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Rumspringa: To Be Or Not To Be Amish



Synopsis

Rumspringa is Tom Shachtman's celebrated look at a little-known Amish coming-of-age ritual, the rumspringa—the period of "running around" that begins for their youth at age sixteen. During this time, Amish youth are allowed to live outside the bounds of their faith, experimenting with alcohol, premarital sex, revealing clothes, telephones, drugs, and wild parties. By allowing such broad freedoms, their parents hope they will learn enough to help them make the most important decision of their lives—whether to be baptized as Christians, join the church, and forever give up worldly ways, or to remain in the world. In this searching book, Shachtman draws on his skills as a documentarian to capture young people on the cusp of a fateful decision, and to give us "one of the most absorbing books ever written about the Plain People" (Publishers Weekly).

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. A teenage Amish girl sits in her buggy, one hand dangling a cigarette while the other holds a cellphone in which she is loudly chatting away. This girl, like many Amish teens 16 and older, is in a period called rumspringa, when the strict rules of community life are temporarily lifted while an adolescent chooses whether to be baptized into the church and abide fully by its laws. Shachtman, a documentarian who began studying this phenomenon for the film *The Devil's Playground*, is a sensitive and nimble chronicler of Amish teens, devoting ample space to allowing them to tell their stories in their own words. And their stories are fascinating, from the wild ones who engage in weekend-long parties, complete with hard drugs and sexual promiscuity, to the more

sedate and pious teens who prefer to engage in careful courtship rituals under the bemused eyes of adult Amish chaperones. Shachtman's tone is by turns admiring of the work ethic, strong families and religious faith that undergird Amish life and critical, especially of the sect's treatment of women and its suspicion of education beyond the eighth grade. Throughout, Shachtman uses the Amish rumspringa experience as a foil for understanding American adolescence and identity formation in general, and also contextualizes rumspringa throughout the rapidly growing and changing Amish world. This is not only one of the most absorbing books ever written about the Plain People but a perceptive snapshot of the larger culture in which they live and move. (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Adult/High School Shachtman expands his documentary film, *The Devil's Playground*, in this study of a social rite of passage. The Old Order Amish, concentrated in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana, but with communities in Wisconsin, Missouri, and even Colorado, eschew or deeply limit not only 20th-century technologies, but also modern consumerism, education, and any form of worldly activity. However, when Amish youth reach the age of about 16, they enter a months- to years-long period of running around, or rumspringa, during which there is the tacit acceptance and expectation that they will participate in such activities as drinking, sexual exploration, automobile driving, and living away from the community. The author examines the role rumspringa plays in the life of the community, the teens, and the teens' families (who are better- or worse-prepared emotionally for their once-obedient children to flaunt not only home rules, but perhaps even to get arrested by state authorities). The author concisely but cogently describes Amish shunning, education, farming and other work, and gender politics. Some kids move out of state during the period, some become drug dealers; most, however, live out a more moderate form of going away, and between 80 and 90 percent return, are baptized, and become fully accepting members of the Amish world. While readers familiar with the Amish as neighbors will find much insight into the plain people's whys and wherefores here, all teens will find accessible information about the psychology of late adolescence and the developmental work of independence. Francisca Goldsmith, Berkeley Public Library, CA Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Rumspringa" is mainly about the Amish coming of age ritual in which the Amish youth are allowed to run around with the "English", but it is also a fascinating look at Amish life in general. The Amish

life is a rigid one, especially for the women, and it is not surprising that some of the youth don't return after their Rumspringa. The price they pay if they don't return is a steep one - not only other Amish, but also their own family shun them, but it is a price some have to pay to be true to themselves. "Rumspringa" is a well-written and well-researched look at Amish life. Author Tom Shachtman interviewed a lot of Amish in the course of writing the book and their conversations are enlightening. While the book is mostly about Rumspringa, all aspects of Amish life are covered and some are eye opening. Much is made of how the Amish youth act during Rumspringa (excess drugs, alcohol, and sex) and while some behavior is self-destructive, many young Amish choose to not return to Amish life because their choices are limited. Ironically, while the Amish school system provides a better education than public schools, that education is limited (for example, science is not taught and most are not educated past eighth grade). Because of that, their life choices are limited - girls are expected to stay at home, get married and raise a family, while the boys are expected to work the farm. It is no wonder some choose to leave, although the price they pay is a high one. For the most part, Shachtman does a good job of not being too judgmental. He strays a bit, especially when trying to make the teens' actions during Rumspringa shocking. But for the most part his writing is straightforward and lets the story tell itself without making it too sensational. His look into the Amish life is very revealing, at times interesting and heartwarming and other times a bit shocking (there are allegations of child abuse). All of this is very informative. In the end, I learned a lot about the Amish way of life by reading "Rumspringa".

The book has some interesting parts to it, but I found it flawed: (1) The writing is not particularly strong; maybe the author was trying to mirror the Amish sense of "plain," but it doesn't make for enjoyable reading; (2) Like the previous reviewer, "RI Mom," I too think this book was more about Amish life in general, with only scant interviews with young people actually in rumspringa; and (3) The book was unfocused, the information being repeated across various chapters, as if they were originally articles and now have been put together to try to form a book. From the reviews, it sounds as if seeing the documentary by the author is a better bet, along with reading a different book on the topic.

Informative, but no real story line. The book is a collection of interviews with young Amish teens. It is interesting and somewhat informative, but is also repetitive and really doesn't lead anywhere.

We used this book for our monthly book club discussion. there was a lot of information regarding

lifestyle of young Amish people and their decision to follow in their family traditions or adopt a modern life style in America. We were surprised at the willingness of their parents to let their young people make discoveries of American teenage life without restrictions. Rather interesting.

Awesome. Very factual and could be used as a school textbook. It really opened my eyes to different culture and religion.

Fascinating look into an area of Amish life rarely talked about (or even known) outside the community.

Not only does this give a detailed look into Rumspringa, but many other aspects of Amish life as well...education, family relationships, origin of the 'ordnung', history of Amish traditions, 'varieties' of Amish, Amish vs Mennonites, etc. I've read many books on the Amish, both fiction and non-fiction, but this is far and away the best overall book for learning and better understanding this fascinating culture.

This was the first book on the Amish that I've read, so I can't really compare it to other books in this genre. The book was an informative, interesting read on the Amish people, specifically their young teenagers. The book describes the experimenting (with drugs, sex, & "English" ways) which is allowed, and sometimes encouraged during the teenage years--the years between childhood & between formally joining the church. The big problem with the book is that it was written in a disjointed fashion. The author loosely organized the stories into topics, and some people's stories were continued in other chapters, and some people's weren't. Some people's stories were left without a clear ending. It made it hard to follow the individual stories. I think a better organization would have been to either tell each person's story in its entirety in a single place in the book, or to have an epilogue to sum up the end of each person's story. Still, there is a lot of information in this book. The author also offers his opinions on the problems with the Amish, the attractions of the Amish religion that should be emulated, and the psychological reasons why 95% of Amish youth decide to become formal members of the church after their time of experimentation (Rumspringa.)

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