

In the Water They Can't See You Cry: A Memoir

By Amanda Beard, Rebecca Paley

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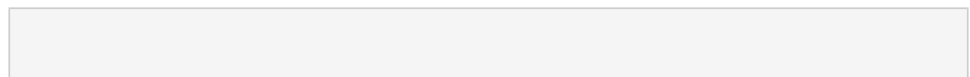
In this candid and ultimately uplifting memoir, Olympic medalist Amanda Beard reveals the truth about coming of age in the spotlight, the demons she battled along the way, and the newfound happiness that has proved to be her greatest victory.

At the tender age of fourteen, Amanda Beard walked onto the pool deck at the Atlanta Olympics carrying her teddy bear, Harold, and left with two silvers and a gold medal. She competed in three more Olympic games, winning a total of seven medals, and enjoyed a lucrative modeling career on the side. At one point, she was the most downloaded female athlete on the Internet.

Yet despite her astonishing career and sex-symbol status, Amanda felt unworthy of all her success. Unaware that she was suffering from clinical depression, she hid the pain beneath a megawatt smile. With no other outlet for her feelings besides the pool, Amanda expressed her emotions through self-destructive behavior. In her late teens and twenties, she became bulimic, abused drugs and alcohol, and started cutting herself.

Her low self-esteem led to toxic relationships with high-profile men in the sports world. No one, not even her own parents and friends, knew about the turmoil she was going through. Only when she met her future husband, who discovered her cutting herself, did Amanda realize she needed help.

Through her renewed faith in herself; the love of her family; and finally the birth of her baby boy, Blaise, Amanda has transformed her life. In these pages, she speaks frankly about her struggles with depression, the pressures to be thin, and the unhealthy relationships she confused for love. *In the Water They Can't See You Cry* is a raw, compelling story of a woman who gained the strength to live as bravely out of the water as she did in it.



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Editorial Review

Review

"Her remarkable story, courageous resilience, and honest self-assessment make this an inspiring read." --- Publishers Weekly

About the Author

Amanda Beard is a seven-time Olympic medalist. She lives in Tucson, Arizona, with her husband, the photographer Sacha Brown, and her son, Blaise. Visit her at AmandaBeard.net.

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chapter 1

I wanted to get to the pool so badly, I was practically running. The July sun had already dried all the dew on our neighbors' matching green lawns, and I was hot. Why were they taking *so* long?

I turned around to watch my family, almost half a block behind me. Mom and Dad, laughing as usual about some story, carried all the junk. They had packed a cooler filled with drinks, sandwiches, and chips that'd last us the whole day of hanging out in the pool and on the surrounding soft, grassy hills. Though we lived only two blocks away, my mom had enough towels, books, and blankets that we looked as if we were moving to the pool.

Okay, I could understand my parents' slow speed, but what were my sisters' problems? Lagging even farther behind, Leah and Taryn had their heads close together the way they always did when they were gossiping, which was a lot of the time. The three of us were like variations on the same theme. Despite the age differences (Leah was two years older than Taryn, who was five years older than me), we were all beanpoles with olive skin, dark brown hair, bright blue almond-shaped eyes, and huge California-girl smiles. But we couldn't have looked more different.

Leah's hair was feathered as it always was, and even though we were headed for the pool, she had put on the blue eyeliner that was her current style obsession. I had to admit, she looked really good. Taryn was just as pretty. Her short hairstyle made her neck look graceful like a dancer's. It was so different from the long, mostly blonde hair that practically every girl in our town had. But she hated doing her hair so much that Mom had threatened to cut it all off if she didn't brush it. Taryn didn't brush it, and my mom didn't make idle threats. So Taryn had hair like a boy's, which was fine with her.

However, I was the real tomboy. I never heard of a sport I didn't want to play, and I never wavered from my uniform of shorts, T-shirt, and sneakers. Today I had jazzed it up with my acid-washed shorts and New Kids on the Block tank top. But the heat was beginning to make my bathing suit underneath stick to my torso.

"Come on!" I shouted at my family. They just ignored me.

I could have run ahead without them. I knew the site—the pool (nine feet at one end, four feet at the other), the grassy hills, the showers, the covered area with picnic tables—like I knew the back of my hand. And I loved everything about the place: the buttery smell of sunscreen, the feel of hot concrete under my feet, the shock of the first jump into the pool. It didn't matter that I spent all day, every day of the week, around the

same pool during swim team practice. On the weekends, it was different; I had to be with my family.

Instead of bolting ahead, I waited for my sisters, who agreed to play Marco Polo with me as soon as we arrived. After they grew bored, my dad chucked me across the pool a few times before he had to get out and help my mom set up the chairs and cooler near the encampment of parents. Luckily a group of neighborhood kids started a fierce game of sharks and minnows that went on until we were starved and our skin was puckered and white. I hopped out of the pool and bolted toward my mom, who greeted me with a clean towel, a turkey sandwich, and a cold Dr Pepper. After gobbling down lunch, I went straight back into the water. And that's where I stayed, where we all stayed, until the sun started to go down on that perfect summer day.

Perfect. That's the word that describes where I grew up. Irvine, California, had cul-de-sacs and identically manicured lawns, kids on bikes and parents who let us do pretty much as we wanted in what seemed like the safest town in the world. It was straight out of a John Hughes movie where the biggest problem is a fight with your best friend. You never saw a single piece of litter on the streets. Even the bright blue sky was straight out of a Hollywood set. Located in Orange County (not exactly known as a land of hardship), my hometown was sunny, on average, 325 days a year. And because it's on the coast, the average temperature is a comfortable seventy degrees. We never had to worry about the town's Easter Egg Hunt or Fourth of July Bike Parade getting rained out. As I said—perfect.

My parents fit right in. High school sweethearts from the Puget Sound region in Washington State, they got married when my mother, Gayle, was twenty and my dad, Dan, was twenty-one. He had been the captain of the football team, and she had been captain of the cheerleading squad. I made fun of them for their cheesy perfection (my mom was homecoming queen), but secretly I was proud to have them as parents.

With his dark skin, black hair, and blue eyes, I thought my dad was the most handsome guy in the world. A basketball player at Washington State, he kept his six-one frame in great shape by continuing to play lots of sports. My petite mom, a lighter beauty with sandy-blond hair and pale-blue eyes, fit right into my dad's side.

You couldn't have asked for better parents. They were like best friends who never fought. Because they were both teachers—my dad taught hotel and restaurant management at Orange Coast College, and my mom taught art at various local schools—they always seemed to be around. Over boring, balanced breakfasts and dinners prepared by my mother, which we ate together every day, my siblings and I competed to see who could be the goofiest and get the most attention. Whether it was acting out *Annie* during a family camping trip or telling the best fart joke over chicken and broccoli, Mom and Dad encouraged us to have fun. Everything was about having a good time.

There was always something crazy going on in our house. That's why all the neighborhood kids gravitated to our four-bedroom tract home in a development called the Colony. My parents, in their very laid-back way, welcomed every single one of our friends. They kept the fridge and cabinets stocked with all the best junk food and allowed us to act young and silly. That meant not freaking out if someone spilled soda on the carpet, hit a lawn ornament with a hockey puck, or lay around watching MTV all afternoon.

Some kids liked it so much, they hardly ever left. One summer, Bobby Lanza, a boy I was really close to from the age of two on, spent every minute that he wasn't sleeping at our house. That wasn't such a big deal; lots of kids did that. But Bobby, who was eight at the time, wore his Speedo for every single one of those minutes. "Jeez, Bobby, give that thing a rest," my sister Taryn said by early July.

“Maybe you *should* give it a wash and wear something else,” Leah said.

“Do you sleep in your Speedo too?” Taryn laughed.

Bobby was unfazed, and so was I. Teasing was the price we happily paid to hang out with (or at least around) my older sisters and their friends. Although we were on the fringes—listening to the new Huey Lewis and the News album through an open door to the living room or using the terms *face!* or *bitchin’* even if we had no idea what they meant—it was still an exciting place to be. Growing up, I thought Leah and Taryn were the coolest people on earth. Anything they did, I wanted to do too. When they started wearing huge socks scrunched down by their ankles, I begged my mom for a pair and wore them piled around my toothpick ankles. They used mousse to get their bangs to stand straight up, then so would I—well, at least once before I decided hair was a waste of time. I even posed the same way they did in photos, with their head tilted way over to one side.

Taryn wasn’t tolerant of my copycat ways. To her, I was nothing more than the annoying little sister. If my parents ever left her to babysit me, we’d both cry to try to get out of the arrangement. Leah, on the other hand, treated me like her special little baby. She would do anything for me, including play endless sessions of Barbie. If Leah had jumped off a bridge, I would have followed in a heartbeat. While I didn’t leap off Golden Gate, I did take tap, jazz, and ballet because Leah was a big dancer. I stuck with it for several years until it was obvious to me and everyone else that I wasn’t very good at it.

While I adored Leah, the best times were when the entire family was together. And there was no better time in our family than Christmas. In our house, Christmas was not a subtle affair. We were those guys who got our tree the minute after the Thanksgiving dishes had been cleared. We played Christmas music and Christmas movies nonstop, decorated the house like crazy, and drank hot cocoa even though it was Southern California. I lived for our traditions, which included my mother and grandma baking trays of *fattigman*, an exotic savory cookie popular in Sweden and Norway, and my dad reading the children’s book *The Polar Express* to all the kids at our annual holiday party. We also used the holiday as an excuse to sneak in a few practical jokes, like the time we gave our grandfather—my dad’s dad, who had been a strict high school principal—a black lace thong for Christmas just to see his reaction when he opened his present. My mom, dad, sisters, and I all wound up laughing too hard to see the expression of shock on his face.

While I recognized that my parents, my town, our home, the pool, and my sisters (even Taryn) were perfect because of their natural, easygoing, and carefree ways, for me perfection could be achieved only through a kind of vigilance I had known ever since I could remember.

Hyperorganized, a neat freak, kind of compulsive: call it what you like, I needed order. All my stuff was perfect. In my sixth-grade classroom, my little desktop stood out like an empty island in a sea of chaos. My pencils were lined up in descending height order next to my pens at the top of the desk, schoolwork and notes to the left, books to the right. When kids knocked my display askew with their backpacks, the disorder sent a cold feeling directly to the pit of my stomach. Until I righted it again.

No one ever had to tell me to clean my room; it was always clean. That was no small feat considering I had two parakeets (Goldie and Zeba), two lovebirds (Peaches and Big Mouth), and our family cats (Angel and Dodger), who used my room as their hangout. Those birds were a mess, constantly throwing their food out of their cages and all over my floor. The vacuum was practically attached to my hand, I used it so much. They were worth it though. I spent hours with my animals, dressing up the cats in outfits and teaching the birds to sit on my finger, which I thought was so cool. They were like best friends.

It wasn't just my room that I cleaned. I would have sooner died than have my human friends come over to a dirty house. Before a playdate, I cleaned the house—and I don't mean tidy but what my mom called a "deep clean." I busted out the wood cleaner for the coffee table, dusted the bookshelves, put all the dishes away, Windexed the sliding glass doors, and made sure my Chipmunks record collection was nicely organized. My sisters—whose rooms appeared to have been hit by bombs that sent their Huey Lewis and Andre Agassi posters askew and their clothes across the floor—looked at me like I was crazy.

My mom, on the other hand, thought her youngest daughter giving her house a good scrub-down was hilarious.

"When I grow up, Mom, I want to be your maid," I said. It was my fantasy job because I could live with my mom *and* clean.

"Fantastic," she said.

I didn't know my Windexing was weird—my parents certainly never made me feel that way. In fact, they made me feel as if anything I did was okay. Limitations never crossed my mind, especially when it came to the physical. Rambunctious to the extreme, I loved a goal, a competition, a challenge of any kind. There's an old family video from one of our hiking trips to Yosemite where my sisters stop at a soggy, moss-covered log to discuss whether they can use it to cross a rushing creek. Suddenly the camera pans to me; with tall alpine trees as my backdrop, I flip my hair brazenly and then start to run across the log. No contemplation, no strategy, no taking it slow—just going for it. In the next scene, I fall off the log like a cartoon character and land smack in the gooey mud. I was completely humiliated, but no fall could erode my fearlessness. Nothing bad was ever going to happen to me. I was sure of that.

My combined fearlessness and high energy made for a lot of showing off. To expend a little bit of the energy that drove my parents nuts, they enrolled me in every activity under the sun. By the time I was four years old, I was taking swimming, soccer, gymnastics, and dance. And still, I had enough steam left over to play endless roller hockey with the neighbors.

When it came to sports, I wanted to do it all. And in Irvine that was a completely realistic goal. Everything was at our fingertips, with pristine basketball and tennis courts, fields, and pools that anybody in the community could use for free. I didn't care if they were "boys' sports" or not, I played softball, football, and basketball—you name it. Dad couldn't have been happier; I was the son he never had.

Even when my dad and I rode our bikes to the basketball court to play horse, I felt the rush of competition and pedaled hard to keep up with him. On the court, he towered over me, his broad shoulders, lean torso, and powerful legs completely eclipsing my spaghetti-thin frame. But I thought I still had a shot. *I'm faster, smarter. I can beat this giant.* We both had the squinted look of people taking a game really, really seriously.

For hours we played horse (there was no way I could out-dribble my six-foot dad), forgetting about the time of day, trying crazier and crazier shots. My dad didn't let me win. I had to really win. That hardly happened, but when it did, I bragged to my family how I had schooled Dad on the court.

In the whirlwind of activities that I did on any of the trim fields or bright, shining facilities in our town, swimming held a special place. Swimming was major in Orange County. Every kid did it, and every rich kid tried to do it well. For me, the love was real. From my earliest memories, the pool was the place of long, happy summer days having fun surrounded by everyone I knew. It was also the only sport shared by my oldest, girlie-girl sister; my middle, rebellious one; and me.

Before I had even turned two years old, my parents toted me to the community pool to watch my sisters' practices and swim meets with their team, the Colony Red Hots. Hanging from my father's arm or toddling with the help of my mother's hand, I thrust my hands out, trying to reach the moving shapes in a spray of blue. By three, I was a full-on water baby who longed to be a part of the team, even though I wasn't eligible to join the summer league until the following year. I was such a pest that the coaches got me a tiny black swimsuit with red piping, the uniform of a Red Hot.

It was official (at least to me!): I was part of the team. My parents and the coaches let me spend all summer pretending. I followed swimmers alongside the pool during races as if I and not they were swimming. During free swim, I dove like a dolphin between the legs of the older kids horsing around and challenged my sisters to see who could hold our breath underwater the longest. I stayed in the pool until my lips were blue and someone finally yanked me out.

In the summer of 1986, it was truly official. Old enough to really be in the league, I curled my toes around the edge of the starting block, as I had been taught, and stared at the long stretch of shining blue in front of me. In the periphery of my goggles I could detect the movements of my competitors, but I didn't look at them. Just straight ahead.

Bang! A shot announced the start of the race.

I pushed off the block, trying to fly as far as I could through the air, and plunged into the water. In a flurry of reaching and kicking, my brain repeating every instruction again and again, I moved like a fish through the water. No, that's too slow. More like a speeding bullet. Definitely. My heart pounded with the effort and my four-year-old muscles began to strain. How much longer could I go? Then, *bam*, my hands hit the hard wall, and I shot up out of the water. An entire lap! And I had done it. I won!

I scanned the crowd through the watery view of my goggles and found my family cheering wildly. My sisters, in their Red Hot suits, were making whooping sounds while my mom clapped happily. But my dad was the most excited, pumping his fist into the air. I felt as if I had won the Olympics. I was hooked.

That summer I practiced for a half hour in the morning every day of the week with the other kids my age and then spent the rest of the day hanging around the pool, watching the older team members work out, or playing games until the sun had finally ducked behind the hills, which meant it was time to go home for dinner. The pool was the place to be. Mom and Dad, who had the summers off from teaching, were always waiting alongside the other parents at picnic tables covered in sandwiches and drinks for their ravenous kids. When my sisters weren't in the pool, they joked around and gossiped with their friends in the shade of the trees or moved to the grassy hills for more serious discussions.

Out of the whole week, Saturdays were my favorite. That's when we had swim meets. My three or four races were each only a lap long, which I knew wasn't as hard as what the older kids did, but it didn't matter. They were races and I was going to win. I put everything I knew how to put into those fifty-second bursts of crazy energy, and it usually paid off.

If anyone singled me out as a swimmer, it wasn't for talent. It was for love and belonging. With the sun shining, my sisters as teammates, and my parents as cheerleaders, I would have been happy to stay in the water forever. Life would always be like this, because why change what's perfect?

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