

Commentary on *The Liar's Guide*
Roberta Lee

In 2003, the three grown children of a Munich woman named Brigitte Hesshaimer came forward with an extraordinary story. Their mother, they claimed, had an affair of many years duration with famous American aviator, writer and hero Charles Lindbergh. They were, they said, the great man's children. A skeptical world refused to believe it, right up until DNA analysis proved it to within a 99.9 degree of accuracy. Within a short time, the details of not one but two more of Lindbergh's secret lives were revealed. Both of them included two children, and one of those secret families also included Brigitte Hesshaimer's sister, Marietta.

The Liar's Guide is not about the secret lives of the famous. It is a book about the motivations behind all the secrets we keep from others, from the mundane "white lies" that smooth our social interactions through the sweeping lies that could hide an entire second (or, in Lindbergh's case, a third, fourth, and counting) family.

The Liar's Guide is my loving homage to lies and to liars, to the tangled webs we weave and the sheer joy we take in weaving them.

The characters in *The Liar's Guide* all have secrets, and the motives behind them range from pragmatic--the working class father trying to support a large family who sells drugs to make extra money--to pathological--the seemingly attentive husband and father who uses his business trips to conceal pointless sexual liaisons and alcohol abuse. Other's are even darker--the wife whose inner awareness of her husband's many infidelities morphs into spousal abuse, and then a plan to murder him; and his scorned mistress, who enthusiastically promotes the wife's plot and claims to do so out of friendship. All of them, however, share the same need to keep their lies hidden. And by no means do all of them find that to be a terrible burden.

Having secrets and lies can be very exciting. Addictingly so. Having a secret to keep may in fact be the prime motivation for committing an act that needs to *be* kept secret. All of the characters in *The Liar's Guide* struggle in their own way with what to hide, what to reveal, which temptations to resist, which to embrace in all their wicked pleasure; who to recruit as an ally, who to trust, and who to fear..

They do so in a suburban landscape saturated with its own contradictions. I am often asked if the humor in *The Liar's Guide* and *The Chilling Effect* was planned from the start. Yes, it was. Both novels could be described as twisted, bawdy comedy/drama, social satire with a very fine edge. In *The Liar's Guide*, wealthy widow Laura takes a low-paying job working in Jack's basement. Jack, meanwhile, is utterly oblivious to the machinations of his long-term mistress, or his wife's escalating impatience with his repeated--and stupid--deceptions. Laura--the most integrated character in the book-- is the only one in therapy. Absurdly complex murder plots hinge on every blessed little detail going as planned--but otherwise intelligent people fail to see the problem with that. The country club is only a few short miles from the strip club, the only difficulties soccer moms have with staking out someone's house is boredom and the lack of bathroom facilities, and the dead return to help fix the plumbing.

Welcome to my (very alternative) version of beautiful Bucks County, Pennsylvania! Come back soon.