



Let This Be Our Secret

Deric Henderson

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May 1991. The location: a quiet, picturesque seaside town. The scene: two bodies in a car filled with carbon monoxide. Police officer Trevor Buchanan and nurse Lesley Howell have apparently taken their own lives, unable to live with the pain of their spouses' affair with each other. The adulterous pair — Sunday school teacher Hazel Buchanan and dentist Colin Howell — had met in the local Baptist Church. Following the apparent double-suicide, they continue their affair secretly before both later remarrying. A series of disasters in Howell's life — the death of his eldest son, massive losses in an investment scam and the revelation that he has been sexually assaulting female patients — lead to him declaring that he is a fraud and a godless man. He tells the elders of his Church that he and Hazel Stewart conspired together to murder their spouses nearly two decades earlier. What follows the dramatic confession are two of the most sensational murder investigations ever seen in Ireland, leading to both Howell's conviction for murder in December 2010, and Stewart's in March 2011 — despite her protestations of innocence.

Let This Be Our Secret Details

Date : Published October 14th 2011 by Gill & Macmillan (first published October 1st 2011)

ISBN :

Author : Deric Henderson

Format : Kindle Edition 272 pages

Genre : Crime, True Crime, Nonfiction, Cultural, Ireland, Mystery, Biography

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From Reader Review Let This Be Our Secret for online ebook

Kathryn Taylor says

The book was quite repetitive but as everything took place in my town I could relate to the people, churches and places, I couldn't believe what I was reading! A fantastically interesting book on a double murder that was covered up for almost 20years

Chris says

I saw this as a PBS film -- loved it, so I got the book (because the book is better, right?). Well, this one is proof that the book isn't always better. Pages of extraneous detail that adds nothing to the understanding of the plot -- just try keeping your eyes open after pages of detail about nothing important.

This books needs some serious editing. Besides the on and on and on of nothing, my favourite line was something about having no sense of 'triumphalism'!!!! Hasn't the author heard of the word 'triumph'?

Sadly, this is an interesting story, but it left me with a feeling of irritationalism (sic).

Calzean says

Fairly dry, repetitive narrative around the murders of two people by their spouses who covered it up by creating an apparent double suicide. Colin Howell is the dentist from hell, preys on women (including patients), loves pornography, is financially reckless and is a control freak. Oh, he is also a strong Baptist. True crime books like Joe Cinque's *Consolation, A True Story of Death, Grief and the Law* by Helen Garner are written with style, building a depth around the people and questioning the ability of the murderer to deny their actions. *The Secret* does not have this subtlety and suffers accordingly.

Sean Kennedy says

Although at times repetitive, this is a fascinating look at the intense hypocrisy and suffocating nature of Northern Irish churches - some of which I've had experience with thanks to relatives when I've returned to Belfast.

Also fascinating because of my (very slight) connection - this was my cousin's dentist. "Always thought he was such a nice man!" Yeah, everybody says that about sociopaths. They're good at what they do.

Redfox5 says

Found this in the bookshelf at the Hotel Globales Tamaimo Tropical in Tenerife. This hotel was pretty dire,

so I got lots of reading done. There were hardly any English books in on the shelf, so when I finished all the books I brought with me there wasn't much choice.

This looked alright, when I started reading this, I thought I was going to love it. A double murder made to look like a double suicide! How on Earth did they manage to get away with that!?

As Henderson fleshes out the events with the history of everyone's life, it does tend to get a little dry. I honestly can't believe they got away with it for so long and Twenty one years is a pathetic sentence. Those poor kids who thought their parents would rather be dead than be with them, only to find out years later they had been murdered by the other parent.

This is a truly shocking crime. Think I may have to hunt down the ITV drama.

Helen says

Excellent writing and a very factual account of true murders and how the couple almost got away with it. Howell was a true paranoid killer showing no remorse or care for what he did believing it was god's plan and Hazel Buchanan was a stupid co killer who I think cared more about her looks, her wardrobe and smart house and what Howell would afford her on his money. But god works in mysterious ways and he confessed. If he is still sitting in prison thinking he will get out at 70 with another 20 years of freedom I sincerely hope he meets a ghastly end in prison at the hand of something much worse than him.

Julie Haigh says

A gripping page-turner.

This was an excellent true crime book. It tells of two people meeting, falling in love and starting a life together. It's not all rosy, but that's as for most. There are many people who have affairs, split up, divorce-but some go to extremes. What makes them go so far as to kill? This book examines.

I've read quite a few brief true crime books recently but this is a good long read. It has quite a bit of background. It starts right back where Lesley is a student nurse, before she meets Colin Howell.

The Howells were respectable, church going people. Active and involved members of the church eg. with Youth Fellowship and Duke of Edinburgh award Scheme. By the time Lesley is pregnant with their third child, Colin is a successful dentist and he is buying his own dental practice. After everything going well, things turn sour, there are mounting money worries, and affairs.

You just can't imagine 'the other woman', Hazel, wanting to be with Colin, knowing what he's done to his wife. Was she not just a bit worried he could end up doing the same to her one day? This seemed a tad slow at first-I started it a while ago, just read the first bit, and went on to read something else-but I came back to it, started it again, and it builds to a gripping true crime case. A real page-turner and a good, in-depth treatment of this case. Contains comments from people who knew them, church people etc. and they tell about their character and manner then. This is very well put together from interviews etc.

Please note that this book 'The Secret' is a TV tie-in edition and is the same book as 'Let This Be Our Secret' by the same author. As there are two editions, with different ASIN numbers, then someone wouldn't be aware that they were buying the same book that they already had, only the cover and the title is different.

Terry Tyler says

I bought this book after watching the TV series The Secret, starring James Nesbitt, as I imagine many have done. For those who know nothing about it, it's the true story of Colin Howell, dentist and supposedly devout Baptist, who, together with his lover, Hazel Buchanan, hatched a plan to murder their two spouses, Lesley and Trevor. Though suspected by many, their crimes went undetected for twenty years.

Did this have anything to add to the TV series? Yes, in that one can get a clearer picture of motive from a book. I must admit that I nearly stopped reading it by around ten per cent; the beginning is a bit stilted, with lots of irrelevant detail about Lesley's past, as if Henderson just sat down and typed up his research notes without deciding which had value to the reader; then again, perhaps he was just honouring a woman who did not get to live her life. I also felt that he was painting her as almost saintly, but as I turned the pages she seemed less so. When the story turned to Trevor, there was, again, too much irrelevant detail, but the picture was built up of a simple, goodhearted sort of chap, devoted to his wife who he put on a pedestal.

I found the detail about Hazel Buchanan's life after the murders fascinating; it was clear that she experienced few moments of real happiness for the next twenty years. Much of this detail was provided by a man she treated badly during a seven year relationship, but there is much to be read between the lines. As for Howell himself, he is well portrayed as a narcissist, possibly a psychopath, a manipulative egomaniac whose life was a complicated mess of smoke and mirrors ~ pretty much how James Nesbitt played him! I was struck by how none of them, despite their supposed religious faith, seemed particularly Christian, aside from Trevor, perhaps...

There is much in the way of quotes from people who knew or were related to the four of them, which was interesting, and it underlines the peculiar world of a small religious community such as theirs. I wanted to know more about the ludicrous Phillipines gold scam in which Howell became involved; that he squandered the family's fortune in this way made me wonder if his sanity was failing, then, or if he wanted to punish himself... many questions are raised throughout.

The book is repetitive at times, but this is perhaps inevitable when recounting a story and then the court case that follows. I'd say that if you found the series as absorbing as I did, you'll be interested to read this; I liked the way that Henderson does not seem to judge too much throughout, just delivering the facts, though at times this made it more like a newspaper article than a biographical story. It reads better as it goes on, though, and gives insight into the lives of Howell and Hazel and their families post-conviction. Worth getting, if not quite as compelling as I'd hoped.

Vicky Crowther says

Not a particularly well written book as it jumps from past to present & different people quite awkwardly. However, I really enjoyed this book. The fact that it is true & based in N. Ireland made it very appealing to me.

Mary Frances Cogley says

Interesting, Horrific, Excellent Character Descriptions

If you didn't know this had actually happened, you'd think this was fiction. I gave it a three star rating because I felt the book was overloaded with extraneous facts that were unimportant to the story and made it hard to keep track of all of the characters.

Sandy says

Was fairly repetitive in the information. Since the murders took place in Northern Ireland, I wonder if it would have helped to have known about them ahead of time? Sometimes I felt as though the author wrote as though the reader was already familiar with the case.

Samantha says

Given the scandaloso nature of this story, this book achieved an extremely dry narrative.

I've never read true crime before and I'm disappointed that this has had to set the benchmark for me. It was rubbish!

The author must have had a word limit to hit, because there was so much repetition in this. One notable example was during McCauley's review of Hazel. The author stated himself that McCauley was willing to talk a lot about her character and events, and I felt like the author just ran with this. Just because an interviewee has a lot to say it doesn't mean you should include everything, repetition and all. Three times in a row he spoke about how Hazel's spending habits were unsustainable. As the author surely it is your job to trim the fat and include only important detail. Bit of a moan on that front, the repetition problem continued throughout.

There also seemed to be no voice to the book. No insight or opinion or point of view, just "this happened, then this happened, and this person said this". This, in my opinion, was the main reason for the 'dryness' of the narrative.

Random anecdotes with no connection to the overall arc, long annoying sentences and repetition all lost my attention.

Overall would recommend a brief google search if you want to know more about this case, I'm sure it would give you just as much. Or watch the ITV adaption, James Nesbitt is great, I'm sure you'll find more enjoyment at least from that.

Tony says

A very well written detailed account of the horrific double murder of Lesley Howell and Trevor Buchanan in Coleraine, Northern Ireland. This book goes beyond the obvious and is a very disturbing story. It dissects the murders and the role of the murderer Colin Howell and his lover Hazel Buchanan and the influence of the church and the very incompetent investigation into what was believed to be suicide. An excellent read and very close to home if you are from Northern Ireland.

Megan Jones says

‘The Secret’ tells of the true events that happened in Coleraine. Colin Howell and Hazel Buchanan are married when they meet and begin an affair, this leads to the fateful decision to murder their spouses, stage it as suicide and then be together. They do this and get away with it, they continue in a relationship for six years before parting and beginning new families. Then Colin’s life implodes and he confesses to his crimes. This leads to a shocking murder investigation and the conviction of both Colin and Hazel though she continues to protest her innocence.

Henderson is a journalist and in ‘The Secret’ he has produced an account that is heavily based in fact and what we know occurred. He goes back to the beginning to when they met their first spouses and the recounts all of the events from then onwards. My one negative is Henderson occasionally goes off on a tangent and adds details about people that are not relevant to the case. Other than this, ‘The Secret’ is highly readable and a fascinating insight.

Henderson has written this very sympathetically and included insights from families and friends and has not added drama or scandalous content, other than that which came out in the trial of Hazel. This is not entertaining but it is incredibly fascinating, in particular Colin and the justifications he has for his actions. If you are interested in true crime then this is a shocking but approachable read.

Beth says

I'd never heard of the TV series before I read this book; after reading it, I am definitely going to watch the series.

Although this book took me longer to read than many that I have this year, it certainly was an endearing read, and I'd urge anyone who enjoys true murder stories to read it.
