

## Brave(ish): A Memoir of a Recovering Perfectionist

**Margaret Davis Ghielmetti**

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*Drawing on the beauty and idiosyncrasies of places all around the world, Brave(ish) is a compelling memoir about travel and self-acceptance.*

Margaret Davis Ghielmetti's *Brave(ish)* is a poignant, humorous memoir about letting go of the need to be perfect in order to live life fully.

When Ghielmetti's hotelier husband was transferred to Cairo, with a three month stint in Paris beforehand, she told everyone, including herself, that she'd be fulfilling her dream of writing a book. But Ghielmetti, who self-deprecatingly calls herself a Trailing Spouse, kept postponing the actual act of writing. After all, she was too busy being The Perfect Wife, Perfect Hostess, and Perfect Expat—in short, the Perfect Person Who Puts Others First. She thought she needed to be perfect to be worthy of love, and lived by the strict family handbook taught to her since childhood. Over the years, as she and her husband moved between cities, countries, and continents, Ghielmetti began to rip out metaphorical pages from that handbook, tap into her creativity, and assert herself.

Written in a colloquial, humorous style, the book is ruthless in its honesty. All of Ghielmetti's struggles are laid open: serious ones such as infertility and alcoholism; and more mundane ones, such as when, after years of having staff, she finds herself missing the luxury.

A constant underlying current is the author's fear of being unlovable unless she puts others' needs ahead of her own. This is the central theme of the book: learning to let go of this toxic belief and finding joy in oneself. The fear impacts the way that Ghielmetti approaches every relationship in her life, including her marriage; although nothing in the book ever suggests that her husband will leave her if she prioritizes herself, this is a realization she only arrives at herself with time.

Spirituality also looms throughout the book. In her struggle to overcome alcoholism, Ghielmetti transitions from atheism to faith. There are multiple instances described of her speaking to, and hearing, God. However, some tone-deafness and awkwardness also arises, as with a mention of collecting international boyfriends to do one's part for international diplomacy, and a throwaway comment about not feeling guilty when, during a trip to India, donations to people begging and peddling trinkets on the street are foregone because the couple has opted to make a donation to a charitable organization instead.

The memoir balances lighthearted and funny stories with heavy, emotionally charged ones. Sometimes, its humor and sentiment coexist. A notable example occurs after Ghielmetti's battle with infertility, when she and her husband hit a rough spot in their marriage because of their different grieving styles. A therapist provides the metaphor of a beleaguered male turtle who retreats into his shell while his grieving wife pokes at him to come out. This anecdote, retold during later storytelling ventures, becomes pivotal in their marriage. Descriptions of settings are also a highlight, both abundant and bright, illustrating the sights, scents, and sounds of places all around the world.

Drawing on the beauty and idiosyncrasies of places all around the world, *Brave(ish)* is a compelling memoir that tackles its challenges in a nonjudgmental, loving fashion.

CAROLINA CIUCCI (June 25, 2020)

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