



## Learning To Swim

*Sara J. Henry*

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*“If I’d blinked, I would have missed it. But I didn’t, and I saw something fall from the rear deck of the opposite ferry: a small, wide-eyed human face, in one tiny frozen moment, as it plummeted toward the water.”*

When she sees what looks like a child tumbling from a ferry into frigid Lake Champlain, Troy Chance dives in without thinking. When she gets the child to shore she discovers that his name is Paul, he speaks only French—and no one seems to be looking for him.

Her determination to protect Paul pulls Troy from her quiet life in a small Adirondack town into an unfamiliar world of wealth and privilege in Canada and then in Vermont. Her attachment to him—and the danger she faces when she tries to unravel the mystery of his abandonment—force her to evaluate everything she thought true about herself.

Sara J. Henry's riveting, award-winning debut will keep readers engrossed right up to its shattering conclusion.

## Learning To Swim Details

Date : Published (first published 2011)

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Author : Sara J. Henry

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## From Reader Review Learning To Swim for online ebook

### Chris says

I really wanted to like this book more than I did. That said, I whizzed through it in a couple of days, so something must have kept my attention and it wasn't a total bomb. Sometimes it's great to read a book about where you're from, you see all the familiar places on the page. But in this case, some of the things in this book I don't think could plausibly happen.

\*Warning ahead. Read at your own risk, I don't think I give too much away, but if you are thinking of reading this, some info may be construed as spoilers.

Troy Chance (she's a woman) sees a child thrown from an opposite ferry on Lake Champlain. In just a split second, she sees the child, and jumps in the lake to save him. OK, first off, the ferrys don't run that close together, so how could she see the eyes of the child? As being a "non-competitive swimmer" how could she rescue a small child and literally drag him several miles in late spring water? The lake temps that time of year is like 50 degrees. No one saw the child tossed and no one saw her jump off a full ferry? And come on, there was NO ONE at the ferry dock? So not one single soul saw you jump and rescue this child? That was just the first bone of contention I had with this story, added to the fact I really didn't like Troy's personality at all.

From here, we go into a story about how/why the child was kidnapped, going from New York, Vermont, Montreal, to Ottawa. I kept with this to the end because honestly, I wanted to know how it ended. I didn't see the twist coming, but I have just as many questions as I did in the beginning, because it just didn't seem like it could really happen.

I feel really badly this was less than satisfactory read for me. Maybe it's my many years of reading top-notch mystery writers, Agatha Christie, PD James, but this one had too many holes in it for me to rank it up there. I believe this is the first in what will be a series. I'll try her again, but next time with lower expectations. :-(

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### Richard Derus says

Rating: 4\* of five

**The Publisher Says:** "If I'd blinked, I would have missed it. But I didn't, and I saw something fall from the rear deck of the opposite ferry: a small, wide-eyed human face, in one tiny frozen moment, as it plummeted toward the water."

When she sees what looks like a child tumbling from a ferry into frigid Lake Champlain, Troy Chance dives in without thinking. When she gets the child to shore she discovers that his name is Paul, he speaks only French—and no one seems to be looking for him.

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**My Review:** This book is not oversold by its jacket copy. I was indeed riveted. The melodramatic ending wasn't a surprise, but it was *\*intensely\** satisfying. Shattering, well...ya know, in a very basic sense, yes. I cannot in any part of me comprehend the actions of the perp in this story. I was so outraged and so lividly furiously angry at the perp for doing what was done, that the Big Reveal Moment (while not a surprise) had me hopping from foot to foot with a desire to hurt and kill and then resurrect and hurt and kill the perp some more.

Any more would be spoilerizing.

Sara Henry did a fine job making the book an intense emotional experience. That is a LOT to say of a debut novelist. But she also made me feel about six hundred years old...in a late chapter, she mentions "the OLD TV show *Sliders* and goes on to explain the premise of the "old" show.

Old. The Nineties are old? They were yester-goddam-day! OLD is when my late mother was young! The Twenties! That's OLD.

I'm gonna go rock in my chair and eat Farina for supper now.

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### **Karalee says**

"If I'd blinked, I would have missed it." The opening sentence of the book in some ways summarizes one of the central themes of this book perfectly -- how, in the blink of an eye, your life can completely change. In this debut novel from Sara Henry, Troy Chance is a free spirit living unencumbered in Lake Placid, New York. On the ferry on her way to Burlington, VT she sees what looks like a child falling from the ferry crossing in the opposite direction. Acting on instinct, she dives into the water and rescues the child, a 6 year old named Paul. This kicks off a chain of bizarre events, when Troy realizes that Paul is a missing kidnapping victim from Montreal. Against her normal instincts to remain aloof and apart from emotional attachments, Troy becomes intensely involved in Paul's life in the aftermath of his reunion with his father, including actively investigating the kidnapping. Along the way, Troy is forced to acknowledge truths about her life, her emotional state and what she really needs in order to be happy and fulfilled.

Some books defy categorization. This is one of them. It is both women's fiction and mystery/thriller, both emotionally moving and suspenseful. The complexity underlying what could have been a pretty straightforward mystery novel makes this a truly unique reading experience. I read this book in a single day -- it has that intangible "something" that keeps you turning the pages even when your eyes are drooping and the hour grows late. I was happily surprised by how much I liked it.

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## **Jennifer Lane says**

My dad, a voracious reader, recommended this book to me. He happened to come across *Learning to Swim* at the library, and the title intrigued him because I was a competitive swimmer for many years and he was always a supportive Swim Dad. The novel actually has very little to do with competitive swimming, but I'm glad Ms. Henry titled it what she did because I probably would've missed this gem otherwise.

What would *you* do if you were on a ferry crossing cold Lake Champlain and thought you saw a young boy tossed off another ferry passing by? I probably would've yelled for help, but the time it would've taken to stage a rescue would've likely left the boy dead from drowning. The heroine of this story, Troy Chance (yes her name is actually Troy!) didn't call for help; rather she dived in to rescue him.

What would *you* do if you somehow swam to shore with the barely conscious boy clinging to your back (like Troy did)? You'd call the police, right? Not Troy! Believing someone tried to murder the wispy French-speaking 6 year-old, Troy takes him home and nurses him back to health.

Next, Troy begins to unravel the mystery surrounding the boy Paul. Where are his parents? Who can she trust? How can she attach herself to this boy so quickly and completely?

My favorite part of the story is the character of Troy. She's independent and strong yet also real and flawed. I never knew what she was going to do next. Many times I cringed at her poor choices but then she'd make it right. Paul was very sweet, and the secondary characters of Philippe and Claude kept me guessing. I also enjoyed learning more about Lake Placid and Ottawa.

This is Sara Henry's debut novel, and in many ways it's impressive. One aspect I didn't like was the setting for the big reveal . . . the event seemed to come out of the blue without much set-up, and the connection between two characters appeared forced, like it was inserted just to make the mystery work. I also felt a little down at the realistic ending.

I think I'll choose this novel for my book club's read next month, and I look forward to hearing their opinions!

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## **Andrea says**

Where to begin with this book? I picked it up because I've been looking for a good literary suspense, and I thought this might be good. It seemed to deal as much with the human side of the story as the mystery side.

This is the story of a woman named Troy Chance who, in the first pages of the book, is riding a ferry and sees something being thrown from another ferry, passing in the opposite direction. She thinks it was a child that was thrown, and even though she considers the possibility that it might have just been a bag of garbage, she jumps into the frigid lake and swims to where she saw the 'thing' go under.

It does indeed turn out to be a small child, a boy named Paul who speaks only french. Troy forms an immediate bond with him and takes him home instead of going to the police. Which is the first moment of 'Huh...wha??" But they keep coming.

Troy keeps the boy and starts investigating the case on her own, without contacting the police. She tracks down the boy's parents -- a wealthy Montreal businessman who's wife and son were kidnapped a few months ago. Yet Troy still decides not to go to the police, but investigates the father on her own. Huh...wha?

Once she decides (for herself!) that the father is innocent, she returns the child and ... moves in with them. Huh...wha?

I feel like this is one of those books where the author made the main character too much like herself, but in all the wrong ways. I don't think it's wrong, necessarily, to insert yourself into a book -- if your character reacts to a situation the way YOU would react to a situation, that's fine. Probably even good, because it'll make their actions feel legit. But in this case I thought it went sort of the opposite way and did a real disservice to the book -- first of all, I did not find the majority of Troy's actions and reactions to be believable or realistic. But on the other hand, the author stuck in all these random things like how Troy's obsession with (and ability to repair) bicycles, which, from the bio in the back, comes straight from the author's life. She is also exceedingly perfect and, despite a few scrapes, she never suffers anything really bad in the whole book -- there's never a moment when she's scared or unsure, and her only moments of angst seem to come in deciding whether or not she should sleep with Paul's father. Huh...wha?

While we're on the subject, seriously, why was every man in this book fawning all over Troy? Literally every guy in the book dotes on her, even though she seems selfish and a bit crazycakes. And that's what I mean about the author putting herself too much into the story -- she wanted everything to be good and easy for Troy, and it felt like maybe she identified with her too much to let anything REALLY bad or difficult happen to her.

Apparently this book is the first in the series, but what the heck the author is going to make a series out of, I don't know. I will not likely be picking up any other books with this character.

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### **Sandi says**

When I won this book through FirstReads, I thought it could be good or it could be cheesy. It's a bit of both. For a smart woman, Troy Chance makes some really stupid choices. While it was really brave of her to jump off a ferry to save a child she sees fall into Lake Champlain from another ferry, it was really stupid of her to take the child home rather than calling 911. From there, the story gets more and more implausible. Yet...I couldn't put it down. I've been in kind of a reading slump lately, jumping from book to book and having a hard time finishing any. Learning to Swim only took a few days to read and gave me a respite I needed from the heavy science fiction and fantasy I've been reading lately.

I will give credit where credit is due. The story was quite suspenseful and had some twists that I never saw coming. I really appreciated that (view spoiler) (Aren't these spoiler tags great?)

I recommend this for anyone looking for a quick, escapist read.

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### **Robin says**

Was hooked on the first page, and could not put this book down till it was finished.

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### **Erin says**

A book that I neither loved nor hated, so I guess I shall pick the neutral 3 stars. More romance than thriller, *Learning to Swim* had me torn between DNF and seeing these characters until the end. I chose the latter option, but still trying to figure out how much suspension of reality this storyline needed to work. At one point, Troy Chance, our female protagonist declares that she can be dense sometimes. On the contrary, this is how she appeared to me the whole time.

Am I headed for a book slump?

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### **Elizabeth says**

To be fair, I think that I do not like the genre. The story itself was a good one but the amount of unnecessary details drove me crazy. Did we need to know about Troy fixing her bike? Her computer skills? Shopping the discount racks? The small talk she made with the basement apartment managers? I also got the feeling that the author was writing about herself. I dislike that.

**Edit :: 04/24/13**

**I have rounded up to 3 stars after an original 2 star rating because I realized I had forgotten about this little gem:**

*On the way home I stopped at the public library and talked the librarian into issuing me a library card based on a piece of Philippe's junk mail I'd brought along. To get a card you're supposed to have something with your name and address on it, but because librarians want you to have a library card sometimes they'll bend the rules.*

Well-played, Sara J. Henry. Well-played.

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### **Carol says**

In the acknowledgments for *Learning to Swim*, Sara J. Henry thanks Michael Robotham for encouraging her to change the title and SFC for the titling. Though I don't know the original title the advice to change it seems sound. Throughout this debut, the images and life lessons that "learning to swim" evoke, fit well.

The premise of *Learning to Swim* is a grabber. Picture yourself on the ferry on Lake Champlain, I've been there. You are the only person on the open air deck. As the ferry going in the opposite direction passes someone throws/hurls something into the water. It might have been trash or even a doll but some instinct tells you it isn't. Without thought you dive overboard into the cold waters and with a bit of struggle actually grab hold of the object and realize it isn't trash nor doll but a young, small boy. On surfacing you realize you and he are now bobbing in the water, the ferry gone and no other boats in sight. You must get to shore. I'm hooked.

As we move on in the story, I must suspend belief a bit to stay in the game. Troy Chance, the diver does get to shore. Most people given the situation would contact the police, tell what they saw and let them handle it. Not Troy. She decides to keep the boy and of course, this allows for the mystery to unfold. Who threw this kid overboard and why. There's enough here to keep me interested if not. Kidnapping, murder, a bit of romance, and one innocent, smart six year old keep me turning the pages. I loved the prime location of Ottawa with bits and pieces of Lake Placid, Lake Champlain and Vermont thrown in. The author includes a bit of herself by empowering Troy with the ability to maintain her bike with expert skill. This wasn't necessary but did work in the plot as it added a bit of the personal to the character Troy.

I very much liked the beginning and I really liked the ending...hoping that this is the end of the story and that the author does not feel compelled to write anything more about these characters.

*Learning to Swim* won the Anthony Award and Agatha Award for Best First Mystery.

P.S. I just visited the author's website and see there will be a sequel; *A Cold and Lonely Place* will be released in February. Whether this is a good move remains to be seen. As I stated I was satisfied to leave Troy and the boy, Paul's story where it ended.

I'm really curious as to what this book might have been named if not for intervention of SFC (?). I read something about it sounding like a Bobbsey Twin novel.

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### **Becky says**

I was so disappointed by this book. I really thought I would love it. I like mysteries enough that even the bad ones generally entertain me, and this one had Amazon reviewers gushing things like "best debut novel I've ever read." But, as I read it, I just couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. Here's why:

First, as a mystery, this book lets you down all over the place. Here's the premise: a woman jumps off a ferry to save a little boy she sees falling from another ferry—she doesn't know who he is or how he came to be pitched off the ferry. About 80% of that mystery is solved in the first quarter of the book. The protagonist then spends the next two quarters of the book studiously avoiding solving the rest of the mystery. She seems bizarrely lacking in curiosity. As a reader who wanted the mystery solved, I at first felt frustrated and later incredibly bored. I slogged through the huge, boring middle section of the book where nothing happens because I really wanted to know why people loved this book so much. The mystery is finally fully solved by the end of the book, but I'll warn you: you're going to be rolling your eyes when it happens.

Second, as writing, this book is simply awful in places. I read on a Kindle, and usually I underline passages I really like. In this book, I was moved to underline passages I really hated. Here's an example: "The default Windows setting hides doc, exe, pdf, jpg, and other file extensions, which I think is insane." MAYBE I could forgive this sentence if it was incredibly important to the plot that the protagonist has oddly strong feelings about file extensions on Windows, but it doesn't figure into the plot at all. Here's another gem: "He smiled at me, and I swear I felt my heart move. Cliches exist for a reason." Note to author: just because you admit it's a cliche before anyone calls you on it does not make it good writing.

As I look back over the Amazon reviews to try to understand what people were thinking when they gave this

book five stars, I see that the NYT book review called it "the perfect romantic suspense mystery for people who won't admit they read romantic suspense mysteries." This might be my problem with the book. I absolutely hate romance in my books and my movies. I guess the romance is what was happening during the 50% of the book where it felt to me like nothing was happening. Because I absolutely don't care if the main character finds the exact right dress to wear on her dream date with Richie Rich. If you do care, you would probably like this book more than I did, although none of the romance in the book ever really goes anywhere.

Sometimes, thinking back about a book makes me like it more than I did when I was reading it. In this case, it's the opposite. I've given it two stars because something hooked me enough that I managed to finish the book, but I'm really annoyed that I got duped by all the great reviews into reading a stupid love story that was only barely a mystery. Will be more careful in the future.

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### **Barbara says**

This book was well reviewed by a woman's magazine, so I decided to pick it up at the library. It's a debut novel from Sara Henry, who's crafted a somewhat decent thriller but has written it for the MTV generation. Troy Chance, a freelance writer and editor, watches a small boy plunge from the deck of a ferry and she dives in to save him. He speaks little to no English and she takes him home and cares for him while searching for his parents. Troy does things that a sane, intelligent person wouldn't do (like not calling the cops first thing; traveling alone to Canada to return the boy) and this put me off. The shocking secret behind the boy's near death isn't quite a shock as I would've hoped, and has probably been used as a plot device on many soap operas or Lifetime movies. The book's promotional blurb states that the world the rich inhabit "a world of wealth and privilege and heedless self-indulgence--a world where the murder of a child is not unthinkable" is where Troy finds herself. I don't know if the author ever visited any "downtown" areas, but poverty-stricken barrios and ghettos are also places where murdering a child is not unthinkable. The book's plot was okay, but the characters were substandard and, in some cases, just plain stupid. Here's hoping Henry does better on her next novel.

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### **Eric says**

It's common with series fiction that the initial entries are not the strongest. But being a fan of series fiction, I'm willing to look beyond the aspects that don't work for me to the elements that do. So to start, I'll just say the plotting of this novel seemed a little thin for a mystery. Now I'll move on to what I liked.

I found the protagonist, Troy Chance, to be an extremely likable, complex, and well drawn character. She's affable and makes friends easily, but keeps a distance from people nonetheless. She never lets anyone get too close. She's practical, unfussy, athletic, and a bit of a tomboy. She's unconcerned with "girly" things. She remarks that she's not yet the person she wants to be, but I'll be reading the subsequent novels to see who she becomes.

It seems to me this book, and presumably the series to follow, although they take the form of "murder mysteries", are less concerned with plot and mayhem and more concerned with the phenomenon of human connection.

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## **EJ Knapp says**

There are those thrillers that keep you turning the pages by strapping you down in the front seat of the roller-coaster from hell and running you through every tire-screeching twist of a car chase, every fusillade turn of gunfire, propelling you skyward on the mushroom cloud of violent explosions and driving you down in a vortex of betrayal, lies and death.

And then there are those thrillers like Sara J. Henry's *Learning to Swim*. There are no car chases in *Learning To Swim*, no hail of bullets, no explosions, no two or three digit body counts. What there is, is an escalating tension that begins with the first sentence and carries the reader through dark, mysterious waters to be tossed, exhausted but satisfied, on the shore of the final, shocking end. If you start this book late in the evening as I did, plan on staying up way past your bedtime.

The quality of the writing, the intricacies of the plot and the superb characterization so over shadowed the few nits I had with the story as to make them pointless to mention. This debut novel by Sara J. Henry is a must addition to everyone's to-be-read list.

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## **Robert says**

**LEARNING TO SWIM** won both the Anthony and Agatha awards for first novel, and I can certainly see why after finishing the book myself. It's a well-written novel, executed flawlessly, and the writing sings louder than Nickelback in the middle of Central Park. But could I say I really liked it? If I'm to be perfectly honest with myself, I'd say no. I liked it, sure enough, and I could check that box just as easily as I could fill in Cs all the way down the columns of a multiple choice math test.

I liked the characters, and the characters were filled with flaws and quirks and oddities befitting any well-done novel, but I didn't love the characters. For me, much of my love of novels comes from voice, unless I'm reading a page-turner from the likes of James Patterson or the late Robert Ludlum, and this novel didn't have a voice that popped off the page for me. I didn't have that moment where I wanted to read late into the night, turning the pages until my left hand cramped up, and my vision had blurred because I stayed up much longer than I should have.

So what happened? This book just didn't connect with me the way I would have liked it to. Not the author's fault, but it is what is. I'm not a big fan of criminals spouting off near the end of mysteries, telling the hero why a certain crime was committed, even if the criminal is a psychopath. When it comes to criminals and endings, I prefer Goldfinger's approach.

James Bond: "Do you expect me to talk?"

Auric Goldfinger: "No, Mr. Bond...I expect you to die."

In the end, though, **LEARNING TO SWIM** concluded the way it should, with a slight opening that will present more stories to tell for its main character Troy Chance. But I don't know that I'll go out of my way to pick up the next book in the series.

I received this book for free at Bouchercon.

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