

**The Teenage Years:  
A New Novel Explores a Parent's Worst Nightmare**

In this story of a talented teenager rejecting her golden future, Terri Long accomplishes something quite extraordinary. She manages to write with equal empathy about both Leah and her parents and in so doing creates a powerful and intimate portrait of a family in disarray. I felt I knew these characters better than my friends and neighbors. *In Leah's Wake* is a beautifully written and absorbing novel.

-- **Margot Livesey**, Author of *Banishing Verona* and *Eva Moves the Furniture*

Author Terri Giuliano Long married her high school sweetheart, and, together, they raised four daughters in an idyllic Massachusetts community.

That's the story of her real life.

The story of her shadow life is the tale of *In Leah's Wake* (LBF Books, November 2006) which began as Long's master's thesis – and perhaps worst nightmare. *In Leah's Wake* tells the story of sixteen-year-old Leah Tyler, whose perfect life is nearly ruined by choices she makes while in the throes of adolescence. Her younger sister, Justine, bears the burden of coping with "Leah's wake," and the damage her out-of-control sibling leaves behind her.

While rebelling against family members' expectations is a rite of passage for many teenagers, Leah takes it to an extreme. She carelessly sacrifices her friends, her promising career as a soccer player, a potential Ivy League scholarship, "goody-two-shoes" beauty and health, and even her relationship with her parents and younger sister to experiment with life in the fast (and, potentially, fatal) lane. Long explains, "By nature, teenagers are impulsive, volatile. Trying on new personalities, and questioning the values and

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philosophies their parents hold dear are a normal part of the maturation process. If we hope to raise strong, independent children, we have to give them room to grow. We must allow them to fail. For parents, this means uncertainty and a lot of sleepless nights. For children, it can mean fighting heart-wrenching battles with the very people they love, trust, and depend on most.”

It’s only natural for parents to want to eliminate that uncertainty, Long says. In their attempts to do that, too many parents micromanage their kids’ lives—much as Zoe and Will do in this story. And the kids are expected to perform, to be perfect. Some live up to their parents’ expectations. Others, like Leah, rebel.

Imagine waking up one day and realizing that your perfect life is over. This is the real nightmare of *In Leah’s Wake*. As Leah’s rebellion escalates, the Tylers’ once perfect lives quickly unravel and the family members find themselves isolated, the subject of vicious gossip and speculation. Ultimately, it’s that loss of connection, the isolation from other people in their small-town community, the family members’ feelings of failure and shame that present the biggest hurdles the Tylers must overcome.

*In Leah’s Wake*

By Terri Giuliano Long

LBF Books

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## Terri Giuliano Long

Though she's been writing and telling stories since she was a child, Terri officially launched her writing career when she was in high school, with her weekly column, "High School News," published in the town paper. While raising her four daughters, Terri worked a series of part-time jobs. She's been a retail sales clerk, a credit manager, an aerobics instructor and master presenter, the aerobics director of an upscale health and tennis club, the editor of a nationally distributed newsmagazine for fitness professionals, a newspaper reporter, a columnist, and an entrepreneur. She received her BA in philosophy from Boston College, where she's taught writing since 1996. Terri has written news and feature articles for local and regional newspapers, including the *Boston Globe*, edited articles for business and technical journals, and written copy for marketing, advertising and public relations. Her stories and essays have appeared in newspapers, trade magazines and literary journals. She received her MFA from Emerson College. *In Leah's Wake* began as her master's thesis.

Terri and her husband, Dave, are the parents of four adult daughters. The Longs live outside of Boston.

## Suggested Interview Questions

1. What was the genesis of *In Leah's Wake*?
2. How would you describe the fictional Tyler family?
3. What goes wrong in Leah's life – what launches her on the path to self-destruction?
4. How has the goal of “perfect” parenting affected today's kids? Is there such a thing as a perfect child?
5. How do kids whose lives have been micromanaged fare in college? Later in life?
6. Is there anything her parents should have done to prevent Leah from making the wrong choices? Are there any warning signs they should have seen?
7. When you run across a real-life “Leah,” to what extent do you hold the parents responsible?
8. What role does Justine play in the story? How is her life affected by her sister's choices?
9. *In Leah's Wake* is an extreme example of how a teenager can transform herself from a perfect child into a troubled adolescent. How typical do you think her character really is?
10. You have four daughters. Have they safely negotiated their teenage years?
11. What have you done, as a mother, to keep your kids as safe as possible?
12. What do you think of such extreme safety measures as searching a child's bedroom, initiating regular drug tests for your child, or buying a cell phone with a tracking device on it to monitor your child?
13. What role does the community play in shepherding teens through their adolescence?
14. What surprised you the most about being the mother of teenage daughters?
15. How is being a teenage now different from how it was when you were growing up?

## Talking Points

- Can teenagers change overnight from brilliant students who are on the fast-track for successful futures to out-of-control outcasts?
- Can the latest technologies (tracking devices on cell phones, drug tests, and so forth) really keep kids safer?
- To what degree are parents responsible for their teenagers' lives and choices?
- Will living in the best communities with the best school systems ensure that your children will have the perfect lives?
- Can the loving actions of overachieving parents actually backfire and cause their children to rebel?