

# Big Girls Don't Cry

9780807022580  
Hardcover  
\$28.00

A Memoir About Taking Up Space

ON SALE 5.27.2025

## A Q&A WITH AUTHOR SUSAN SWAN



### What do you think people will find surprising about your memoir?

The idea that body size is a factor in shaping our identities like race and gender and class and cultural background. Many of us, especially women, have insecurities about our bodies, but we may not realize just how much that makes us who we are.

### You said your memoir is about coming to terms with difference. How tall are you anyway?

I was six foot two at twelve in the 1950s when women were supposed to be small and not heard. Things are somewhat better but very tall women still remain outside the norm. The novelist Jane Smiley (who gave a quote for my memoir) recently pointed out to me that she and I are in the 99th percentile of North American women. We are one in 3000, in other words, and that means that others see us differently, and we see ourselves differently.

## **Did you have help from women writers with this book?**

My friend Margaret Atwood who wrote the foreword to my memoir suggested I write about my height and she read some very early rough drafts. At first, I dismissed it as a dumb idea but the more I thought about it the more I realized my size had affected me powerfully without me being aware of it.

Early on, it made me feel I wasn't feminine enough, and when store clerks would mistake me for a man (which still happens if they can't see my face), I would just want to crumple up and die. As I got older, I learned height can be a dramatic tool that you can use to your advantage, which is why most giants become entertainers. If people are going to stare at you anyway, why not ask them to pay for doing it?

## **Is Anna Swan, the Nova Scotian giantess that you wrote a novel about, related to you?**

I've researched our backgrounds and aside from our mostly Scottish ethnicity, nothing has come up. But I knew about her when I was twelve and I felt terrified that I might grow up to be a giantess like her and have to join the circus, as a teenage boyfriend once joked. So my height always had a shadow side that I didn't fully understand until I wrote *Big Girls Don't Cry*.

## **How different is writing a memoir from writing a novel?**

Not as different as you might think. Both forms dramatize and distill, so you need to write actual scenes instead of reciting a litany of events. I followed the same writing process that I use for a novel. Make notes; dictate a scene into my cell phone based on my notes; create a word document and revise endlessly. The big difference is the detailed way lawyers will check over your manuscript to ensure you aren't compromising someone's privacy. Although it's rare, some novelists have been sued for defamation. Memoirs can be court cases waiting to happen.

## **What inspired the image of lemons on the cover?**

My memoir is about a big woman writer (me) coming to terms with difference and taking up space so the cover had to suggest something original instead of predictable images of tall female bodies that don't quite fit the book cover. I wrote a novel about the real life giantess Anna Swan and a lot of covers for this novel show images like that. So we wanted to come up with something new. I'll leave it to you to figure out what the pink lemon means.