



Unsinkable: A Memoir

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A surprising and inspiring story of courage, perseverance and the triumph of the human spirit.

Just ten weeks before the 1992 Olympic Games, Silken Laumann, the reigning world champion in single sculls rowing, suffered a brutal accident that left her right leg shattered and useless. Doctors doubted that she would ever row competitively again. But twenty-seven days, five operations and countless hours of gruelling rehabilitation later, Silken was back in her racing shell, ready to pursue her dream. When the starter's pistol rang out on August 2, she made the greatest comeback in Canadian sports history, rowing to a bronze-medal finish while the world watched, captivated by her remarkable story. Silken became one of Canada's most beloved Olympians and has continued to inspire, encouraging people to dream, live in the moment and embrace life's unexpected, difficult and amazing journey.

But there was a massive barrier in her path that she has never before spoken about, a hidden story much darker than the tale of her accident. Now, Silken bravely shines a spotlight on all the obstacles she has encountered—and overcome—in *Unsinkable*, a memoir that reveals not only new insights into her athletic success and triumph over physical adversity, but also the intense personal challenges of her past and the fierce determination she applies to living a bold, loving and successful life today.

Time after time, this courageous champion has proven to be unsinkable. Silken's extraordinary story offers us an intimate look at the complicated woman behind the Olympic hero, showing how perseverance and optimism can allow anyone to embrace the incredible opportunities that often go hand in hand with adversity.

Unsinkable: A Memoir Details

Date : Published January 21st 2014 by HarperCollins Publishers (first published January 13th 2014)

ISBN : 9781443419093

Author : Silken Laumann , Sylvia Fraser

Format : ebook 304 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Biography

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From Reader Review Unsinkable: A Memoir for online ebook

Jenn says

I would give this 3.5 stars if Goodreads allowed half stars. I enjoyed this book, it was a quick read and well written. Silken was very honest about her life and I enjoyed the fact that she did not exclusively focus on her rowing.

Sharon says

I don't often read biographies and am not sure what drew me to this one, except the inescapable fact that I found so many books titled *Unsinkable* when I checked it out at our library. So I chose 2. And I'm pleased that I did.

Silken Laumann is an indomitable soul, no question. Her strength of character speaks through each word. She also has quite human failings, as we all do. This book is a reflection of her life, her challenges, her failures and her successes.

Silken experienced a brutal accident just weeks before the 1992 Olympic Games and she walks us through her journey to the Olympics and the medal she received. This is what I mean by indomitable, a woman to be contended with indeed.

But that's not all Silken is, she's also a mother, a wife, a lover, a friend, a career woman and all of these components together make up an incredible individual with drive, compassion and understanding. She takes us on her journey, with all of the filters off and introduces us to her sometimes desperate but always amazing life.

Claire Lion says

2/3 of this book was very interesting and worth a read, even somewhat inspirational, the other 1/3 was a little to preachy for me, but I found I could easily skim through the dull sections. Worth learning about the interesting and imperfect life of a canadian legend.

Kyle says

I expected a cliche story about a young female athlete overcoming the odds to compete at the Olympics so she could become a hero for her country. I did not get that from this book. In fact, this memoir surprised the hell out of me.

This book is a frank, honest depiction of depression and anxiety and mental illness. It's about surviving

crippling childhood shame. It's about discovering that you are locked in a cycle of abuse. Its about ending that cycle. It's a story about anguish and pain and fear... And so the metaphor that Laumann uses to supplement her childhood memories is that fateful day when her leg was injured during training and the incredible recovery that she pushed herself through in order to compete in the Olympics. Everything could have ended for her that day.... but, alas.

I could not put this book down. Possibly one of the best memoirs I have ever read because of its subject's willingness to unabashedly address her faults and present the reader with the exact OPPOSITE image of what they would have expected her private life to be like. At the same time, Laumann, an Olympic hero, maintains a tenuous optimism that makes you want to route for her as a simple, non-pedestaled human being.

Even though it is not a masterpiece of language, this book is so readable and so touching and so inspiring that I would expect it to surprise other readers as much as it surprised me. This one comes highly recommended by me.

4.5/5

Mike Reilly says

Having known Silken and John for many years, it was awkward reading the intimate details of their marriage and divorce (even though the narration isn't very intimate in itself). The best parts of the book are learning how raising an autistic daughter has influenced her life and her views on role sport can improve girls' lives.

I recommend this book to anyone who enjoys thoughtful biography and personal journeys.

Bojan Land says

How this woman survived and then recovered from her traumatic injury is beyond words, despite having read the book I'm still at a loss for how much strength and courage she has. The book awesomely portrays her journey, and it explains things, I felt that I wanted to know a bit more about her method of recovery rather than about her family life. It felt more like an autobiography of her overall life rather than a book about recovering from a traumatic event, which is what I hoped it would be. I can definitely see why it's called *Unsinkable*. :)

PrairieReader says

I did not give a rating for this book because I didn't finish it. I got 60 pages into it (the first part entitled "Olympic Magic") and was really just not feeling it. I have to say, I found Silken to be quite self-centered and narcissistic. I felt badly about feeling that way, because this period was clearly very stressful and trying for Silken and it was crucial for her to remain focused on what she believed she needed to do, but I found myself not caring for the way she treated other people. She was mad because the doctors had "drilled holes into perfectly good bones" albeit in an attempt to save her leg from amputation; "discredited" what her doctors told her about her recovery (although, in this case, she did indeed prove them wrong); complained about her private hospital room, despite being the only one available, which was actually a former broom

closet which had been cleaned out so that the nurses could keep a closer eye on her - "Being a world class athlete had never seemed more glamorous", she snipes; and "screaming" at her sister, a Halifax lawyer who none the less flew to Victoria to be with Silken. Perhaps I will pick up this book at a later date, but I just became fed up with it and, sadly, Silken.

Meredith says

When I opened this book, I was hoping to read about the demands of training for international level rowing competition. I hoped to learn about facing the endless early mornings, managing tension and camaraderie with other rowers, descriptions of the different regatta venues, the style of coaching, and the stress and strain of making a rapid comeback after a horrific injury. I wanted to read about the inequality that women face in competitive sports, and how it is changing only slowly, and what's being done to address it. I wanted to read about active initiatives to encourage sports education among girls in backward cultures that consider women as chattel instead of equal, contributing members of society.

I did get some of that, but mainly got a polemic of somewhat whiny, poor-me, quasi-inspirational, overly simple fluff about the emotional baggage caused by a domineering mother, post-divorce depression, the ups and downs of life with basically average kids who sometimes misbehave, and how hard it is to manage a life of public self-help speaking engagements while cushioned by a second husband's immense fortune. I was also irritated by the weird editing...such as references to "Western University" (um, it's actually called the "University of Western Ontario") and a "blue ribbon" awarded for first place, when in fact in Canada it is a red ribbon.

Jo-Anne Vandermeulen says

A Beautiful, Hopeful, and Courage Memoir of an Olympian Star's Honest Life—Empowering All! Currently, A Canadian Best-Seller!

Shannon says

kind of preachy at moments but this lady really overcame some serious shit. very inspiring!

Barrett Lafortune says

Silken Laumann's reflections on her life are as brutally honest as they are inspiring. While rowing and olympics are obviously a big part of the book, I was surprised about how much else there is to her. Hearing about the breakdown of her first marriage as well as the difficult relationships she has with her parents was just as interesting as her stories about competing in the olympics.

Silken honestly reflects on her struggles with her own body-image, self harming tendencies, disordered eating, and other mental health issues. She also opens up about how her own complicated relationship with her parents has added challenges to her parenting and her relationships with her children. Additionally, she discusses raising her step-daughter Kylee who is a low-functioning person with autism.

Personally, I found her depression to be the most relate-able of these issues. How someone can appear to be healthy and functioning on the outside right up until the moment they completely break down is something I can sympathize with. The way she copes and heals were inspiring and I found useful advice for my own life.

I would highly recommend this book to pretty much anyone. It is an honest reflection on a very impressive life, yet it always comes across as very humble and ego-less. What a fantastic read.

Patty says

I was a big fan of Silken Laumann's comeback story when she overcame a horrific leg injury to win a bronze medal at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. In this memoir, Laumann covers the harrowing details of that accident and her gritty recovery early—clearing the decks to turn her attention to the focus of this book, her ongoing recovery from a tumultuous childhood she blames for developing an eating disorder and cutting herself. Laumann does a good job of capturing the life and drive of an athlete but her desire to get to the root of any physical, psychological and emotional issue (and often trace it back to her childhood) becomes a bit wearying at times. I applaud her honesty and her commitment to self-improvement and awareness, but I felt it weighed down the book. She survives the breakdown of her marriage to meet GoodLife Fitness founder David Patchell-Evans and writes effectively and frankly of the challenges and joys of merging their families and raising his autistic daughter together. Laumann is a life-long seeker and she has an interesting story to tell but I'd like to hear a little less about her inner journey and more about her post-athlete life—but for her the two are irrevocably entwined.

Joanne Liddy-mctavish says

This book did not endear me to Silken Laumann. I found her preachy and not empathetic. But I deeply admire her accomplishments. I think I need to attend one of her motivational talks before I give a final verdict. After reading this book though I now find it difficult to take advice from her accept on how she overcame adversity in the rowing arena.

She was very brave to talk about her childhood and especially about her Mother. I believe her when she recounts those events.

Janet Grieder says

I hope this book helps to finally break the stigma with admitting to mental illness.

Bronwyn says

As a rower, I quite enjoyed this book. However, I'm a little baffled that I hadn't really heard of her before, seeing as I grew up in Victoria. I marvelled at her grit in the face of adversity, and also appreciated her

honesty about hard times. Her story was whole and human, and I'm glad she took the time to tell it. I would recommend this book to rowers of course, but it's also a good memoir for anyone who needs to be reminded that we can stand back up after we've been tackled by adversity.
