

The Perks of Being a Wallflower  
by Stephen Chbosky (1999, reissued 2012)

The book was reissued to coincide with the release of a movie of the same name and my daughter was reading it so I did too. The author is the screenwriter and director of the movie as well. It is a coming-of-age novel set in Pittsburg in the early 1990s and written as a series of letters from an introverted high school freshman with the alias "Charlie" to an unnamed person he has heard others talk about fondly at school. The narrator's freshman year opens hard on the heels of the suicide of his good friend, Michael, from Middle School but we see Charlie mature considerably by the time he is due to be a sophomore.

Charlie is a very sensitive kid, who cries a lot, but we learn he has been in psychiatric care since a very young age with anxiety related symptoms, which strongly suggested abuse and this is confirmed near the end of the book. He relates poorly to peers and befriends two seniors, Sam and her step-brother Patrick, and soon very strong feelings for Sam, played by Emma Watson in the movie. Patrick is gay and involved in a clandestine relationship with a school jock, which goes bad when it looks like the jock may be outed.

Charlie's sister is involved with a boy that hits her and Charlie discloses this to his close confidant, his English teacher, Bill. Charlie is estranged from his sister for a while until he helps her when she needs a termination after falling pregnant. Charlie is particularly sensitive to physical abuse because his Aunt Helen, to whose memory he is very devoted, was beaten by her stepfather and suffered mental illness as a result before dying in a road accident on Charlie's seventh birthday, which is Christmas Eve.

Charlie is a straight "A" student despite his angst and use of alcohol and drugs. Clearly, Chbosky is as strongly influenced by "Catcher in the Rye" and "A Separate Peace" as Charlie is. It has been many moons since I have read young adult fiction (why don't they have geriatric fiction?) but "Wallflower" stands up very well against them in my opinion and the author handles the sometimes difficult epistolary form more than competently. The revelation of Charlie's abuser is handled cleverly and sensitively in a dream sequence. I thought the Epilogue was a little laboured but, overall, I enjoyed this book considerably more than I expected to.

Four-and-a-half stars

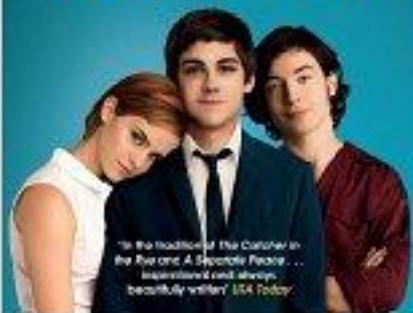
Robert Hitchins  
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STEPHEN CHBOSKY

# THE PERKS OF BEING A WALLFLOWER



In the tradition of *The Catcher in the Rye* and *A Separate Peace*...  
inspirational and always  
beautifully written! USA Today

kindle edition