



Huge

Sasha Paley

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April and Wil couldn't be more different, but both of them are spending the summer at Wellness Canyon -- otherwise known as a weight-loss camp.

April knows that if she could just drop a little weight, she would be popular like she's always wanted. She's saved up for months to afford Wellness Canyon, which is more like a posh spa than a sleepaway camp. While April can't wait to jump into all the activities, Wil can't wait to get out of there. Her parents own a chain of high-profile fitness centers, and she's pretty sure her mom and dad sent her to Wellness Canyon to slim down before any embarrassing stories about their obese daughter hit the gossip pages. To get revenge on her parents, Wil decides she's going to gain weight at Wellness Canyon.

It's bad enough that they have to share a room, but things really get ugly when April and Wil both fall for Colin, the sarcastic camp hottie. Are April and Wil destined to be frenemies all summer, or can they overcome their sizeable differences? Filled with everything great about summer camp (and none of the calories), this is a funny, emotional novel about learning to accept yourself -- no matter what your size.

Huge Details

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Author : Sasha Paley

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Zoe says

What I liked: Um... I had to think really hard about this. I realized that Paley has some well-written dialogue (like when Wil's mother, musing on a good before picture for a commercial says, "Remember that picture of you on our vacation to Cabo? I've never seen a more miserable human being. It's perfect."), but I couldn't think of anything else.

What I didn't like: I felt like I was reading the YA fat camp version of *The Price is Right*. Paley uses over 140 brand references in a 259-page book. I know because I counted them. Some of them I didn't count, because she uses Wil's iPod as a plot point, so it's mentioned *a lot*, along with Hershey's Kisses and 7-11. At one point, I threw down the book in disgust and ranted at Matt about how I couldn't take it anymore. Here are some typical, brand-laden sentences:

She'd been so eager to get away from her idiotic roommate, she'd forgotten to put on any of her new Neutrogena SF 50 sunscreen, but there was no way she was going back to Franklin with Wil inside.

Her light pink Adidas Originals looked adorable with her fitted V-neck and cropped yoga pants.

She pulled back the covers to her bed and stared at her dark red Ralph Lauren sheets.

"We're gonna lose at this rate," Dave said, kicking the ground with the toe of his New Balance sneaker.

April twisted the cap off her Maybelline Great Lash mascara and carefully brushed it onto her short, pale eyelashes.

"Nice threads." Will touched the sleeve of Dave's jacket and then looked down at his jeans.
"Are those Diesel?"

She turned to the mirror to cover her embarrassment and applied some Burt's Bees strawberry lip gloss across her lips.

I understand dropping a brand or two to create an idea of someone's character (Louis Vuitton luggage, Tiffany & Co. alarm clock, etc.), but Paley's brand mentions were really excessive and distracting. I read multiple sentences where I thought, *Why did she mention the brand? The sentence sounds better without the brand.*

Other than that, I found the story and its characters a little flat. Some parts were a little hard to believe -- like why a guy whose parents didn't like football would send him to weight loss camp, and why said guy would go from being friendly with two girls to calling them names and depantsing one of them. Then there's the whole revenge-with-ExLax bit, which also felt tired.

Paley wraps up all the loose ends and writes a very sweet story where everyone leaves with fuzzy feelings, but it just didn't ring true to me. April is supposed to be living on a low income, so how is she going to maintain the stringent organic foods and workout regimen that she had at camp? I also rolled my eyes at the part where April's mother, an overweight woman confined to a Rascal (another brand mention!), calls April at camp to reveal that she's been diagnosed with diabetes. What a tearjerker!

jess says

I decided to read this because there's a new show on ABC FAMILY about kids at fat camp, starring the girl from Hairspray (the movie version of the musical version of the John Waters movie). I have long been obsessed with John Waters. Consequently, this book is about 4 degrees from anything I'm actually interested in. But I was flying across the country on a non-stop screaming babies flight and this book was enough to distract me and also quick enough that I was finished before we landed in Seattle. It's different from the tv show, of course, but I'm not sure if it's better like most book->tv translations. The characters are mostly rough approximations of themselves. The major thematic elements are in place - the mystery and exuberance of summer camp, the crushes, the counselors, the food that is snuck into the bunks, etc.

The main characters are Wil & April. Wil is a rich spoiled brat from Malibu who was sent against her will to fat camp so she can lose some weight and stop embarrassing her parents who own Excalibur, a chain of expensive workout centers. She has an ipod and lots of hidden snacks in her luggage. She's determined to be the first person to gain weight at this fat camp. April comes from the wrong side of the tracks in San Luis Obispo. She saved all of her christmas and birthday money for over a year (this camp costs like \$7,000.00 so I'm not sure what kind of birthday money she gets?) to pay her own way to the fat camp. Her mom is really fat, and suffering the health effects of it. April just wants a better chance at life, you guys. She is really earnest and semi-clueless. She wishes she was popular, but she has no idea how to handle the games and gossip of the popular girls. She definitely does not have an ipod.

The longing and angst of adolescence shines in this book. The confusing, constantly changing landscape of the world is not far beneath the surface. I appreciated the treatment of Wil & April's relationship - it passes the Bechdel Test. They talk about boys, sure, but also their families, shopping, eventually money, and they dance around the topic of privilege. They get mad at each other. They hurt each other. They work through things. They depend on each other even when they don't want to. It's complicated, like friendships of teenage girls usually are.

My main issue with the book would be the way that the size of the fat kids was handled. The extra weight is simultaneously the most important and least important part of the story, but in the exact opposite way I would wish it was handled. I would hope that the pounds would be there, obviously a subtext for the story, but it don't need to be mentioned over and over because it's just the context for a story about Humans and their Human Humanity, right? Not quite.

It's kind of like Bridget Jones Diary -- the young adult fiction is formatted into short chapters with logs of hours of exercise per day, and strict food diaries. It reads a little too awkwardly "how to." And here are some of the adjectives: ample, generous, round, thick. OK, OK, they're fat. Kids at fat camp -- can we just assume that they are all overweight, everyone knows how to use a thesaurus, and get on with the story? All of the kids came to Wellness Canyon to lose weight and be some better version of themselves - except Wil, who delivers brief early tirades about liking yourself the way that you are. She implies maybe not everyone wants to change to fit some strict sense of normality. Her resistance to losing weight is tied up in the ways she

resents her parents and their control over her life. Don't worry, by the end of the summer she has unintentionally lost lots of weight and her clothes are falling off like all the campers going home too small for their skinny jeans. Her relationship with her parents is markedly less combative, either in addition to or because of her weight loss. I'm not saying that all fat teens have radical fat politics, but one of them could have considered something for a minute.

Despite all that, the book was a very quick and fairly enjoyable read. There was no profound revelation. I didn't feel less alone in the world at the end, but it was a sufficiently entertaining way to cross the country at 35,000 feet.

Katie Lawrence says

This book is about two girls who are sent to Wellness Canyon. Wil is sent there because her parents just want her to lose weight and be skinny. Just to spite them Wil is determined to gain weight instead of lose it. April has been saving for two years to go to this camp. She believes that this will change her life. April and Wil end up rooming together and really hate each other. April tries to fit in with some of the more popular kids and they take advantage of her. One guy at camp, Colin pretends to like both Wil and April. They both find out about it and plan to get revenge on Colin. Near the end of the summer they have an Olympics championship. April and Wil's team cheats and their team ends up winning. However once they are found out their medals are taken away. The true lesson that they learn this summer is that friends will last forever and it's not about what you look like.

I really enjoyed reading this book. The main characters in this book are so opposite it just shows you that anyone can be friends. I was reading this book nonstop. It was a very enjoyable book.

I would definitely recommend this book. It just shows you that happiness doesn't come from wearing a smaller size, but through making friends.

laaaaames says

What I learned from this book is you only get pretty if you lose weight.

I learned that your mom's so fat she sends you cookies at fat camp. HA HA. Fat people! They're so stupid!

I learned apparently my track pants from Target are not the hot brand.

I learned the only reason anyone could be happy with their weight is to spite someone.

I learned there is a shameful lack of kissing and making out and sexual experimentation even with kids in the wilderness together for weeks on end.

I learned if you're hanging around a bunch of fatties you'd better make sure to keep reminding the reader how fat these fatties are by detailing their chubby fingers and their stomach rolls and their large thighs and how sweaty they are.

If you're fat and want to feel like shit about yourself, go ahead and read this. I think I'm gonna go rewatch *Hairspray* instead.

(read: 102)

Irene Heinrich says

Irene H.

Huge by Sasha Paley

Pages: 272

Realistic Teen Fiction

This book is written in 2 different point of views, Wil and April. When these two girls walk into their cabin and see how totally different they are from each other, there is instant chaos. Wil is a spoiled rotten child who likes to make her parents mad. She loves music and never sees the beauty of anything. Her parents own a big chain of fitness centers. They sent her to fat camp so that no embarrassing stories hit the media about their overweight teenage daughter. In order to get back at her parents, Wil decides to gain weight this summer. As for April, she has saved up every last dime to go to this summer camp. Her mother doesn't want her daughter to leave her for the whole summer but April goes anyway hoping to lose some weight, get a nice figure and become popular, which has always been a dream for her. Trying to hid a secret from all the campers is also her other summer challenge.

When April starts crushing on the popular guy at camp, Colin, Wil starts to mock her. When they get into an argument, they place a bet. When that bet seems to be over, they found a common interest. What that common interest is? Just read and find out.

This book is all about finding who you really are. It's also about dealing with others and making friends with people who were your enemies. In general, everyone can relate to this story somehow. Whether it be facing camp, a person or an obstacle, this book has it all.

It's a very emotional rollercoaster type of book. Heartwarming friendships begin. Troubles happen.

Obstacles overcome. Romance flourishing. Frowns are flipping. Stories changing. Point of views switching. The book is full of mystery. You'll definitely be a happy camper reading this adventure.

Morgan F says

If you decided to read this book because you like the TV series on ABC Family, don't. The two have nothing in common besides the title, Wil's name, and the concept of kids at fat camp. These differences don't necessarily mean one is worse than the other. No, there are plenty of more reasons for that. This is one of the few instances that the TV series has actually more plot, heart, and character development than the book.

One of things that really, *truly* pissed me off was all the brand name dropping. Good Lord! See, I'm not the most fashionable person in the world, or even remotely wealthy. I think Coach bags are ugly. Gucci sunglasses make people look like insects. Vera Bradley reminds me of diaper bags. Ugg boots are like bear feet. I don't want the word "Juicy" printed on my ass. I don't wear makeup unless forced to by my mother, for a costume of some sort, or when I fall asleep in public places. I wear clothes from Wal-Mart if I like them

well enough. But the way this book makes it sound, brands are the most important thing in the world. There must have been over 200 references to brands in this book. This isn't Gossip Girl, Ms. Paley, it's fat camp. I understand that you want to emphasize the class differences between Wil and April, but it's a little overboard to mention the brand of ALARM CLOCK like it's the sort of thing everyone notices. Gosh, it was just so damn annoying.

And I laughed when it said "for Ages 12 and up" on the back cover. Please! What part of this book is inappropriate? Sure, there is the occasionally mild curse word and an obscure mentioning of "hooking up", but this book seemed like something more for ten year olds. I mean, this is the last sentence: "But nothing- nothing at all- was sweeter than leaving Wellness Canyon with a new best friend by her side." BLECH. And all the writing was just as cheesy and horrible.

This book also failed miserably at creating anything resembling interesting characters. They were predictable stereotypes. April overeagerness was absolutely cringe-worthy. I felt embarrassed for her most of the time. Wil, while slightly more likable, could shed her "tough exterior" and become just as cheesy as the rest of them when the situation arose. Jessica and Marci(?) were just popular girls, and Colin was nothing more than a mean jock. Just nothing special. The plot was also very tired. I felt like I was reading some Mary-Kate and Ashley junk.

Also, the overall message was just horrendous. You think that a message from a book about fat camp would be something like "be comfortable in your own shoes" or something, right? Nope! The thinnest girls were always the prettiest, and the characters only felt good once they saw the pounds being ticked off on the scale. Even Wil, who was confident in her body beforehand, sold out. Great.

Overall, a truly disappointing book. It's a good thing I won this book and didn't pay anything for it. I do recommend the TV show, though. It's infinitely better.

Liralen says

So many kinds of not impressed. If I could give half stars, this would be a 1.5.

Some spoilers in what follows, but they should all be below the fold.

Let's put this in bullet points, because it isn't worth in-depth commentary:

- Unrealistic
- Unlikeable (and often completely idiotic) characters
- Utterly one-dimensional characters
- Dropped plotlines: what happened with April's mother? What happens when they *leave* camp? All research - not that there's much of it - suggests that weight-loss camps DON'T WORK in the long run. Why else would there be so many repeat customers?
- There was exactly one camper who didn't want to be there. One. I know that weight-loss camps have gotten more popular among teenager - i.e., it's no longer just teens whose parents forced them to go - but I cannot believe that Every Single Person (except Wil) shipped off to "fat camp" wants to be there.
- On that subject, Every Single Person (except April) at camp is most likely not rich... and going out and buying your poor friend expensive clothing is not a way to make amends for being a bitch. Seriously, Wil? *Seriously?*
- Releases be damned, I highly doubt that any counselors who valued their jobs would handcuff and blindfold

wayward campers and dump them miles from camp, telling them to find their own way home.

So what's the lesson here? Let's see. It's really funny to put laxatives in someone's protein shake, except it's also Really Bad. Even people who are happy with themselves (and therefore have a Bad Attitude) will be happier when they lose weight (and therefore gain a better attitude). Popular cute guys don't show any of their flaws until they've made out with you and thus can humiliate you. Also, there are wildly popular people and there are wildly unpopular people, but there is nobody in between.

Bah. Now I'm sorry I spent two and a half hours reading this book.

Anna says

If I was into book burning (which I am not) I would burn this book at the stake. It is wrong on so many levels I don't want to waste my life time explaining it. I already wasted enough trying to read it inbetween the endless stream of brand name dispersal. Someone else here has counted them.

Aside from being practically unreadable, it also perpetuates every single myth about obesity while framing it in a kind of modern day Lemon Popsicle (it's a 1970s series of Israeli teen films) - Pretty in Pink way.

I CANNOT BELIEVE THIS WAS PUBLISHED.

Ashlyn Curry says

The book I am reading is Huge. Huge is about two girls named April and Wil. April has always wanted to go to the "fat camp" and Wil is being forced to go by her parents. When they get to camp, Wil hates it and April loves it. They meet each other and instantly April can tell that she won't like Wil. April and Wil end up being roommates. I like this book because it shows the struggles of being over weight. My favorite part so far was when April saved up enough money to even get to go. She was so excited and I love it when happy things happen in books. I would recommend this book to anyone struggling with weight or anyone who just wants a good read. Over all this is a very good book.

-k The Lady Critic says

Sending your children away to "fat camp" has always intrigued me. I mean, at a regular camp you're never not busy; there's always swimming lessons, bike riding, hiking, canoeing, and so many other typical camp activities. Sure, you also have your arts and crafts and other indoor things, but in my experience the counsellors were always making us be outside as much as possible. So exactly what's the added benefit of a "fat camp"?

Well, this book helped me see the difference while still offering a peek into regular camp life.

I liked the duo-perspective between Wil and April and seeing how much their views differed on their experience while at Wellness Canyon. I also liked seeing just how far each would go to get what they wanted – only to discover what they really wanted in the process.

This is a great read for the summer (especially if you're away at camp) but it's also a good read in general. One thing that I wasn't keen on, though, was that actual weights were never mentioned. I kept picturing the characters much bigger than I think they would have been. I also couldn't help but picture the actors cast in the television show from a couple of years ago.

Overall, I'm going to give this novel a 7/10 and I recommend it to anyone who wants a fun summer camp read.

Tara Calaby says

This falls into what I call the Gossip Girl school of books - lots of references to brand names, which will render the story completely outdated within a few years.

I'm not so big on the message of this one, either. The character who was completely okay with her weight ends up losing some and being happy about it. So much for what I thought was going to be a strong character role model!

There are also far too many references to characters only becoming "pretty" or otherwise attractive once they start losing weight.

Apart from the brand references, this isn't a badly-written book, but the messages it sends to its teen audience are just so irritating - and dangerous - that I can't rate it higher than one star.

Anna says

****THIS TEXT CONTAINS PRACTICALLY NOTHING BUT SPOILERS****

I was actually planning on giving this book 4 stars out of 5, but then the last part of the book happened. The story was nice; two girls, completely different, meeting at a place where they will have to get along even though they won't. It's a good concept, and the story was nicely written. What I have problems with are all the loose ends and "unfair stuff" that happened:

The fact that April's mum called to tell her she had been diagnosed with diabetes was quite odd. It was a dramatic scene, and April was deeply affected by it. But her mother's sickness was only mentioned in that particular scene. It didn't do a thing for the story; it didn't motivate April to work harder, it didn't make her leave the camp, it didn't make her unstable the rest of the story. It's weird how it was just left in there.

Colin behaves like a moron the whole time, and he treats especially April and Wil in a very unacceptable way. Their revenge on him, the prank with the laxatives, was fairly innocent and I feel it would have been more than justified the let them get away with that. Instead they were punished in a way that made me uncomfortable: the leader wakes them up in the middle of the night, blindfolds and cuffs them and drives away with them. They get dropped off at a spot that seems to be several hours away from the camp. Sure they've spent the summer at the camp, but they haven't been allowed to leave the camp site themselves, they're not familiar with the surroundings, neither of them are from that place, and it's nighttime. Loads of

things could have happened to them, among others they could have gotten lost or been attacked (by both animals and other people).

Nothing is cleared up with the camp leader, Melanie, after that incident. They just eventually arrive back at the camp, pack their things and leave (since it's the last day and the point where families and transport are picking them up to take them home).

The end is about Wil's angst when her parents pick her up. They continue with treating her badly and being awful parents. At least April and Wil becomes friends. But after finishing this book I'm just filled with unease. None of the problems in the book gets solved, they just become one big mess of sad feelings.

I give this books 2 stars, instead of 1, because I really enjoyed it up until 4/5 in where it was clear that nothing would get solved and only more bad things happened.

Ellen Cohen says

Huge was an outstanding book. I enjoyed reading every page of this book. The best part is that there are so many things to discuss in this book: overweight/obese kids vs. nearly chubbies, rich kids vs. poor kids, cool kids vs. the outcast and parents' selfishness vs. kids' selfishness. I can not say enough about this book being a discussion book. One thing I adored was that every music group, magazine and pop culture items were current, such as the use of iPods, ibooks, 7-11, workout equipment and lets not forget the concert tickets to "Death Cab for Cutie". Please understand everyone should read this book, big or small, just because it is a great book. The kids I suggest should read this book are:

- Kids with parents who are into their own self image.
 - Overwieght students
 - Wealthy students (To realize that everything handed to them, it is not available to everyone.)
 - Kids that feel like outcast of the popular kids
 - Kids that trying to hard to fit into the popular crowd
 - Kids going away to summer camp
 - Kids who have to deal with a roommate
 - Single child families
 - Punk/Gothic student
-

Rachel says

The tagline of this book is "At fat camp, even the drama is...*Huge*." I honestly picked up this book thinking that tag was meant in a clever way and Paley's was going to be a fat positive approach to weight loss camp; meaning, the ultimate message of this book would be acceptance and love for self at any size. But *Huge* is so *not* that and it's kind of sneaky about it, given the teenage audience, and I'm really pretty disgusted by it actually.

Long review to come.

Samantha says

April has been saving up all her money to pay to go to Wellness Canyon, which is also known as fat camp. It's the one thing she looks forward to for the coming summer, besides losing weight and going back to school skinny. Wilhelmina, whose nickname is Wil, has parents who run a fitness center and who want her to become skinny. They're ashamed of her because of her weight and are excited to see Wil at the end of the summer when she is finally thin. Wil, of course, doesn't want to go to Wellness Canyon, and plans on making other people's lives miserable. When both April and Wil get to Wellness Canyon, they're paired as roommates and immediately dislike each other. Wil is rude and obnoxious, while April is a little too giddy and constantly longs to be friends with Jessica and Marci, the two popular girls. Will April and Wil be able to get through the summer without killing each other? Will they be able to reach their goals?

This book was pretty good. I liked how it jumped between Wil and April's perspectives, but I would have liked it more if it were in first person instead of third person. I also thought the ending was a bit rushed because of how easily Wil was able to find Wellness Canyon again after Melanie and Kevin left her and April in the wilderness. I also thought it was weird how Wil would expose the secret at the dance that they both tainted Colin's protein powder with laxatives when others were listening. It was obvious that they would get caught and wasn't particularly fond of that part. Other than that, the book was really good.
