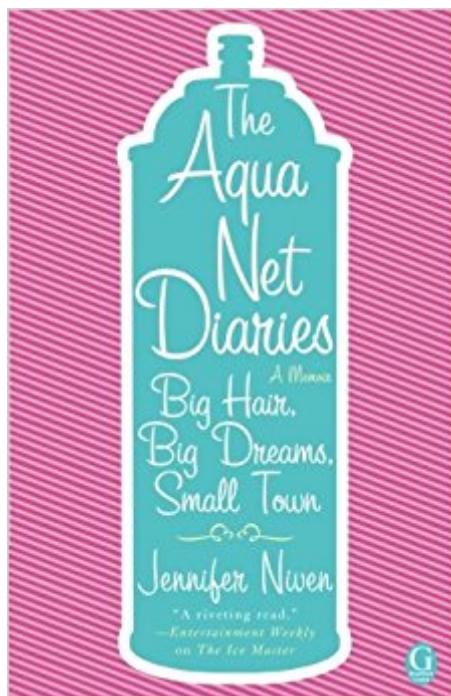


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# The Aqua Net Diaries: Big Hair, Big Dreams, Small Town



## Synopsis

Jennifer Niven quit her job as a television producer to write the true story of a doomed 1913 Arctic expedition in her first book, *The Ice Master*, which was named one of the top ten nonfiction books by Entertainment Weekly, and won the Barnes & Noble Discover Award. She received high praise for her follow-up arctic adventure, *Ada Blackjack*, which detailed the life of one woman who overcame enormous odds to survive. Now, Niven tells a survival tale of a different kind; her own thrilling, excruciating, amazing, and utterly unforgettable adventure in a midwestern high school during the 1980s. Richmond, Indiana, was a place where people knew their neighbors and went to church on Sundays. It also had only one high school with 2,500 students, and for both the students and the townspeople, it was the center of the universe. In *The Aqua-Net Diaries*, Niven takes readers through her adolescent years in full, glorious and hilarious detail, sharing awkward moments from the first day of school, to driver's ed, and her first love, against a backdrop of bad 1980s fashion and big hair. Like Chuck Klosterman in *Fargo Rock City*, Niven's talented voice perfectly captures the pain, joy, and shame of going through adolescence in America's heartland, making a funny, touching, and universal experience.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

High school is full of ups and downs, wins and losses, the highest highs and the lowest lows, and it's pretty much the same regardless of time or location. Niven is so sure of the timeliness and universality of high-school experiences, she retrieved old memories and dug up all her old memorabilia from her less than glamorous high-school years in the mid-1980s in a small farm town

in southern Indiana. Nevertheless, as Niven tells tales of her life as Jennifer McJunkin, spraying her hair to enormous heights and dreaming of fame, she does manage to rediscover the fun, excitement, and drama of those crucial times. Whether she's organizing a speech team, arguing with classmates about Walter Mondale, or talking on the phone with Matthew Broderick, Niven relays it with humor, even if it was humiliating at the time. People who didn't have the best time in school might find this memoir too cloying, but everyone will recognize themselves or people they knew in Niven's chronicle. --Hilary Hatton

JENNIFER NIVEN's first book, *The Ice Master*, was named one of the top ten nonfiction books of the year by *Entertainment Weekly*. Her second book, *Ada Blackjack*, was a Book Sense Top Ten Pick. Her memoir, *The Aqua Net Diaries*, was optioned by Warner Bros. Her bestselling debut novel, *Velva Jean Learns to Drive*, was followed by the sequel *Velva Jean Learns to Fly*. Her novel *Becoming Clementine* will be released in September. She lives in Los Angeles.

What I enjoyed most about this book is that the author somehow manages to slide the reader into her world at that age. It must have been so tempting to write it differently -- taking several steps back as a more mature adult and summing up everything learned. Instead, because that teenaged world was so perfectly preserved, I was able to reflect on my own teenaged years with equal clarity -- a fascinating retrospective journey even though my experiences were often quite different than Niven's. I saw some of the negative reviews for this book and was surprised. I never felt that the author condoned or glorified her past but rather unflinchingly allowed her readers to make their own judgments. As someone who tossed away most of my old yearbooks and has thus far avoided high school reunions, Niven's treatment of the topic felt bold. It reminds me of this quotation: "Writers as a tribe loathe the paper trail that has led each of us to our present position and cannot bear to examine the debris of cast-off identities we leave strewn in our wakes as we try on one ill-fitting costume after another. In fact, writers are, ironically, the worst book burners around, systematically effacing our traces, burning our diaries, obliterating the record -- all in an effort to pretend that we have not changed, have not developed, were always exactly as you find us now, having sprung like Athena from Zeus' head, fully formed and armed to the teeth." (Daniel Harris, "A Writer's (Very) Early Years" from *Harper's*, November 1994.) Niven owns up to the good, the bad, and the indifferent of her teenage years. Because of this honesty, it is a fascinating read that I can't wait to share with my high school buddies.

This book was ok and being from the same home town I could identify with it to a point but it was twenty five years after I attended Richmond High and many many things had changed..Had it been in my era I would have enjoyed it very much. I did recognize two of the characters...

I also graduated from RHS, even though it was earlier than the author.... :-) It was fun reading about her experiences, recognizing landmarks and names of some of the teachers, and so on. A fun read. I got an extra copy for a friend who graduated with me....

A fun read of a simpler and good time. Remembrance of the high school days in the Midwest of people who emerged happy and sane. Helps one remember that laughter is a gift in a world that can be too dark and serious. This is just one lens, but a view that made me laugh and smile.

I am not entirely sure why I loved this book so much. It's a memoir from the author's teen years growing up in the relatively small town of Richmond, Indiana. There wasn't necessarily that much going on in the story, but the writing itself was just tremendous and it brought back memories for me, big time. The book is at times funny, at times sad, but always on target about all the triumphs and insecurities of high school for the average middle-class kid in America. There were a lot of '80s-era references that definitely brought some nostalgia with them. I really enjoyed the fact that the people she wrote about gave her permission to use their real names and photos from high school. I just found the whole book very warm, relaxing, and enjoyable. The only thing I worry about for other readers is that there is a possibility that the book's strongest appeal will be for members of Generation X and might not resonate as much for others. For example, when I read Wally Lamb's "Wishin' and Hopin'", I didn't like it very much. I could definitely see where Boomers would like the book, but I did not, in part because I could not relate to the era portrayed in the book. The writing in that particular book was not enough to overcome the fact that I'm not of that generation (in fact, I was a card-carrying '80s AquaNetter myself). So I look forward to hearing from others who did not attend high school in the '80s to see if The Aqua Net Diaries carries the same weight with them as it did for me. In this case, I do believe it will. The writing is just that good, and the issues discussed are really universal.

Jennifer writes to the hearts of three generations. Lots to enjoy here. Funny and full of photos and thoughts all who ever were teenagers can relate to. Delightful read.

I grew up in and love the 80s, so I dove in with much eagerness and low expectations, just hoping for a fun read with some 80s nostalgia. And still I was disappointed. The book was confusing. It had so many characters and jumped around so much, I found myself going back and searching for who the people were, until I just gave up and pushed through. I got the feeling it was not written in the order it was presented. Not good for something you expect to be just a light read. Also, the events were mildly entertaining at best. There was a great scene where she talks to Matthew Broderick, and some funny descriptions like the Indiana winters. I think it would have been a much better read for her to go deeper into her feelings instead of just having random events thrown together. Most of it came across like the high school memories of any girl in the 80s who was popular (even though she repeatedly tells us she wasn't while dating lots of boys and going to many parties), not someone who became a famous writer telling the events of their youth. I'm sure anyone who went to school with the author will love this book, but I just can't recommend it to anyone else.

This book was quite an undertaking for the author to put together from her diaries and saved notes. I probably liked it partly because I went to high school in Indiana.

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