



The Secrets We Share

Emma Hannigan

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Clara Conway is a woman with secrets.

But consequently, Clara's family is falling apart. Her son Max emigrated to the US years ago and she has yet to meet her teenage granddaughter, Nathalie...because Max and his mother no longer speak.

Meanwhile Clara's daughter Ava is fighting for a piece of happiness. When Clara unexpectedly reaches out to Nathalie and her niece comes to visit, Ava's thoughts turn to Max, the brother she loved and lost. The brother whose abrupt disappearance left the Conway family heartbroken.

When Nathalie finds a pile of torn, faded letters, she unlocks the door to Clara's past. Can Nathalie's time with her grandmother start to right some very old wrongs? And can Clara find a way to reach out to Max and thereby begin to heal the whole family once more?

After all, some secrets are meant to be shared...

The Secrets We Share Details

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From Reader Review The Secrets We Share for online ebook

Emma Crowley says

Inspired by her own grandmother's story Emma Hannigan is back with her tenth novel *The Secrets We Share* and what a story she has given us. I have followed Emma's work right from the beginning when she published *Designer Genes* and unquestionably this is her best novel yet. Her heart and soul was poured into every word of this story and it just radiates from the pages. With each book Emma's writing has matured and the incredible, heartbreaking but ultimately uplifting story showcases what a true talent we have here in Ireland. This is a book which demonstrates how secrets can tear a family apart and ultimately forgiveness and understanding can go such a long way. The cover is deceptive -yes the waterfall connects to the story but between these pages is a brilliant story with a historical aspect which I was not expecting and when having read the last page I was sad to leave these inspiring characters behind.

Clara Conway at 80 years old is in the latter stages of her life yet still well able to go out and about in the fictional town of Lochlann and keep an eye on her boutique now run by daughter Ava. But there is something tugging at Clara's heart. A twenty year estrangement from her son Max does nothing to ease the pain for many wrongs that have occurred. Having discovered Max is now a doctor in L.A she writes a letter to his 17 year old daughter Nathalie which sets in motion a chain of events which will alter the family dynamic forever. Will it have the effect she desires or has time proved to long to reconcile and forgive? Everybody in this book is hurting, all the characters have flaws but they are still endearing and you hope that they will all get the outcome they deserve. The author has such a way of describing their hurt, anguish and pain that you cannot but care for them. You can see why everybody feels and acts the way they do but you want them to realise the actions and weight of the past can not hinder the present or future.

Nathalie at such a young age is experiencing immeasurable pain at the death of her best friend in a car accident on the night of her prom. She embarks upon a course of self destruction unable to cope with what the world has thrown at her. Not even knowing she has an Oma (grandmother in German) in Ireland the letter which arrives leads her mother Amber to make a life changing decision. Soon Nathalie finds herself in a small town the polar opposite to what she is used to. It must have been very hard to have been uprooted from what you know to live with a woman you never knew existed but Nathalie handles this admirably. So begins a unique relationship between Clara and Nathalie which will plant the seeds of forgiveness in the hearts and minds of all the characters.

In the sewing room of Clara's house Nathalie stumbles upon a box of letters and like anyone else her curiosity is piqued and so she begins to read. The story on these pages is utterly heartbreaking and told so vividly. I won't say to much suffice to say it is based around World War Two. This method of using the letters was extremely well done and only added to the flow of the story. The letters were interspersed throughout at just the right time. They were not in your face but imparted what we needed to know and helped us to understand more about the situation in the present. Having dipped her toe in the past with this book I wonder will the author try it again in future books? I for one would love this as the letters only enhanced what was an incredibly well written story.

Although I felt for every character and understood where they were all coming from the person who spoke to the most was Ava. Yes, having finished the book I know why Max felt the need to leave and why his wife Amber was so angry with him. Also why Clara hid certain things but Ava's story was just so raw and emotional. She is in self destruct mode and my heart just went out to her, I wanted to give her a big hug and try and make things better for her. The author does say 'Nobody lives a perfect existence without so much as

a shred of sadness ' but the sadness Ava experiences is just something else. She has endured such pain but cannot speak about it and when we find out her background it endeared me to her all the more. The later half of the book moves along at a rapid pace and the secrets they are sharing just spill from the pages right down to the last page or two. There was so much I didn't see coming but the author has done a remarkable job in weaving the threads of the story together.

The Secrets We Share hit me right where it matters -direct to the heart. This is not easy to do and Emma Hannigan has accomplished this with great success. I flew through this in a day as the storyline and characters had me in the palm of their hand. Being drip fed clues in the beginning as to what had caused such upheaval in their lives only meant I was rapidly turning the pages to discover the overall outcome. Yes this book is full of hurt, upset and pain but it was handled in such a manner that the message and the characters shone through in a way that made me care for people involved all the more. Achieving the right balance between happiness and sadness is difficult to do but Emma Hannigan should be proud she mastered this in such a wonderful, heartfelt, emotive book. Yes you will need tissues as Emma throws everything at you but please pick up this remarkable book it has many lessons for all to learn hidden inside the pages.

Rea Cobb says

review tomorrow

Anne says

The Secrets We Share is the story of a family, and is led by Clara Conway. Clara is eighty, she's been a successful business woman, a devoted wife and a loving mother. Her family have had their problems over the years, and Clara decides that it's time to finally lay things to rest.

Clara's son Max left home over twenty years ago and has never returned. His sister Ava is a troubled, unhappy woman who exudes style and glamour on the outside, but inside she is battling with many demons. Ava was hurt dreadfully when Max left, and finds it difficult to forgive him for the heartbreak his departure caused.

When Clara tracks down Max and his family in America and discovers that she has a seventeen-year-old grand daughter Nathalie, she becomes determined to heal the rifts that have torn apart her family.

Nathalie herself is troubled; she is grieving and confused, and the last thing she expected was to hear from a grandmother who she thought had died many years before. Nor does she want to travel from stylish LA to some back street town in rural Ireland. Despite her fears and her objections, Nathalie arrives at her grandmother's house, and she and Clara start to get to know each other.

Nathalie does not just find her living relatives, she also uncovers secrets from Clara's past. Secrets that have been hidden for many years and that have shaped this family, and caused the rift.

I become totally engrossed in this story which on the face of it appears to be a fairly light read, and whilst it is a very easy read, the author deals with some hard-hitting and sensitive issues, giving the story a depth that

I really did not expect.

Emma Hannigan's writing is warm and sincere, she loosely based the plot of *The Secrets We Share* on her own family history, and the realism and authenticity of her story shines through.

The characters who populate the story are wonderful; Clara is wise, yet sad, she knows that she has made mistakes over the years, and that her actions have caused harm, yet she has learned from this and is determined to make things right. She is quirky and funny and a little bit over the top. Clara's daughter Ava was possibly my favourite character; a complex woman who has hidden depths that she hides from everyone, even herself. Ava stumbles from one disaster to another, never learning and dogged in her desire never to be hurt again. Nathalie is bright and enquiring, she is sad and confused, but has inherited her grandmother's wise ways.

The Secrets We Share is emotional, endearing and very enjoyable. Emma Hannigan is a gifted storyteller. I enjoyed this story so very much.

Karen Whittard says

This book was easy to read. Full of mystery and wonderfully uplifting. Telling the tale of the bond between women, friendship, hope, joy, and love. It was fast paced and endearing. It tells the story of a young woman called Nathalie Conway who wake up in a hospital not knowing how she got there, but being told that her best friend has been killed in a car crash and that Nathalie barely escaped with her life. A moving chapter where Nathalie in shock doesn't believe anyone until she sees for herself. Meanwhile in Ireland Clara Nathalies estranged grandmother has had enough of not knowing her granddaughter and sets about writing a letter to Nathalie in the hope that they can bridge the gaps caused by Clara's son. Nathalie wrecked with grief decides to take her grandmother up on the offer of going to visit Ireland for a little while. What follows is a touching story of love, friendship, family and secrets being revealed.

Trish at Between My Lines says

This review was originally posted on [Between My Lines](#)

Green Giants is my feature where I share some of my favourite books by Irish Authors. I'm passionate about Irish Authors, they supply us with a great and exciting mix of books, hopefully you will find something new to try. Today it's Emma Hannigan who is my latest Green Giant. I've heard lots of positive praise for this author in the past and now I know why.

A book full of clandestine family secrets is a book that is always going to call out to me. So the secrets hooked me in but then the writing and the characters kept me enthralled from beginning to end.

First Line of *The Secrets We Share* by Emma Hannigan:

“Clara paused, laying down her pen on the soft cream paper for a moment, unsure of how to go

on.”

My thoughts on The Secrets We Share by Emma Hanningan

I absolutely loved *The Secrets We Share*. It made me care about every single character and evoked feelings of warmth and hope as I read it. It's a multi-generational read and the three main characters are :

Clara – who is Austrian/Irish, the grandmother who is wonderfully blunt but also hugely loving

Ava – her daughter who is prickly and troubled and keeping secrets of her own

Nathalie – Clara's estranged American granddaughter who was blissfully unaware that her father's family even lived in Ireland

Clara finds out where her son is living and extends an invite for her granddaughter to visit for a while to Ireland. After some uncomfortable, awkward initial beginnings, these three women begin to bond as they are more alike than they are different. All are artistic, plain speaking, strong women with lots and lots of gumption and seeing them rebuild their family made for a warm-hearted read.

I loved the format of the books and the secrets are slowly revealed through old letters. It was so tantalising to just get a little bit of the story and then to have wait for the next letter to get another morsel but they were also very emotional so I was also glad it was done this way as it was less overwhelming. I was so intrigued by what the letters revealed and by trying to piece it all together that I just flew through the book. So the pace rocked for me.

The themes of reconciliation, forgiveness and moving on added a feel-good factor to the book and I was very moved at times by the writing and wisdom that this book contains. I know it's one that I'd be happy to read again someday as I think I have a lot I could learn from these characters. But don't worry it's not a preachy book, full of too-good-to-be-true characters, it's because they are so realistically imperfect that I loved them.

There is also a nice bit of humour in the book which is something I also appreciate and it adds balance to the poignant plot. Most of it courtesy of Clara and no nonsense approach to life, I loved how candid she is.

Overall this one gets a very animated thumbs up from me and I know I'll be treating myself to some more books from this author very, very soon.

Who should read The Secrets We Share by Emma Hanningan?

Do you like books about old family secrets, engrossing characters and all the warm-hearted feels? If so, then this is the book for you. Fans of authors such as Cathy Kelly, Patricia Scanlan and Sheila O'Flanagan should also enjoy.

Thanks to Bookbridgr and Headline Review for giving me a copy of this book in exchange for an honest, unbiased review.

Tracey says

A fabulous book that had me in tears continuously.

Sandra Preston says

Fabulous, loved it. Thank you

Maria Meagher says

Two stars because I'm feeling generous. The plot was okay, apart from some huge holes and a dodgy time-frame. The dialogue was incredibly annoying. Irish people calling Ireland "the Emerald Isle". 17 year olds talking like 40 year olds, and 50 year olds speaking in the same manner. Books in which all characters speak with the same voice are incredibly jarring. I was asked to read this book by a friend who thought it was dreadful. She was right. It's not my usual type of reading material, but that doesn't change how poorly written it is.

Trish at Between My Lines says

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Jane says

Good read very quick to get into the story.

Anne Mackle says

When Clara's husband passes away she decides to hire a private investigator to find her son who left home

twenty years ago after a family argument. She finds out that he is now living in America and has a seventeen year old daughter. From her home in Ireland Clara writes to her granddaughter Nathalie introducing herself and inviting her to visit.

Tragic circumstances find Nathalie's mother reading the letter first and arranging for her daughter to go and stay with her newly found grandmother or Oma as she's called.

This part of the story is set in present day but through letters we find out along with Nathalie the reason why Clara's parents brought her from Austria to live in Ireland.

Clara's daughter Ava has never recovered from what she thought as her brother's betrayal and is not looking forward to meeting her niece. Many secrets will be revealed and old wounds re- opened before healing can begin.

I cried my eyes out reading this book. I loved Clara she's the grandmother everyone should have and yet she's been deprived of her granddaughter's childhood. She is so accepting and forgiving and when you read about her background it will break your heart too.

The book flowed seamlessly from present day to war time in Austria and Germany and I found it so hard to put it down. The ending was....I'm not going to reveal it but I cried many tears.

This is the first book I've read by Emma Hannigan but it won't be my last.

Margaret Madden says

Clara has not seen or heard from her son, Max, for almost twenty years. She has no idea where he is and feels the time has come to try and find him.. After some sleuthing, she discovers that he is living in LA, has a wife and a seventeen year old daughter. Clara writes to Nathalie in the hope that her granddaughter would like to connect.

Eva is still bitter about her brothers disappearance and has her own painful memories to deal with. Still single, she finds her habit of picking up strange men in bars becoming a cliché, and vows to change her ways. When she hears of her niece's existence, she finds herself looking towards the past rather than the future.

Nathalie is a typical All-American teenager. Finishing high school, dreaming of her future and getting ready for college. All that changes on Prom night, when her whole world changes in an instant. A trip to Ireland to visit an unknown grandmother seems like the best option for a damaged teen, and soon Nathalie finds the home comforts of the Irish countryside the best medicine.

When she discovers box of old letters in her grandmothers house, the family history becomes a bigger part of her life than Nathalie ever expected. Going back as far as WWII and the Nazi camps, the story of her great-grandmother is poignant and inspirational at the same time. But can the inherited history bring the damaged family back together again?

Emma Hannigan has a way with words. She embraces the characters wholly and gives them each an individual personality. Clara, an Austrian grandmother, or Oma, is a woman we would all like to come home to; gentle yet firm, honest yet kind and well able to warm anyone's heart with her home baking and crafty talents. She has a lifetime of memories and is more than willing to share them, at her late stage in life. She misses her late husband and visits his grave for a chat almost every day, filling him in on all her news. When she discovers where her estranged son is, and that she has a granddaughter that she knew nothing of, her world seems a little brighter. Her daughter, Eva, is not as excited. Still hurt by her her brothers quick

departure from her life, she blames him for a lot of her bad memories and is hesitant to have anything to do with him or his new family. Alcohol leads to inappropriate hook-ups and placing herself in dangerous situations.

The arrival of Nathalie changes all that. She is a breath of fresh air in a dusty environment and brings a connection and vibrancy to the family, that they didn't even know was missing.

The stories which unfold via the old letters are emotional. There can be no happy tales from the Nazi treatment of Jews and it is through letters like these that we learn the truth. Based on fact, this novel may come packaged as chick-lit, but is more than that. It is the story of an elderly woman with a host of memories to share. Some may be secrets, but need to be told. Some may be difficult to hear but deserved to be aired. Mostly, these are stories that bring a family closer together rather than tearing them apart. There is something very hard about ending family feuds. Longer gaps in communication make things seem a lot worse than they should be and the mountains that seem to be obstacles, and actually only be hills.

An inspirational novel, which the author has an affinity with. Warm, lovingly written and full of hope.

Lynda Meyers says

This is the first time I've read an Emma Hannigan book and it won't be the last. I really enjoyed it. The complex relationships and secrets everyone had and loved the way everything worked out right in the end and realistically so. I'm now going to read the summer guest.

Dale Harcombe says

Four and a half stars

If you like books about secrets and families then you should love this one. I was into this right from the prologue which starts with Clara writing a letter. Now an old woman, the Austrian born Clara living in Ireland, has decided it is time for the truth of her story to be told. But she is unsure how to proceed. Max is Clara's son but she hasn't seen him for twenty years. Meanwhile, in America Nathalie, only child of Max and Amber is preparing for her prom. But then an event occurs that leaves Nathalie shattered.

This is a story of friendship, love, forgiveness, and guilt. It shows how choices made by one person can deeply affect others in a family. Clara is an outspoken woman but one I found it easy to care about, despite one or two inexplicable decisions. Her single daughter, Ava, is a prickly character and I found her less easy to like for a while. Nathalie comes across as a mature 17 year old in some ways and not in others. Fairly normal I would think. All of the characters were well drawn and easy to care about. In the course of hearing Clara's story we also learn about her mother and father's story. This is told through letters brought out one at a time. Some of them were hard to read given the time and topics covered.

I liked the writing style. Most of them like 'He'd proved to have the emotional depth of a puddle' raised a smile. Sadly on the same page that one is used, there were a couple of others in close proximity which for me lessened the effect of the puddle image. But that could be me getting a little picky. I was emotionally invested in this story and shed more than one tear. Grief is handled very well. At times it is very raw but then there is this part about the loss of loved ones which summed it up well. 'The people who mark a mark on your heart never truly leave. You simply learn how to carry on without them.' True! This is a good emotive read that should appeal to a wide variety of people.

Ann says

I was really disappointed by this book. It should have been a very powerful story but was let down for me by a very dodgy time frame. Clara is 80 years old and has decided to find her estranged son who left Ireland 20 years previously, however, as Clara got married in December 1954 and soon after she became pregnant with Ava, this means that Ava is about 60 years old and going into bars picking men up! I don't even like to go there! How old is Max? How come he was studying to be a doctor only 20 years ago?? Is it just me? This is a crazy time line! If Clara is 80 the story, when written, is set in the future! There are lots of other problems with the story, I wonder how it got past the editor stage. I feel that the author could do much better.
