

Secrets, Secrets Are No Fun,  
Unless They're Shared With Post Secret

Jenny Choi

Where do you go to pour out your deepest, darkest secrets? To whom can you reveal your most guilty pleasure, an unspeakable sin, or a disturbing past experience? Some may turn to priests during confession, but this is problematic for those who are not Catholic. Others speak with a therapist, but this is an expensive outlet that many cannot afford. A close partner or friend would be the ideal person to share a secret with, but many find it difficult to muster up the courage to do so. For these people, hope can be found in Post Secret ([www.postsecret.com](http://www.postsecret.com)). This increasingly popular site is a weekly showcase of anonymously sent secrets on a decorated postcard. Countless people have submitted their secrets on postcards to the mysterious address in Germantown, Maryland, and an even greater number have read some of these secrets on the internet blog. Because the writers and readers are all anonymous, this is an attractive way of easing a guilty conscience with no strings attached. Yet, many people such as myself, who haven't even mailed in any secrets, visit the website regularly to view the weekly updates. What accounts for the immense popularity of this Post Secret site? After all, reading about someone's scandalous secret is not nearly as entertaining when the face behind it is unknown. How is Post Secret different from confession, therapy, a message in a bottle, or any other means of releasing a secret?

Post Secret was created by Frank Warren on January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2005, when he encouraged a few strangers around the country to send in post cards with their secrets on them. According to the Post Secret Community website, Warren decided to do so after a cryptic dream that included

images of three postcards. He posted these secrets on his blog, and surprisingly, many more postcards were mailed in. The blog has grown immensely since then, with over 228 million visits. Now, the Post Secret Community goes on tours around the country, has published several books, and is receiving more post cards than ever.

This website has a unique structure in which a total of twenty secrets only remain for one week: every Sunday they are taken down and replaced with new ones. Unlike other blog sites and forums, these secrets can never be revisited through the original [postsecret.blogspot.com](http://postsecret.blogspot.com) site, though there are other ways to browse them on other sites. This format only allows for a limited number of postcards to be posted; many may check the site weekly to find their secrets, but to their disappointment, find that it is not there (most of these unread postcards eventually make their way into Post Secret books). Because of this short-lived cycle, each secret is treated as valuable in its own right; these postcards are not left to the general public forever, but instead are displayed for a precious seven days in the spotlight. Afterwards, these secrets are removed, and in essence, destroyed, as though the author never has to revisit them again; this was most likely the original intent of the authors—to let go of their secrets forever. If their post cards find their way onto the site, authors may find that Post Secret serves as the best way to reveal and release their secrets.

These secrets found on Post Secret vary in design and content. Warren encourages anyone to mail in his or her secret “as long as it is true and [they] have never shared it with anyone before.” Post cards are usually 4x6 inches, and they carry a few revealing words and a uniquely designed background. The authors use these blank canvases to make their postcards highly personal; one card, for example, has the capitalized, violently-etched red ink marks: “I WILL NOT LET THIS DEFINE MY WORTH” with a ripped-up excerpt of a college rejection

letter glued in the background. While some of these messages are meant for a general audience, others seem to be directed at a specific person; one card is in the shape of a round, brown leaf, with the tiny words, “Did you know I fell in love with you under these leaves?” Another: “I got engaged the week before you did because I know you live for attention.” Some of these postcards sound lightly spiteful or funny, but others convey a much more serious tone. One card, for example, reads: “I rear-ended an unregistered, unlicensed, illegal immigrant...he went to jail because I was texting and driving.” While the postcards are highly varied, they each reveal the author’s dedication to their secrets. The postcards are very artistic, and even the images convey thoughtful messages to the viewers; one can imagine these authors pouring over the details of the artwork before writing in their secrets. Therefore, the art of writing secrets is important not just in its outcome, but also in its process. Putting such dedication into the post cards makes it more of a relief once the website exposes them to the public.

Despite the anonymous, and therefore impersonal entity of Post Secret, many still flock to this site. In fact, the site has come to be known as the Post Secret *Community*, with its members participating in forums and commenting on other postcards. What makes this site so appealing is not only that thousands will see one’s secret, but also that many will find that they have been, or are going through the same experiences. In response to one post card that read “His temper is so scary that I’ve lost all of my opinions,” one woman wrote to the Post Secret Community website that she too had been involved in an abusive relationship, and that “It took a total stranger writing it down to make [her] realize what the hell was going on in [her] life.” It is clear that these cards serve not only as a sort of outlet, but a source of hope for others who are going through the same situation. In fact, Warren even admits that while it is impossible for every single secret to be true in the traditional sense, a secret that was not true for the author may

resonate within a random reader from across the country. For example, other high school seniors who fear for their academic futures may see the same postcard that contained the college rejection letter; reading this postcard would assure them that they are not alone. Therefore, Post Secret is unique in its ability to project people's secrets to the rest of the world; rather than burying them secrets in the dark, where they can only continue to torment the sole carrier of such a burden. Post Secret allows individuals to throw their secrets out into the open, and give them a sense of relief that can benefit other readers along the way.

Post Secret is a source of hope for those who are struggling with both large and petty secrets, and for those who simply need the reassurance that they are not alone. The site is so successful because of its unique, short-lived structure, the blank postcards that allow room for artwork, and the widespread exposure that it has. The childhood rhyme, "Secrets, secrets, are no fun, unless they're shared with everyone" has never held more truth than now, except with a different implication. Instead of casting secrets aside as shameful objects of constant concealment, this site fosters its own type of community, united by the knowledge that everyone, *everyone* has a secret, and that these secrets have the power to influence other lives.