

Brave: A Painfully Shy Life

Helen Rivas-Rose

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Shyness can be crippling, but Helen Rivas-Rose shows the way toward better communication and a better life.

In Helen Rivas-Rose's detailed and poignant memoir, *Brave*, she details her lifelong struggle with shyness and how she learned to free herself from it. Her message promises to inspire shy people and give them a guideline to gradual, positive change.

Rivas-Rose struggled with her interactions with others from the time she was a child, a pattern that may have originated in her family dynamics. Her parents locked her in her room every night after dinner so they could have time to converse without children. She struggled to form bonds with her peers and was not able to find a true friend until her shyness issues were dealt with. As she matured, she found herself increasingly unable to have "normal" interactions with people, keeping to herself because her social anxiety often trumped her desire to make friends. Using her creative side, her writing, she gradually helped herself overcome the crippling fear she'd had all of her life. In this book, she also includes a lengthy appendix that serves as a guide to overcoming shyness.

Rivas-Rose's memoir is powerful because it stems from her desire to help others overcome what she struggled so hard to vanquish. She never wavers from that desire, and if her writing seems to go on a bit at times, it is only because of her passion for the subject matter. The appendix really brings that home, as it uses examples from the story itself to provide assistance. The stories make readers feel less alone in their struggles, something that is vital for those who feel socially awkward. Rivas-Rose offers a welcome sense of community with this book.

The poetry scattered throughout the text does an excellent job setting the tone. The poems are written by the author, and they reflect on the events in the chapters themselves. "A Queen and Two Aces" describes the author's rural family life, and the chapter that follows this poem delves into day-to-day life on Prince Edward Island, where as a girl Rivas-Rose communicated "using sparse monosyllabic words" when talking to those outside her family.

Educators should read this book because painfully shy children can be found in every classroom, and Rivas-Rose's memoir offers insight into what makes these young people tick, and how to help them. Families and friends of the painfully shy will also benefit from this helpful advice, as will shy individuals themselves.

LYNN EVARTS (April 24, 2015)

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