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### Wait Until I'm Dead! A Novel of Family Secrets by Elda Dawber

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### Keywords

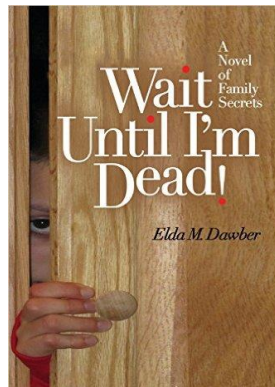
Abuse family, secrets, fiction, adverse childhood experiences, drama, fiction, training

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**BOOK REVIEW: WAIT UNTIL I'M DEAD!  
A NOVEL OF FAMILY SECRETS BY ELDA M. DAWBER  
CREATESPACE INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING PLATFORM, 2014, 346 PAGES**



**Cordelia Anderson**

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**KEYWORDS**

Abuse, family, secrets, adverse childhood experiences, drama, fiction, training

**E**LDA DAWBER'S first novel, *Wait Until I'm Dead!*, is a gripping read for those who relish escaping into a mystery-filled world with characters who are easy to want to spend time with while also being challenged by other characters equally easy to hiss at or fear. The main character, DJ, is a wildly successful romance writer who feels compelled to write an autobiography likely to shatter her image and challenge her dedicated fans. Her best friends, Kate and Tuck, are not only an example of a loving couple and caring, supportive friends, but also much needed comic relief who readers are likely to desire as their friends. They are intensely committed to DJ's journey, not only of writing this particular book but to going with her to inform her family she's writing it. Since the book contains multiple stories of abuse in the family and equally appalling responses to it, the uncovering is aided by Kate and Tuck's skills, wit, and tenacity as social workers with abused children.

Chapters of DJ's autobiography—interspersed throughout the novel—lead readers on a wild ride through layers and layers of family secrets that eventually reveal a complex and painful picture. However, it is ever so much more than that. Elda Dawber's years of experience as a compassionate licensed clinical social worker allow her to envelop the actions and reactions of her characters in ways that allow the reader the opportunity to learn about the dynamics of abuse, trauma, and

dysfunction without even knowing the lessons are happening. Elda Dawber doesn't hold back on the impact of sexual abuse or many other layers of trauma in DJ's childhood that compels her adult actions to no longer to carry or hide the family secrets. While many such stories have been told by survivors, clinicians, and novelists, what Dawber adds here is poetic sensitivity to a variety of moral, emotional and relational struggles. DJ's mother never ceases to take every opportunity to weigh DJ down with "ought's" related to how she should be, rather than appreciating who she is. Her discrediting is amplified by hiding behind accusing DJ of being a story teller and liar. Yet, for DJ, as motherless as her mother is for her, she is also the only mother she has and was a protection—however feeble—from her abusive father. DJ's main protector, her uncle, also happens to be a highly successful pornographer. This uncle, "Zipper" Malone, justifies his work by holding on to the notion he is doing nothing harmful, particularly since he doesn't support *child* pornography. Kate and Tuck shed light on the reality of the harms of his work and successes, while also understanding DJ's reality of loving the one person who believed and supported her.

Dawber writes: "Confusion is not an arbitrary result of abuse to a child. It is a constant, a given." This line speaks to the reality for so many survivors of adverse childhood experiences who struggle with the crushing need for the abuse to stop, to be believed, and to have the person who hurt them take responsibility and be held accountable. However, the book raises many challenges to what that accountability means and how it is complicated by compassion and love for those who cause great harm. *Wait Until I'm Dead!* not only brings deep insights into the layers of harm for victims and the ripple effects through families, but it also does much more by helping readers confront the faulty and distorted thinking of abusers. It's easy to be stopped in one's tracks reading the wicked excuses Zipper makes for his various choices. And it is deliciously satisfying to read such excuses challenged by Kate, Tuck, and DJ.

*Wait Until I'm Dead!* while being a rock-solid novel to read for entertainment, is also a useful resource for clinicians for their training and work with survivors and families. Dawber's skill at describing the intensity and value of the therapeutic experience is alone worth the read. The novel could also stimulate meaningful book club discussions and could support the movement to end such harms if made into a film. Perhaps more importantly, because a key strategy towards ending child sexual abuse is perpetration prevention, *Wait Until I'm Dead!* can vividly show readers how to confront excuses for harmful and abusive behaviors.

DJ asks us to "Imagine a world in which every child is loved and held safe." This valuable book offers the reader abundant opportunities to help prompt discussions and to support the clinical and prevention work necessary to do just that.

*Wait Until I'm Dead!* has won several awards, including:

- Award-Winning Finalist, USA Best Book Awards, 2016
- Award-Winning Finalist in Fiction, USA Best Book Awards, 2015
- Winner, First Prize in Literary Fiction, Independent Publishers of New England, 2015
- Finalist in Cover Design, Independent Publishers of New England, 2015.

### **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

Cordelia Anderson, MA, has been working to prevent sexual harm (abuse, exploitation, and violence) and to promote sexual health and wellness for 40 years. Since 1992, she has operated a training and consultation business based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, through which she works with a broad range of organizations across North America. Cordelia has conducted over 2,500 presentations at national and international conferences, is on the board of The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers Prevention Committee, and founded the National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation. She also co-hosts Prevent-Connect's *Ending Child Sexual Abuse* Webinar series and authored *The Impact of Pornography on Children, Youth, and Culture* published by NEARI Press (2012, rewrite to be released 2017).

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