

SERIOUS TIMES

MAKING YOUR LIFE MATTER IN AN URGENT DAY

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PostSecret

Few developments have altered the terrain of news and information, communication and conversation, than the arrival of now nearly 30 million blogs and bloggers. All the more reason to stay abreast of the most popular and influential sites.

This week, PostSecret.com won a record five Bloggies in the sixth annual weblog awards, including the top prize, Weblog of the Year. *Time* magazine and the *Chicago Tribune* had already placed the blog on their top fifty lists. According to Technorati, the leading blog-tracking service, PostSecret is now the third-most-popular blog in the blogosphere. Started modestly by 41-year-old Frank Warren, PostSecret now gets 2.3 million unique visitors and 3 million page loads a month.

So what is PostSecret? The theme is proclaimed prominently on its main page: "See a secret...Share a secret." PostSecret purports to be an ongoing community art project, but it is far more. People mail in their secrets anonymously on one side of a homemade postcard. Fresh selections of the submitted art/confessions are then posted each Sunday. The secret can be a regret, hope, fantasy, belief, fear, erotic desire, feeling, or childhood humiliation. People are encouraged to reveal anything, as long as it is true and it has never been shared before. Some are heartbreaking, some hilarious. Others are touching, thought-provoking, shocking, silly, or simply repulsive.

This week, PostSecret featured a card bearing an image of a baby wrapped in a pink blanket with a note reading, "Please take care of my baby," and these words pasted over it: "I have always

wanted to find a baby on my doorstep. (and keep it.)" Another showed a sand trap on a golf course with the words, "I have never played a round without cheating." A picture of a colorfully wrapped present reads, "I hate opening a gift in front of the person that gave it to me."

And that's it. No "bloggy pontificating," as one reporter noted, no ads, just instructions on how to submit, a legal notice, and a picture of Warren's home mailbox.

Yet an exhibit of 2,000 PostSecret postcards in Washington earlier in the year attracted thousands of viewers; some waited in line for hours, even on a Sunday when the Redskins were fighting to stay in the playoffs. Several filmmakers are courting Warren for potential TV documentaries as he makes the rounds on the *Today* show, National Public Radio, and dozens of other media outlets. PostSecret postcards were featured in last year's All American Rejects music video for their hit *Dirty Little Secret*. There's even a book compiling 400 postcards which is selling well enough after three months that a sequel is already being planned.

"People are drawn to this because it's something powerful and raw and real that speaks to them," Warren says. Judith Regan, who plans a call-in PostSecret segment on her talk show on Sirius Satellite Radio, says it is about "the human heart exposed." Gail Saltz, a psychoanalyst in New York and author of the forthcoming *Anatomy of a Secret Life*, says that Warren has "provided a forum that enables people to feel like they're sharing or getting a secret off their chests but without any risk. They have the catharsis without being exposed."

USA Today notes that PostSecret seems to prove at least three things: Lots of ordinary Americans are artistic, lots of them are poetic, and lots of them have something to hide.

I would add a fourth: lots of them feel the need to *confess*.

One submitter who has gone public said that making the card offered a "moment of self-clarification." "It's hard to admit that sometimes you wish your life had taken a different path. It's hard to admit you're not where you expected you would be."

PostSecret is culturally revealing in that it shows the degree to which we are aware of our spiritual need (Pascal's God-shaped vacuum), and estranged from the only Person who can speak to that need. We are desperate for forgiveness, yet are reduced to anonymous postcards sent to a website. Our world forcefully contends that truth and morality is relative, but then flocks to an internet altar in order to express remorse and regret – and with no seeming sense of contradiction. Yet the tension cannot be hidden, as demonstrated by the site's only link, which is to a suicide hotline.

The world's great crisis is that it has abandoned God; the world's great hope is that it cannot help but long for that which it has abandoned.

That may be the biggest secret, yet to be posted, of all.

James Emery White

Sources

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"Blogger gives dark secrets the first-class treatment," Maria Puente, *USA Today*, Wednesday, March 15, 2006, p. 1A.

Frank Warren, *PostSecret: Extraordinary Confessions from Ordinary Lives* (HarperCollins, 2005).

Gail Saltz, *Anatomy of a Secret Life* (forthcoming).

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