Charlie to a gay pick-up park. Charlie is not gay and sits on a bench while Patrick goes cruising.

Big Boy Restaurant

Charlie and his friends often meet at the Big Boy Restaurant to discuss things and to eat after showings of the "Rocky Horror Picture Show."

Bob's Apartment

Bob is older and not a high school student but holds parties that Charlie and his friends attend. When Charlie is feeling really down, he buys some pot from Bob.



Themes

Secret-Keeping

Charlie who was the wallflower in "The Perks of Being A Wallflower" was part of a family that had a long tradition of secret-keeping. And there were reasons for the family keeping those secrets for they were hurtful, sinful and even criminal. Both sides of Charlie's family had legacies of abuse. And both sides learned that it was something that wasn't spoken about. The victims learned not to complain to others.

Charlie was abused by an aunt who always bought him extra presents and told him he was special. They had a special relationship but at seven years of age, Charlie didn't know how wrong it was. He only knew that he wasn't to talk about it with anyone else. After all, he was treated special and was given nice gifts and in exchange all he had to do was remain silent.

There were many examples of secret-keeping in "The Perks of Being A Wallflower." When Charlie's sister was slapped by her boyfriend, the first thing that came to her mind was to make Charlie swear he wouldn't tell their parents. She was more concerned about keeping it a secret than being struck by someone who supposedly had deep feelings for her.

Patrick was a sufferer of emotional abuse. His male lover who also happened to be the high school football hero pretended not to know him when he was with his other friends at school. Patrick was even called a "fag" by the lover in front of his friends so that no one would think he was gay himself or that he was involved with Patrick.

The secret-keeping, ignorance and low self-esteem make the three-legged stool that supports the perpetuation of abuse in a relationship or family. Anyone with a good self-image would have no reason to keep abuse a secret - what reward would that have except more abuse? But in the case of Charlie's family, and unfortunately thousands, even millions of others past and present, the family was taught to remain silent about the abuse. They were taught and they learned to be secret-keepers.

Abuse

One of the main themes of "The Perks of Being A Wallflower" is abuse. Charlie's family on both sides of his family - his mother's and father's - had a history of abuse. There are different types of abuse but they all have the same debilitating and long-lasting impact on families for generations. The family learned not to talk about the abuse, to keep it secret and not discuss it. As often is the case, alcoholism was part of the legacy of abuse in Charlie's family.

Evidence of abuse emerged on one occasion when Charlie and his older brother were with their grandfather who was inebriated at the time. He told his grandsons that he had



beat both their mother and their Aunt Helen for not making better grades. Although it had been years, the guilt of his actions had stayed with the old man all those years. Perhaps that's why he drank.

The grandmother on his father's side was married to an abusive man who beat her and her two kids, the man's step-kids. The grandmother had stayed with the man seven years until her brother found out and, with a group of friends, beat the man to death. But the damage was done, Charlie's Aunt Rebecca had been indoctrinated in abuse and subordination and resulted in three failed marriages. All of the men she chose were abusive towards her. Charlie feared that his cousin, Aunt Rebecca's daughter, would follow in her mother's footsteps.

Sam, Charlie's love interest, was abused by a friend of her father when she was just seven-years-old. Charlie's own sister put up with her boyfriend slapping her. In fact, she became more docile after he hit her. What goes hand-in-hand with abuse is low self-esteem. Any woman, or man, who puts up with physical abuse does not have a good self-image. A person who is hit by a loved one isn't really hit by a loved one at all. No one who loves another person wants to hurt him or her.

The repressed feelings from which Charlie suffered since childhood finally emerged during a protracted hospital stay and his on-going psychological therapy. Charlie had been the victim of sexual abuse by his Aunt Helen. He was always her favorite and she told him that he was "special" to her. After the truth came out, the term "special" had a completely new meaning for Charlie. He reasoned that if she hadn't been abused by her father, perhaps their relationship would have turned out differently. He was probably right.

Self-Discovery

"The Perks of Being A Wallflower" by Stephen Chbosky tells the story of a young teen who is socially inept and immature. Although he is brilliant - in fact, the most gifted person his English teacher had ever met - Charlie is unsure of himself and the emotional confusion he lives with is debilitating and has retarded his social progress. Charlie wants to find out who he is and discover that unique niche in the world to which he belongs but he just doesn't know how to go about it. Although there is evidence and hints that there are buried and repressed memories that may hold the key to some of his image and esteem issues, they are too terrifying for him to unlock.

But Charlie is a survivor and a winner. He wants to know what made him the way he is. He has been an observer, a wallflower, who has watched other people live and love. He'd like to be part of it. His favorite teacher tells him he needs to "participate" in life, not just watch others live. But that obstacle from the past is always there to stop him.

Charlie does finally break through but not in the easiest and most palpable manner. When his friends, who are all older than he, leave for college, Charlie is alone again resulting in his complete psychological breakdown. But through the months' long



recovery that he endures, Charlie finally discovers what has been holding him back since childhood. The story ends with Charlie standing in the bed of a pick-up truck with the wind rushing over him, finally feeling a freedom that he had never known before.

A journey of self-discovery is something that most adolescents go through at least to some degree. But as witnessed by the story of Charlie, some journeys are much more difficult than others. But the point of the story is that no matter how impossible the challenge, finding oneself is not only important it is essential to one's healthy development and future success and happiness.

Style

Point of View

"The Perks of Being A Wallflower" by Stephen Chbosky is written from the first-person perspective of Charlie, the protagonist. The story is told in a series of letters, known as an epistolary, that span the first year that Charlie is in high school and the summer that follows it. Each of the letters are dated which gives perspective to the time frame of the story.

Since the book was written, it has grown into a cult favorite and has sold a million books. The author, Stephen Chbosky, is a graduate of the University of Southern California's filmic writing program. He directed and wrote the screenplay for the film version of "The Perks of Being A Wallflower." He also wrote the film adaption of "Rent" which was received with critical acclaim. Chbosky's first film was "The Four Corners of Nowhere" which was premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. He also wrote for the TV series "Jericho."

Critics have compared this coming-of-age book to the classic, "The Catcher in the Rye" which, as one of Charlie's favorite books, is part of the story.

Setting

"The Perks of Being A Wallflower" by Stephen Chbosky is set in modern times and covers the year between August 1991 and August 1992. In that year, the protagonist, Charlie, transitions from middle-school to high school student. The setting is somewhere in the middle-west. Charlie speaks of visiting his Ohio relatives who live two hours away from him.

Part of the story takes place in Charlie's house where he lives with his mother, father, older sister and older brother. Charlie, who begins high school having no friends, meets Patrick - AKA "Nothing" - in shop class. Patrick is a senior and eventually the two become friends. Patrick introduces him to other members of his small circle of friends, including his step-sister, Sam, on whom Charlie develops a huge crush.

The friends attend a showing of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" most nights and various members of the group act out parts of the movie. After the showing, the kids all gather at Big Boy's restaurant to eat and rate their performances.

Patrick, who is gay, takes Charlie to a pick-up park that he frequents on one occasion. There Charlie, who is not gay, has a strange encounter with a TV sports anchor who is apparently looking for a young boy. The kids have parties at each other's houses and apartments where they drink, smoke pot and take drugs including LSD.



When all of Charlie's friends begin leaving for college, he becomes lonely and has a breakdown. He spends two months in a psychiatric hospital after which he is released back to his family.

Language and Meaning

"The Perks of Being a Wallflower" by Stephen Chbosky is written in an epistolary format. Charlie, the protagonist, writes letters to an anonymous source to whom he pours his heart out about his personal and family problems. The letters are clear and well-written which is a testament to Charlie who not only brilliant but is the most gifted person his English teacher ever met.

Charlie writes to his source with great humbleness and politeness. He explains that he omits certain elements of what he is writing about if he feels that are too inappropriate to convey. He addresses each letter with the date and the salutation, "Dear friend." He ends each letter with, "Love Always, Charlie."

The identity of the anonymous source is never revealed. By writing to a source who does not know who Charlie is and can't respond with any advice or comment, it is obvious that Charlie needed someone to vent to. By choosing someone who didn't know anything about him or even who he was, Charlie was able to tell secrets and discuss things that he had been taught not to.

The principal characters are teenagers. Charlie does not include many four-letter words in his letters but he does describe some of the typical behavior of teens including drinking, taking drugs, smoking pot and having sex (he usually accidentally observes others having the latter). Charlie suffered from emotional problems. He had a total collapse and had to be hospitalized and undergo long-term therapy. However, writing the letters which spanned his first year in high school and the summer afterward was probably therapeutic.

Structure

"The Perks of Being a Wallflower" by Stephen Chbosky is presented in an epistolary format and tells the story of Charlie who is a confused and emotionally conflicted young teen. The letters that Charlie writes are sent to an anonymous source that is never named in the book. The book is divided into four parts followed by a short epilogue.

Charlie begins each dated letter with the salutation, "Dear Friend" and ends his letter, "Love always, Charlie." He explains to the anonymous source that he heard that the person was a kind and understanding individual and one who did not "sleep around." Charlie is portrayed as a brilliant young teen who is socially immature and inept and in need of friendship and emotional support.

The epistolary format provides a defined time frame that spans roughly one year - the year of Charlie's transition from middle school to high school. By using this format, the



reader is privy to the protagonist's point of view and emotional reactions to the events that take place. Charlie is a fragile young man who has struggled with the unhealthy secrecy that is pervasive in his family and with his own psychological problems that have been on-going for some time.

The letters to the anonymous source are used by the author to foreshadow certain aspects of the plot and to divulge pieces of information that eventually tell the secret behind Charlie's emotional problems.



Quotes

"I will call people by different names or generic names because I don't want you to find me. I didn't enclose a return address for the same reason. I mean nothing bad by this. Honest" (Part 1, p. 2).

"And he wound up and hit her hard across the face. I mean hard. I just froze because I couldn't believe he did it. It was not like him at all to hit anybody" (Part 1, p. 11).

"The thing is some girls think they can actually change guys. And what's funny is that if they actually did change them, they'd get bored. They'd have no challenge left" (Part 1, p. 23).

"Sometimes people use thought to not participate in life" (Part 1, p. 24).

"She calmed me down, and I guess I'm glad she did because I think I would have gotten even madder if I started hitting Dave...So, I decided to do the next best thing and let the air out of Dave's tires" (Part 1, p. 32).

"It's like he would take a photograph of Sam, and the photograph would be beautiful. And he would think that the reason the photograph was beautiful was because of how he took it. If I took it, I would know that the only reason it's beautiful is because of Sam" (Part 2, p. 48).

"Sam and Patrick left with their family for the Grand Canyon yesterday. I don't feel too bad about it because I can still remember Sam's kiss. It feels peaceful and right. I even considered not washing my lips like they do on TV, but then I thought it would get too gross" (Part 2, p. 73).

"I don't know if you've ever felt like that. That you wanted to sleep for a thousand years. Or just not exist. Or just not be aware that you do exist" (Part 2, p. 94).

"I laid down and made a snow angel. The policemen found me place blue and asleep. I didn't stop shivering from the cold until a long time after my mom and dad drove me home from the emergency room" (Part 3, p. 99).

"I stood alone by the wall and watch ed the dance for a while. I would describe it to you, but I think it's the kind of thing where you have to be there or at least know the people.



But then again, maybe y9ou knew the same people when you went to your high school dances, if you know what I mean" (Part 3, p. 115).

"I would die for you. But I won't live for you" (Part 4, p. 169).

"I never once thought that it would mean Sam might start liking me. All I cared about was the fact that Sam got really hurt. And I guess I realized at that moment that I really did love Her. Because there was nothing to gain, and that didn't matter" (Part 4, p. 179).



Topics for Discussion

How did the secret-keeping that went on in Charlie's family impact him? Why is such a practice damaging?

What is the legacy of abuse in Charlie's family? How could that history have influenced the way his parents raised their children?

What was the significance of what Charlie's parents focuses on - his father was most concerned with his son's football while his mother was most concerned with her son's grades. Why was his father so obsessed with sports?

Why did Mary Elizabeth talk incessantly about herself? What behaviors did she display that indicated she wanted to control her relationships?

What part does low self-esteem play in abuse? Why is it important for a young person to have a good self image?

Why did the author chose to use an epistolary as the method to tell his story? How was it effective? Would another style have been preferable?

Why was Charlie's "melt-down" necessary for his ultimate recovery? What circumstances led to his breakdown? Why was it important for him to break with the status-quo?