

# BIONIC WOMAN



## The Passionate Life of Amy Purdy

words **Jessica ridenour**

**Amy Purdy** always knew she would do something meaningful with her life. As cofounder of Adaptive Action Sports (AAS), she and her partner Daniel Gale create and support opportunities for disabled people to get involved in such action sports as snowboarding, wakeboarding and skateboarding. It's a cause that's very close to Amy's heart, and for good reason.

Eight years ago, the Las Vegas native was enjoying a carefree life of competitive snowboarding while working as a massage therapist at an upscale spa. But the 19-year-old's world was turned upside down when flu-like symptoms quickly turned into a near-fatal battle with bacterial meningitis. She endured multiple organ failure and 32 blood transfusions, and then fell into a three-week coma. Doctors gave her less than a two percent chance of survival.

In spite of her dire circumstances, she fought and survived. However, due to prolonged lack of circulation, her legs did not. Both were amputated below the knee.

Luckily for Amy, her passion for life was stronger than her physical ailments. Now at age 27, with the help of two prosthetic legs, she's back to competing in action sports and, through AAS, helping others to do the same. The California-based nonprofit grew out of Amy's own frustration in finding events and equipment for disabled action sports athletes. "I'm this snowboarder who mountain bikes, rock climbs and does all this outdoor adventure and there was no support for that," says Amy. "I had to find my own way, my own friends and my own community of people to do those things with."

Today AAS sponsors athletes and events through grants and fund-raising drives. Last year they sent five adaptive kids to skateboard camp, sponsored the adaptive division of the annual USA Snowboard Association Nationals and helped fund a rock climbing camp.

After two successful years, AAS is gearing up for another busy season of events, starting off with a freestyle snowboard camp for adaptive athletes at the world-class Windells Camp (the official camp of the US Snowboarding team) at Mt. Hood, OR. Pro snowboarders will teach campers how to ride rails, maneuver the half-pipe, pull 360s and other fun tricks.

Next up are the USASA Nationals in March, when AAS once again will sponsor the adaptive division of the competition. "This year we have double the amount of snowboarders that want to attend than last year," says Amy. AAS is trying to bring in as many disabled athletes as possible, and in order to do this, the grassroots organization needs to help athletes financially by funding their transportation, lodging and gear. "I know, being a double amputee, it's crazy expensive to pay for equipment and do a cool event like this," she says. Later in the summer, AAS's Amped Riders skateboard team will embark on a tour of East Coast military rehab hospitals and nearby skate parks, where they'll give demos and mentor disabled soldiers on the amazing things that can be done with prosthetics.

The process of starting a nonprofit—the grant writing, the fund-raising and the endless networking—has truly been a labor of love for Amy and Daniel (they have yet to earn a salary because every nickel they raise goes into AAS programs), but totally worth it.

"We feel really good about what we're doing," says Amy. "Helping others is the best thing I've done with my life." ●



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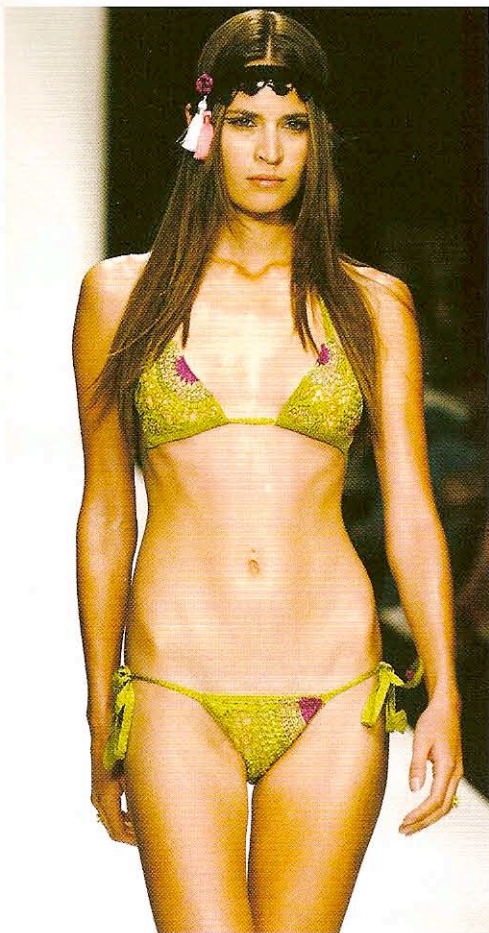
# knit-wit

DISCOVERY OF THE CROCHET SWIMWEAR OF **ASHLEY PAIGE**

words jessica ridenour

“It wasn’t supposed to be a boutique. It was going to be a design space,” says swimsuit designer **Ashley Paige** as she begins the grand tour of her sunlit workshop turned storefront in the heart of Hollywood. Ashley originally envisioned 1616 Cahuenga as a creative space where stylists, friends and other designers could get together and talk shop, but as demand for her exclusive hand-knit bikinis grew, she couldn’t keep people from dropping in. Now the colorful five-year-old space, adorned with whimsical artwork and racks of teeny knit bikinis, bags and apparel, is a destination store for jet-setters and Hollywood celebrities. She’s become the go-to gal for sexy, unique swimwear and is the first designer to offer nothing but knit bikinis.

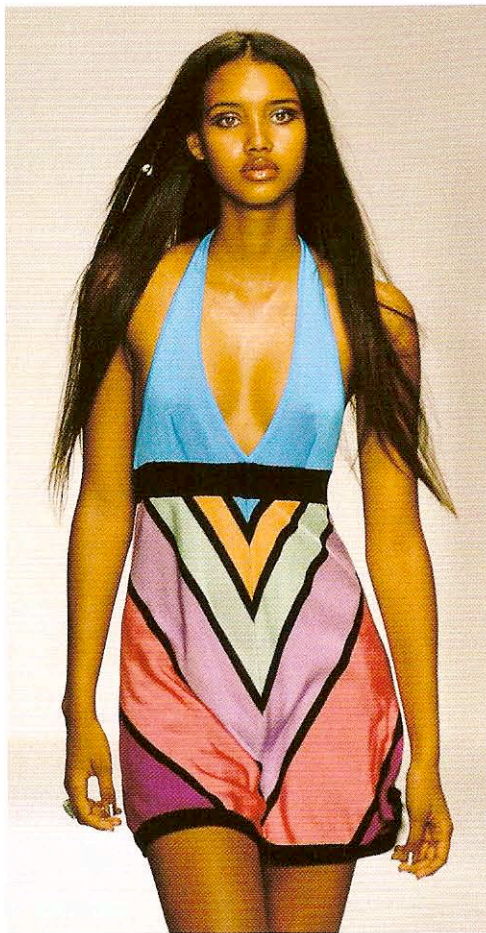




The Pensacola, Fla., native is a self-described “bikini girl.” While she was working toward her degree in marketing and fashion design at the American College for the Applied Arts, her mission became clear. “Everyone else was sketching gowns; I was doing bikinis,” says the 36-year-old. “It’s what I was meant to do.” The young entrepreneur designed and sold Lycra bikinis to supplement her income until she finished school and moved to New York, where she contemplated the next chapter in her life.

“In New York, I was doing the corporate thing and not really fitting in,” she remembers. “I started missing my bikinis.” Inspired by a vintage knit bikini she found in a thrift store, she set out on a research mission to re-create the look with more water-friendly materials. (Cotton doesn’t work because it absorbs too much water, making for a heavy, saggy bikini. Not a good thing for a girl who wants to keep her privates, er, private.) Once she found fibers with just the right amount of stretch, she went to work on her now-famous Beach Undie, which remains one of her top sellers to this day.

The Beach Undie, along with the Tie-kini, forms the backbone of her business, which now includes an array of gorgeous, intricately designed one- and two-piece suits that may either be hand- or loom-knit, or both. The inspiration for the sexy, California-girl styles comes from Ashley’s love of all things ’70s (including her ’70s-era Mach 1 muscle car). She fondly remembers it as a happy, simpler



time when women were carefree and naturally beautiful. Her distinctive styles artfully evoke this laid-back, old-school vibe.

A lot of love is crafted into each piece, and the retail value reflects that, with prices starting upwards of \$300. “We’re a very niche, small business, but we like it like that,” says the designer. “We want to keep it that way. You can’t mass-produce something like that.”

## “A great day for me is selling a couple of bikinis and finding a home for a dog or cat.”

As such, Ashley Paige caters to an elite crowd, with a celebrity following including Kate Hudson, Carmen Electra and Christina Aguilera, among others. She also styles for movies, including Ashley Scott in *Into the Blue* and Naomi Watts in *I Heart Huckabees*. She’ll happily create a custom order for those trendsetting beach gals who want a unique design.

And for those knitters out there who want to rock the Ashley Paige look but can’t afford the real deal, she’s written *Sexy Little Knits*:



*Chic Designs to Knit and Crochet* (Potter Craft, 2006), a collection of her classic looks for the more experienced knitter. “Everything in the book is sassy,” says the designer. The book is divided into three sections, featuring sexy beachwear, street duds and cozy nighties. “Girls who want to be my competitors, they have everything they need in this book,” she laughs. “And yes, I did write everything in the book.”

Next up on the Ashley Paige agenda: a line of Lycra swimsuits that will launch in July and be available in high-end department stores such as Bloomingdale’s. Ashley is excited about the new direction and says the line “is going to be kick-ass.”

While Ashley’s business is now a bona fide success, the slender blonde remains grounded and humbly grateful for her many achievements, and she channels that energy into helping others. “It was very important for me to merge something good into this nightmarish business world,” she says. “I just didn’t want to be in the rat race. I wanted to give back and be involved in the environment.”

To that end, Ashley holds animal adoptions in her boutique every Sunday as well as brings homeless dogs to her runway shows. So far, she’s placed over 300 animals in loving homes. “A great day for me is selling a couple of bikinis and finding a home for a dog or cat,” says the animal lover. “That’s the perfect day at Ashley Paige.” ●