

Rumspringa: To Be or Not to Be Amish

Tom Shachtman



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A revelatory look at Amish youth as they have never been looked at before

Rumspringa is a fascinating 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. Through vivid portraits of teenagers in Ohio and Indiana, Tom Shachtman

offers an account of Amish life as a mirror to the soul-searching and questing that we recognize as a generally intrinsic part of adolescence.

The trappings of the Amish way of life—the "plain" clothes and electricity-free farms—conceal the communities' mystery: how they manage to retain their young people and perpetuate themselves generation after generation. The key to this is the *rumspringa*, when Amish youth are allowed to live outside the bounds of their faith, experimenting with alcohol, premarital sex, trendy clothes, telephones, drugs, and wild parties. By allowing them such freedom, 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 out 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 an original and deeply affecting portrait of the Amish as a whole.

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