

Book 7: Plain Truth

The Publisher: Pocket Books (2000)

Book Club Discussion Questions for PLAIN TRUTH

An Excerpt from PLAIN TRUTH

Paperback version printed by Pocket Books, 2001.

Moving seamlessly from psychological drama to courtroom suspense, PLAIN TRUTH is a fascinating portrait of Amish life rarely witnessed by those outside the faith. When a young Amish teen hides a pregnancy, gives birth in secret, and then flatly denies it all when the baby's body is found, urban defense attorney Ellie Hathaway decides to defend her. But she finds herself caught in a clash of cultures with a people whose channels of justice are markedly different from her own...and discovers a place where circumstances are not always what they seem.

Book Club Discussion Questions for Plain Truth:

1. What character has the most to learn during the course of this novel? Why?
2. In what ways does immersing herself in Amish culture alter Ellie's perception of the case? Of Katie?
3. Does the American legal system have the right to govern a group that lives separate from American society?
4. To what extent is Katie responsible for what happens to the infant?
5. What role does Hannah's ghost play in forming Katie's actions? Sarah's?
6. Jacob Fisher and Leda are two characters who bridge diverse worlds in this novel. Are they successful? Explain.
7. Do the actions of the men in this book aid or detract from the growth of the female characters? Explain.
8. Was Aaron Fisher justified in cutting Jacob out of the family?
9. The Amish base much on the concept of Gelassenheit, or humility, and putting others before yourself. What examples support this? In what places in the book does this not happen,

APRIL

Leader's Guide

and how does it affect the society?

10. Forgiveness is a basic tenet in the Amish faith. Which Amish character in this book forgives the most? Who is the most unyielding?
11. What about the Amish culture is similar to "English" culture? What is the most different?
12. Is the verdict a fair one, in your opinion?
13. Why would an Amish person accept a punishment without having committed a crime?
14. What do you think would have happened if the baby had lived?
15. In your opinion, what occurs after the last page is turned-- to the Fishers, to Katie, to Ellie?
16. What do you think Ellie will do with the information she learns from Sarah at the end of the book?
17. Why do we care so much about Katie Fisher? How does her specific situation come to touch upon universal issues like community estrangement and forbidden love?
18. What kind of a man is Aaron Fisher? As you were reading, what were your reactions to his choices? If you had to, could you make a case for defending his code of life, his propensity to put the community above the individual?
19. "You know how a mother would do anything, if it meant saving her child," Sarah tells Ellie. And earlier on, referring to her ability to butcher chickens with remorse, Sarah says to Ellie, "I do what I have to do. You of all people should understand." What is Picoult up to here? Why should Ellie in particular understand this?
20. "We all have things that come back to haunt us," Adam Sinclair tells Katie at one point. "Some of us just see them more clearly than others." Discuss the ways in which the ghosts of the past come to haunt the present action in PLAIN TRUTH. Of all the book's characters, who comes to "see" things most clearly? Ellie? Jacob? Sarah? Explain.
21. What kind of future do you see for Ellie and Coop? For Katie and Samuel? Jacob and his Plain heritage?

22. Discuss the significance behind the title. Is "Plain Truth" a different sort of truth than "plain truth"?

The following is an excerpt from Plain Truth:

She had often dreamed of her little sister floating dead beneath the surface of the ice, but tonight, for the first time, she envisioned Hannah clawing to get out. She could see Hannah's eyes, wide and milky; could feel Hannah's nails scraping. Then, with a start, she woke. It was not winter-- it was July. There was no ice beneath her palms, just her own slick skin. But once again, there was someone on the other side, fighting to be free.

As the fist in her belly pulled tighter, she bit her bottom lip. Ignoring the pain that rippled and receded, she tiptoed barefoot into the night.

The barn cat yowled when she stepped inside. She was panting by now, her legs shaking like willow twigs. Lowering herself to the hay in the far corner of the calving pen, she drew up her knees. The swollen cows rolled their blue moon eyes in her direction, then turned away quickly, as if they knew better than to bear witness.

She concentrated on the hides of the Holsteins until their black spots shimmied and swam. She sank her teeth into the rolled hem of her nightgown. There was a funnel of pressure, as if she was being turned inside out; and she remembered how she and Hannah used to squeeze through the hole in the barbed wire fence by the creek's edge, pushing and angled, all knees and grunts and elbows, until by some miracle they'd tumble through.

It was over as suddenly as it had begun. And lying on the matted, stained hay between her legs was a baby.

Aaron Fisher rolled over beneath the bright quilt to stare at the clock beside the bed. There had been nothing, no sound to wake him, but after forty-five years of farming and milking the smallest things could pull him out of sleep: a footfall in the corn, a change in the pattern of the wind, the rasp of a mother's tongue roughing a newborn calf.

He felt the mattress give as Sarah came up on an elbow behind him, the long braid of her hair curling over her shoulder like a seaman's rope. "Was ist letz?"
What's the matter?

It was not the animals; there was a full month before the first cow was due to deliver. It was not a robber; there was too little noise. He felt his wife's arm slip around him, hugging his back to her front. "Nix," he murmured. Nothing. But he did not know if he was trying to convince Sarah, or himself.

She knew enough to cut the cord that spiraled purple to the baby's belly. Hands shaking, she managed to reach the old scissors that hung on a peg near the pen's

door. They were rusty and coated with bits of the twine from the hay bales. The cord severed in two thick snips, and then began spurting blood. Horrified, she pressed her fingers to the ends, pinching it shut, wildly looking around for something to tie it off.

She rummaged in the hay and came up with a small length of baling twine, using it to make a quick knot. The bleeding slowed, then stopped. Relieved, she sank back against the hay-- and then the newborn started to cry.

She snatched the baby up and rocked it tightly. With her foot, she kicked at the hay, trying to cover the blood with a clean layer. The baby's mouth opened and closed on the cotton of her nightgown, rooting.

She knew what the baby wanted, needed, but she couldn't do it. It would make this real.

So she gave the baby her pinky finger instead. She let the small, powerful jaws suckle, while she did what she had been taught to do in times of extreme stress; what she had been doing for months now. "Lord," she prayed, "please make this go away."

The rustle of chains awakened her. It was still dark out, but the dairy cows' internal schedule had them rising



Arts & Humanities

American Literature

Book reviews: Plain Truth, by Jodi Picoult

by Thingywhatsit

[view all](#)

I like a book that makes me think, although when I bought this book, I didn't know how much it would expect of me as a reader, let alone what I expected of the author. It sounded tempting when I read reviews on it, although I was surprised at the impact it made on me, and how it set the psychological processes into trying to make sense of the morality of the events that the book brings out. Having never read this author before, I knew that the subject matter interested me, as I have something inside that fascinates me about the Amish people, since seeing a documentary about them many years ago. I like their values, appreciate that whilst they are different from me, their society is based on humility and the appeal that this has to me is much more than society that thinks nothing of values.

The story is about a young Amish girl, called Katie Fisher, who is accused of the murder of her newborn child. Coincidentally, a lawyer (Ellie Hathaway), taking a break away from her life in the city and the corruption of city life, and staying with her aunt Leda in Lancaster County is persuaded to take up the case and in effort to procure bail for Katie, offers to live in Katie's home until the trial. It's an interesting story, and takes you through the doors of Amish life and the simplicity of it, balanced against the legal system in the United States. From the cover itself, we glean that what the story offers is a balancing act between two cultures, and it certainly lives up to its' promise. Not only does the child deny giving birth, even though all the scientific evidence says that she has, she also denies vehemently that she killed her child.

I took a week to read this story, and enjoyed every page. The characters are well developed and believable but it was more than that to me. The story unfolded questions that a reader feels involved in, and at the end of the book, there was a section of questions poised in the story for study purposes, and I really did ask many of the questions before reading this section, because of the complexity of the story. For example, is trying an Amish person the same as trying an American since their way of life and the beliefs are so different, even from an early age. Humility is the key to the Amish life, and putting the importance of others before ones self. Over and over during the course of the story, you go through highs and lows, think you know how the story will unfold, but are surprised because it really is not a clear cut case at all.

The look that you take at Amish life is a pretty good one, and the sameness of these simple people who are known as 'Plain' makes sense, given the fact that it is not the individual that counts but the combination of individuals that make the society what it is, gives it its' strengths and perhaps through this story, its weaknesses too. I realise that this is fiction, though it is exceptionally well thought out fiction that would appeal to a wide spectrum of readers. In carrying out the exercises at the end of the book, I felt that my understanding of the differences between Amish 'right' and American 'right' was wide, and it wasn't until you understood the make up of the complex characters that make the story, that you are able to appreciate the complexity of the issues posed.

Described on the cover as a drama, I felt that the book deserved a better description, and to me it was more of an awakening than a drama, putting my thoughts about how different races of people interact, what happens when they do, and how very narrow minded people can be about other races beliefs and the way in which they react to given circumstance.

Jodi Picoult not only gave a good story in words, she conjured up scenes that I could actually imagine, and saw in pictures within my minds' eye. I loved the backdrop, the way of life, and the description of the pace of life that Ellie Hathaway discovered when she went to live with the Amish people. It actually felt quite familiar to me, as my life is slower than most UK lives, here tucked away from it all, though it doesn't mean that values are any less, or that people who chose a different mode of life have less worth or intelligence. It just means that they are different.

I was interested in the fact that Jodi Picoult chose the characters of her jury to be non Amish, and could just imagine this to be the case, and wondered if any case like this had been tried and whether in fact it was fair for a jury that knew very little of Amish ways to judge a girl whose whole life revolved around her belief. It gave a good insight into the growing up of Amish people, and how it differed from other upbringings in the same country and I really do believe that the book goes out of its way to make the picture it portrays as clear as possible, and succeeds.

The portrait of Katie's family was extensive. As a reader, you could almost see her mother, and her father, and imagine the unbendable belief that her father portrayed. Giving away much more than this would ruin the book for a potential reader, though I hope I gave enough to tempt, as I certainly would recommend both the style of the writer and the content, the delicate weave of words that paint a story worthy of telling. It's one book that I shall be keeping, and I shall be reading more of this lady's work because I believe she deals with moral issues, thinks out her stories in such detail as to be capable of painting a wide screen image of the characters that make the story work.

Meeting the people that are part of Katie's everyday life is enlightening, and I liked very much the character of Samuel Stolzfuß, or Katie's intended, his generosity of soul and genuine love for the girl that doesn't let circumstance sway his emotions for her, though most would bend given the same situation. He was almost like a great friend from youth that was always there, no matter what Katie did, and could be relied upon and friendships like that are rare, and perhaps since I have known that kind of friendship, could understand it and recognise that kind of love that doesn't impose conditions.

When a book makes me question my own morality, what I believe balanced against what others believe, it really is worth the read, and I would have no hesitation in recommending it as one of my favourite books to date.

Incidentally, at the back of the book are tasters for other works by the author, as well as an extract from another of her books, and I thought this was very well thought out on the part of the publishers and has tempted me to buy more of Jodi Picoult's work.

A bargain new at Amazon for 5.49 GBP (7.50 US Dollars), and certainly worth doing what I did, and buying two books at once, making a further saving on postal costs.

Paperback: 480 pages

Publisher: Flame (31 Oct 2004)

Language English

ISBN-10: 0340835478

ISBN-13: 978-0340835470

Learn more about this author, Thingywhatsit.

[show more](#)

Copyright © 2007 Helium, Inc. All rights reserved.

Helium, Inc.

300 Brickstone Square Andover, MA 01810 USA

* Choose "Print" from your browser to print the document. Choose "Back" on your browser to return to the document.

Publishers Weekly, Feb 14, 2005 v252 i7 p22(2)

From Quiche to Corvette Steve: from a safe haven, Jodi Picoult explores the dark side.
(Innovators Series)(Interview)

Full Text: COPYRIGHT 2005 Reed Business Information

JODI PICOULT IS A STUDY IN CONTRASTS. She lives in an idyllic farmhouse in Hanover, N.H., with her husband, Tim, a stay-at-home dad to their three children. There are cows in the yard and a friendly Springer spaniel named Gus running about. When PW visits Picoult to talk about the latest of her 12 novels, *Vanishing Acts*, out next month from Atria, New England is in the grip of winter, which only makes the warmth and settledness of the Picoult home all the more welcome. Indeed, the house hums with wholesome domesticity, and the fresh-baked quiche and coffecake on the counter tell Old Man Winter he's not so tough. The lovely house, with its view of snow-covered mountains, hardly seems the setting for the production of works that plumb the dark depths of human nature.

"I do like to deal with hard topics like child abuse," says Picoult, 38, who has degrees from Princeton and Harvard. "I've found that when you throw it into fiction, you almost hook the reader by accident because you get people involved with the story of a family, the story of a person. You sort of go in the back door and crack open their thinking."

In *Vanishing Acts*, Picoult deals with child abduction and the sexual abuse of children; in *My Sister's Keeper*, a child suffers from a fatal illness; euthanasia is at the center of *Mercy*; teen suicide impels *The Pact*. Nonetheless, Picoult comes across as bright and warm. In conversation, she makes easy small talk about her three kids, ice hockey, the latest theories of learning (Picoult has a Master's in education). She is aware that her children are living lives that hark back to an earlier, more innocent era. It is left to the characters in her books to deal with the perils of growing up today.

Indeed, Picoult, whose novels grapple heroically with many of the burning social issues of the day, most especially concerning the welfare of children, has been much praised for her ability to render a complexity of characterization. "My approach is like taking a can of worms and spilling it out and then asking everyone to put it back in," she comments. "Everyone is going to do it a different way and that's okay, because it's a 'what if' question.

"In *Vanishing Acts*, the question is, 'What if doing the right thing means doing the wrong thing? What if being a good parent means doing something that other parents would judge you very harshly for?'" The novel tells the story of Delia Hopkins, who, as a 32-year-old on the eve of her wedding, has a fleeting childhood memory involving her father and his role in a magic act she performed as a six-year-old. Her attempts to chase down this memory and pin it to truth become the novel's narrative drive, as Delia's widowed father moves in and out of shade.

"Just when you make up your mind that he's good, he starts running a crystal meth operation," Picoult says of the shape-changing father, laughing. "I went to a jail in Arizona," she adds. "Every detail about jail in that book is real. One of the detention officers set up interviews with inmates for me. The recipe for crystal meth came from an inmate named Corvette Steve. The good news is that I left out some very

important steps. Don't try this at home. It will blow up in your face."

- Picoult relishes research. On her refrigerator, there is a picture of her and her family dressed as Amish folk, a memento from her research for Plain Truth. For her next novel, The Tenth Circle, she spent time in an Eskimo village in Alaska.

While research adds authentic texture and detail to her tales, Picoult's work is about less time-bound themes--love under pressure, for example, or how moral challenges can draw us out in unsuspected ways. Picoult is proud of the moral depths of her work, and asks, dryly, "Isn't it interesting that this is considered to be commercial fiction?"

Picoult certainly is commercial. Her books consistently sell well; her Web site is imbued with the magnanimity of the beloved ("Jodi occasionally lurks here to see what people **really** have to say! Are you a writer? Share tips and questions on Jodi's new message board.... She'll be dropping in with hints from time to time!")

Like other ambitious writers of commercial fiction, Picoult chafes under the label while welcoming it, like a wool muffler on a cold day. "If you asked me, 'Are you commercial or are you literary?,' I would answer, 'I'm a commercial fiction writer.' In America you are very specifically targeted toward becoming either a commercial fiction writer or a literary fiction writer. But there is actually a wide range of commercial fiction. There is a lot of what I call 'McFiction,' and there are a handful of people who I consider to be commercial writers who write a beautiful book and an artistic book. Alice Hoffman, Anne Patchett, Anne Tyler, these are women who are good enough at their craft to be considered literary but they produce and sell like commercial writers.

"What you lose by deciding to become a commercial writer is a bit of pride," she concedes. "You can't count on a review in the New York Times. You probably never will be noticed by the National Book Awards." Never mind that a writer no less celebrated than Stephen King, when he received his recognition from the NBA in 2003, cited Picoult among a small group of authors usually thought of as commercial but equally deserving of recognition.

her life Storybook Start

"I had a ridiculously happy childhood," says Picoult. "I grew up in Nesconset, Long Island, in what was called the storybook development. Most of the streets had names like Prince Charming Lane, although we lived on Lloyd, which was not nearly as exciting. Every house looked the same. In fact, my thesis at Princeton was a novel called Developments. The protagonist is a real estate developer on Long Island who creates these developments. I'm very happy to say that this was not published, although it did teach me how to write a novel.

"My mom was a nursery school teacher and director, and my dad worked as a securities analyst on Wall Street. They were happily married and they are still happily married. I had one little brother and I liked him. My mom especially always encouraged my creativity. I never had any trauma.

"I know, I know--I have this really great existence and I write about this godawful stuff. I think that being able to leave my office and come downstairs to a happy family allows me to open that door to the dark side every day."

As with most writers, Picoult had an early mentor.

great teacher
"I had an amazing teacher at Princeton, Mary Morris. She basically ripped me to shreds and showed me I wasn't as good as I thought I was. But she also believed in me in a way that made me fight back and realize I could be better. She taught me what a novel is supposed to be. I think the most important thing that she taught me is that a good novel functions as if every chapter is a short story. She taught me that a novel is really just a bunch of connected short stories.

"She also taught me that you can't write about the dinosaurs until they become oil."

For her next book, Picoult is on to something a little different. She runs upstairs to get the graphic art that will illustrate *The Tenth Circle*, a popular reimagining of Dante's *Inferno*.

"This is the story of a man who literally has to go through hell to find his 15-year-old daughter. In between every chapter, there are pages from a comic book. You can read this as a comic book by itself or as a novel by itself, but when you put it together it's greater than the sum of the parts.

"Lucifer was tossed out of Heaven over the issue of free will, and that's basically what this is about," Picoult adds. "The idea is that the lowest circle of Hell, even lower than betraying your benefactor, is betraying yourself."

Picoult is more than warming to the task of describing a trip through hell. "At the end, the devil makes a man decide who he is, and he winds up picking the most demonic, the worst version of himself because he realizes he can get everything he wants by admitting that."

Picoult smiles at us, aglow. The darkness of her theme has fled, a kind of vanishing act in itself, perpetrated by a writer's creative heat.

[About Jodi](#) | [Others on Jodi](#) | [An Interview with Jodi](#) | [Large Black & White Photo](#) | [Large Color Photo](#)



"Picoult is a novelist to watch." -- Glamour

Jodi Picoult, 37, is the bestselling author of eleven novels: *Songs of the Humpback Whale* (1992), *Harvesting the Heart* (1994), *Picture Perfect* (1995); *Mercy* (1996), *The Pact* (1998); *Keeping Faith* (1999), *Plain Truth* (2000), *Salem Falls* (2001), *Perfect Match* (2002), *Second Glance* (2003) and her newest novel, *My Sister's Keeper* (2004). In 2003 she was awarded the New England Bookseller Award for Fiction.

She was born and raised -happily-on Long Island...something that she believed at first was a detriment to a girl who wanted to be a writer. "I had such an uneventful childhood that when I was taking writing classes at college, I called home and asked my mother if maybe there might have been a little incest or domestic abuse on the side that she'd forgotten about," Picoult recalls. "It took me a while to realize that I already did have something to write about - that solid core of family, and the knotty tangle of relationships, which I keep coming back to in my books."

Picoult studied creative writing with Mary Morris at Princeton, and had two short stories published in *Seventeen* magazine while still a student. "The first time the editor called me to say she wanted to pay me for something I'd written," Picoult says, "I immediately called my mom and said, 'I'm going to be a writer!' 'That's great,' she said. 'Who's going to support you?'" Realism - and a profound desire to be able to pay the rent - led Picoult to a series of different jobs following her graduation: as a technical writer for a Wall Street brokerage firm, as a copywriter at an ad agency, as an editor at a textbook publisher, and as an 8th grade English teacher - before entering Harvard to pursue a master's in education. She married Tim Van Leer, whom she had known at Princeton, and it was while she was pregnant with her first child that she wrote her first novel, *Songs of the Humpback Whale*.

Picoult says, "I found out it was going to be published just before my son was born, and I had this completely idealistic vision of him sitting at my feet, cooing, while I continued to write books. Needless to say, it didn't quite work out that way." Her struggle to balance motherhood and her own career formed, in part, the basis for her second novel, *Harvesting the Heart*. For a few years, she was either delivering a book or a baby. Now, she's happy to be prolific solely in her writing...and admits wholeheartedly that she moonlights as a writer, but she's really a mom. "It took me a while to find the balance," Picoult says, "but I'm a better mother because I have my writing...and I'm a better writer because of the experiences I've had as a parent that continually remind me how far we are willing to go for the people we love the most."

She and Tim and their three children live in Hanover, New Hampshire with a dog, a rabbit, two Jersey calves, and the occasional Holstein.

Others On Jodi...

"Ms. Picoult has carved her own niche with her novels - one part romance, one part courtroom thriller, two parts social commentary." --
Dallas Morning News

"Beginning with her first book...Picoult has refused to sweat the small stuff. She's concerned with love and truth, the blurry boundary lines implied by both. She forces the reader to look, however uncomfortable the experience might be, at complacent people who discover, much too late, the sad disparity between what they thought they knew and what they know now." -- Orlando Sentinel Tribune

A. Jump out of a plane. I was in college, and my old boyfriend dared me. It was incredibly beautiful.

Q. You are on a deserted island. What health and beauty product do you miss most?

A. Contact lens solution. And frizz-control for my hair. Although I suppose if I was on a deserted island, I could use mashed bananas.

Q. If you were in the middle of an earthquake, what would take out of your house?

A. An earthquake? In New Hampshire?

Q. Indulge me.

A. My kids, my husband, my dog. Whatever manuscript I'm working on right now, and/or research. The aforementioned contact lenses. My daughter's tiny stuffed dog Diddley, because without it none of us will ever get to sleep. Shoes.

Q. Jimmy Choo?

A. Merrell Clogs. Hey, it's New Hampshire

* Choose "Print" from your browser to print the document. Choose "Back" on your browser to return to the document.

Publishers Weekly, March 20, 2000 v247 i12 p69

PLAIN TRUTH. (Review)(Brief Article)

Full Text: COPYRIGHT 2000 Cahners Business Information

JODI PICOULT. Pocket, \$24.95 (416p) ISBN 0-671-77612-6

Though it begins as the quietly electrifying story of an unmarried Amish teenager who gives birth to a baby she is accused of then smothering, Picoult's latest (after *Keeping Faith*) settles into an ordinary trial epic, albeit one centered intriguingly on an Amish dairy farm near Lancaster, Pa. Katie Fisher, 18, denies not only having committed the murder but even having home the baby, whose body is found in the Fishers' calving pen, and she sticks to her story, even when she is quizzed by Ellie Hathaway, the high-powered Philadelphia attorney who undertakes Katie's defense as a favor to Leda, an aunt she and the young woman share. Ellie, who has retreated to Leda's farm in Paradise to reconsider her life--she successfully defends guilty clients--embarks on the case reluctantly: at 39, she wants nothing more than to have a child. However, to meet bail stipulations, she volunteers as Katie's guardian (since Kate's strict parents reject her) and moves in with the Fishem. Living with the Amish necessitates some adjustments for both parties, but Katie and Ellie become fast friends in spite of their differences. Very little action occurs beyond the initial setup, though the questions remain: Who was the father of Katie's child? And did she smother the newborn? Told from both third-person omniscient and first-person (Ellie's) vantages, the story rolls leisurely through the trial preparations, the results of which are repeated, tediously, in the courtroom. Perhaps the story's quietude is appropriate, given its magnificently painted backdrop and distinctive characters, but one can't help wishing that the spark igniting the book's opening pages had built into a full fledged blaze. (May)

- *Keeping Faith*, Morrow (New York, NY), 1999.
- *Plain Truth*, Pocket Books (New York, NY), 2000.
- *Salem Falls*, Pocket Books (New York, NY), 2001.
- *Perfect Match*, Atria Books (New York, NY), 2002.
- *Second Glance*, Atria Books (New York, NY), 2003.
- *My Sister's Keeper*, Atria Books (New York, NY), 2004.
- *Vanishing Acts*, Atria Books (New York, NY), 2005.
- *The Tenth Circle*, Atria Books (New York, NY), 2006.

Media Adaptations: Picoult's novels *The Pact* and *Plain Truth* were adapted for television and aired on the Lifetime network, 2002 and 2004. *My Sister's Keeper* was optioned by Fine Line Films for theatrical release.

"Sidelights"

Since her first success with *Songs of the Humpback Whale* in 1992, novelist Jodi Picoult has produced several other books in quick succession, often working on two books simultaneously. While she did tell an interviewer for the *Allen-Unwin* Web site that "I moonlight as a writer. My daylight hours are spent with my three children," her writing time has become more constant since her husband chose to be a stay-at-home dad. Picoult's themes center on women's issues, family, and relationships. According to Donna Seaman in *Booklist*, the author is "a writer of high energy and conviction."

Picoult's second work, *Harvesting the Heart*, concerns Paige O'Toole, an Irish Catholic with some artistic talent. The product of an unhappy childhood and adolescence, Paige leaves home after high school and lands a job at a diner where she sketches customers. There she meets her future husband, the egocentric Nicholas Prescott, whom she eventually puts through medical school after his parents disown him. After their first child is born, Paige becomes frustrated with the pressures of motherhood and increasingly estranged from the busy Nicholas. At the end of her patience, she decides to leave her family and seek her own mother, who left her when Paige was only five. Paige's heartwrenching decision leads her to deal with her own identity as she discovers she is not like her irresponsible mother. A happy ending ensues, with Paige returning to her family and Nicholas learning to take on more family responsibilities. A *Kirkus Reviews* critic found that the book had "some good writing, but not enough to sustain a concept-driven and rather old-fashioned story."

After producing *Harvesting the Heart*, Picoult published *Picture Perfect*, a study of wife abuse, and *Mercy*, a story dealing with euthanasia. In 1998 she published *The Pact: A Love Story*, a legal thriller set in a New Hampshire town. The novel concerns the Hartes and the Golds, neighbors and close friends. Their teenaged children, Chris and Emily, who grew up almost as brother and sister, become romantically involved and enter into a suicide pact. However, Chris survives and is charged with murder. After an investigation, he is jailed, and the friendship between the two families dissolves.

January 15, 2004, review of *My Sister's Keeper*.

- *Knight-Ridder/Tribune News Service*, June 15, 2000, Linda DuVal, review of *Plain Truth*, p. K239.
- *Library Journal*, May 1, 2002, Nancy Pear, review of *Perfect Match*; February 15, 2003, Diana McRae, review of *Second Glance*; March 15, 2004, Kim Uden Rutter, review of *My Sister's Keeper*.
- *Publishers Weekly*, May 6, 2002, review of *Perfect Match*; February 16, 2004, review of *My Sister's Keeper*.

ONLINE

- *Allen-Unwin Web site*, [http:// www.allen-unwin.com/](http://www.allen-unwin.com/) (October 2, 2000), interview with Picoult.
- *Jodi Picoult Web site*, [http:// www.jodipicoult.com](http://www.jodipicoult.com) (August 23, 2004).*

Source: *Contemporary Authors Online*, Thomson Gale, 2006.

Source Database: Contemporary Authors Online

According to a *Kirkus Reviews* critic, the trial scenes in *The Pact* are "powerful," and the novel itself is "an affecting study of obsession, loss, and some of the more wrenching varieties of guilt." Seaman, writing in *Booklist*, dubbed Picoult's book "a finely honed, commanding, and cathartic drama."

The author's 1999 novel, *Keeping Faith*, also concerns characters in a small town struggling to maintain their concepts of honesty and faith. The protagonist, Mariah White, discovers that her husband has been unfaithful and subsequently sinks into depression. Her seven-year-old daughter, Faith, is upset by her mother's behavior and begins conversing with an imaginary friend, as well as acting as if she has newfound religious powers. Their lives enter a state of increasing upheaval as more and more of the faithful and the curious come to partake of Faith's supposed healing powers. Faith's father sues for custody of the girl, and an emotional court scene ensues. Margaret Flanagan, in *Booklist*, called the novel "a mesmerizing morality play."

Picoult's novel *Plain Truth* is set in the Pennsylvania Amish country. When a dead infant is discovered in the barn of an Amish farmer, a police investigation suggests that the mother is an eighteen-year-old Amish girl and that the baby did not die of natural causes. Although the teen denies responsibility, she is arrested and charged with murder. She is defended by a Philadelphia attorney, Ellie Hathaway, who soon clashes both with the will of her client and with the cultural values of Amish society. In the process of building her client's difficult defense, Ellie discovers more and more about her own inner life and personal values, while also learning to appreciate the values of the "plain people." Many reviewers praised the novel's suspenseful plot, its characterization, and its skillful portrait of Amish culture. *Knight-Ridder/Tribune News Service* contributor Linda DuVal said that in *Plain Truth* Picoult writes with "clarity" and "depicts a simple, yet deceptively complex, society of people who share a sense of compassion and the unshakable belief in the goodness of their fellow men and women."

In *My Sister's Keeper*, Picoult uses her characters to explore the ramifications of cloning and gene replacement therapy, asking whether birthing one child to save the life of another child makes one a good mother--or a very bad one. A *Kirkus Reviews* critic declared that in *My Sister's Keeper* the novelist "vividly evokes the physical and psychic toll a desperately sick child imposes on a family, even a close and loving one." Noting that there are "no easy outcomes in a tale about individual autonomy clashing with a sibling's right to life," the reviewer explained that "Picoult thwarts our expectations in unexpected ways" and dubbed *My Sister's Keeper* "a telling portrait" of a modern American family under stress.

Picoult once noted of her work: "I am particularly concerned with what constitutes the truth--how well we think we know the people we love and the lives we live. I also write about the intricacies of family ties and connections, which often unearth questions that have no easy answers."

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

PERIODICALS

- *Booklist*, April 1, 1998, Donna Seaman, review of *The Pact: A Love Story*; May 15, 1999, Margaret Flanagan, review of *Keeping Faith*; December 15, 2002, Kristine Huntley, review of *Second Glance*; January 1, 2004, Kristine Huntley, review of *My Sister's Keeper*.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, August 15, 1993, review of *Harvesting the Heart*; March 15, 1998, review of *The Pact*; April 15, 2002, review of *Perfect Match*; January 1, 2003, review of *Second Glance*;