

Forward

Have you ever felt lonely? Like you were completely and totally uncared for. As if no one wanted to be near you? I have. My name is Rae Brimley, and this is my story. I cannot promise you it is the greatest, or most interesting story, but it is mine.

By opening this book and reading my story, you are joining me in the unique journey that is my life. You will see my battle with self-consciousness, and my struggle with fitting in. Most importantly, you will see the fight I have with depression and how I managed to overcome it.

There may be parts in my story that you don't want to read, that may be difficult to stomach. They may remind you of your own story, pulling up the uncomfortable memories and causing you to reminisce the time you were bullied. Or even the time you were the bully.

While the people portrayed in my story may come across as mean and hurtful, I don't want anyone to think ill of them. Everyone has bad days. Everyone makes mistakes. I hold no ill will for anyone I describe here. We were all kids once, and like all children we did stupid things to show off for our friends.

Lastly, thank you for reading. I am so glad you chose to pick this book up off the shelf, and allowed me to share with you. In the end, my story is the only thing I have.

Chapter - 1 - Kindergarten

I was a small girl, tiny for my age, with long mousy brown hair. I looked around the school yard with wide brown eyes. My nerves caused a hurricane in my belly. Kids of all shapes and sizes ran past as the bell rang. They lined up along the walls next to their respective doors while I stood lost in the crowd.

My mom placed her hand on my shoulder and lead me to the door. I joined the line and gazed at the students around me, my new classmates. The teacher opened the heavy green door and greeted us. She had us rearrange our line into alphabetical order and told us to look at the person standing in front of us, and behind us. She told us these would be our new friends, and we were responsible for making sure they found their spot in line quickly and easily.

Mrs. Jackson then brought us into the building and showed us our cubby-holes, where we would put our outside shoes and our jackets when we came in each day. We were instructed to hang our coats and backpacks and to follow her into the next room. I watched as the children in front of me tittered in awe at the decorations and toys.

A large circular rug was placed in the middle of the floor, surrounded by stations for crafts and building blocks. My favourite station was tucked in behind the tables. A small, cozy library complete with pillows to use as cushions atop a fluffy shag carpet. I wanted nothing more than to run and immerse myself in the stories I knew I would find, and go on the adventures provided for my young mind.

Instead, I had to join the other students on the large carpet. We sat in a large semi-circle and looked to Mrs. Jackson. We impatiently awaited her next words. Some fidgeted, and squirmed in place. I sat, keeping my eyes firmly locked on a splotch of black paint in the carpet in front of me. I was nervous.

My family had just moved into the neighbourhood, so while these kids all knew each other from Junior Kindergarten, I knew nobody. I could hear them talking and laughing, catching up with each other after a long summer apart. My day continued with the class, learning the rules and expectations placed upon us. As a treat we were introduced to special treatment.

Of course this was not quite the way the teacher had meant it. Each day, starting the following week, a student would be selected as the 'teacher's helper' for the day. This involved sitting in a special chair where we could hold the classroom mascot, a stuffed bear we had affectionately named Teddy. During the day this student would get to walk to the office with the attendance sheet for the day, fetch books or materials from the shelves as needed by Mrs. Jackson, and choose which students would read aloud to the class. This position was much sought after by my peers, and I wanted it more than anything.

The end of the day came and I waited anxiously for my mother to pick me up. When she arrived I hurried to her side and clasped her hand, squeezing her fingers tight. She walked me home and asked me questions about my day. Typical things such as “Did you make any friends?” “Did you learn anything?” and “Do you like your teacher?”. My answer for each was that of which I assume every lonely child responds with, “Yes mum”, “No mum”, and “Yes mum, she’s nice.”

The next day I went to school and waited by the doors for the bell to ring, as I would for the rest of my early school years. The rest of my classmates milled about chatting with each other and playing games. The bell rang and we all lined up in our places. When we entered the classroom to take our seats I sat next to a girl I thought would be a good choice for a friend. She was quiet like me. I sat beside her and gave her a shy smile, hoping she would return it.

This would be when I was first separated from the rest. The girl sitting on the other side of me whipped around and tapped me on the shoulder. “YOU CAN’T SIT THERE!” she boomed.

At this point all eyes were on me and her, her pointed finger now a mere inches from my nose. I stood and moved back to where I had been seated the day before, in between the boy who picked his nose and wiped his fingers on the floor and the girl we would later learn had head lice.

Two weeks later I had settled into a routine. I would go to school and sit on the carpet, listening to the chatter of my peers and watching as they played together. During this time I began to feel lonelier and lonelier. The other children began to form stronger bonds, separating into small groups that would later become cliques. I was included when it was required, a small relief from the loneliness I felt most of the time.

One day, a few weeks after the school year had begun, I went to the building blocks to play with a boy who was alone like me. When I sat beside him he told me I couldn’t play with him because nobody liked me or wanted to be my friend. I played by myself for the rest of the day.

A few months later, during the national anthem I realized I needed to use the bathroom. I went to Mrs. Jackson and asked if I could use the washroom, and instead of being allowed to go I was told I needed to wait until the anthem and prayer were done. I waited, and waited and I fidgeted and danced through the announcements until finally I was allowed to go.

I ran to the restroom and struggled to undo my belt. I finally managed to get it undone, but it was too late. Warm moisture began to spread in my jeans and down my pant legs. I began to shake with embarrassment, and the first of many frustrated tears began to form. I cleaned myself up as best I could, but quickly discovered it was no use. Tears now streamed freely down my face as I knew if I went to the teacher and told her what happened the other kids would see. I knew it would be something I couldn’t live down.

Eventually Mrs. Jackson came to check on me, and upon discovering what had happened, she reassured me there was no problem. She left me in the washroom, and returned a few minutes later with a clean pair of pants and underwear. I quickly changed and put my soiled clothes into a plastic bag she provided and allowed her to wipe away my tears.

Once I was presentable Mrs. Jackson sent me back out to the classroom where the other students were watching a video. I choose a seat at the back of the group so no one would see me return. After putting the bag of clothing into my backpack, Mrs. Jackson sat down at her desk to finish filling out the attendance sheets. She looked around the room for her helper of the day and quickly sent him towards the office with the attendance folder. The rest of the day thankfully passed without further incident.

More time passed and I took notice of something very concerning to five year old me. While most of the students had been chosen for Teacher's Helper multiple times, I had yet to be chosen once. This made me very unhappy. All I wanted was to fit in, and now it felt as though the teacher herself was pushing me off and excluding me. That morning I watched as another student was selected for the fourth time as the teacher's helper for the day.

I decided I hated her. I waited until first recess, and then I couldn't hold it in anymore. I went up to Mrs. Jackson and asked her when I would get to be the teacher helper. She told me she was sure I had already been selected. I told her no, I hadn't, and she shrugged and said it would be very soon, within the next week. Elated, I rushed outside to enjoy some of my recess.

I made it out the doors before I realized I still had no one to play with. My little heart sank at the thought of another recess alone. I walked around the playground looking for someone as lonely as myself. Upon finding no one I left the direct playground and turned back towards the building where I sat against the warm brick and waited for recess to end. A girl plopped down next to me and nudged my shoulder.

"Hey," she said. "I'm Jessalyn. Why are you sitting by yourself?"

I looked up in surprise. Someone was actually talking to me? The first thing I did before responding was to look around for a group of friends laughing nearby. Seeing none, I turned to look at the girl sitting beside me. She was tall and thin with short brown hair. She had dark eyes and a bright smile.

"Hi," I replied nervously. "My name is Rae." I chose to ignore her question.

"Well, I see you all the time in my neighbourhood. Do you want to play sometime?" She looked at me expectantly.

I couldn't believe someone was actually asking me to play with them. The only other kids I had played with up to this point were my cousins, and I didn't see them often. I hesitated again, trying to figure out if she was serious or not.

"Okay?" She prodded me.

I nodded once and smiled shyly. She smiled back and told me she'd see me after school. I went through the rest of the day as if I were in a bubble. The mean things people said couldn't hurt me anymore. For the first time I can remember, I had a friend. A real life, actual friend. Someone who wasn't forced to play with me or talk to me.

My mom was at work that day so my dad picked me up from school. As we walked home I told him about the new friend I had made and how I couldn't wait to play with her. I don't know if he noticed a change in my demeanour, if he did he didn't acknowledge it. We arrived home to find Jessalyn on our front porch. My whole face lit up and I looked up at my dad. He took my backpack and ushered me off to go play with a stern warning to stay within sight of the house.

Jessalyn and I played for hours. She showed me around the neighbourhood and introduced me to her mom and her sisters, Ashley and Jenna. Jessalyn and Jenna were twins, and while Jessalyn went to the same school as me, Jenna did not. She went to a special school for the hearing impaired. After meeting her family, I took Jessalyn to my house to meet mine.

My mom had just arrived home from work and was chatting with my dad when we ran up.

"Why hello Rae, who is your new friend?" She smiled down at me.

"This is Jessalyn and she lives there." I pointed at the house across from ours.

My mom lowered herself to our level and greeted Jessalyn. She asked a few questions and nodded at each of Jessalyn's answers. Once she had finished her questions, she shooed us off to play again.

Jessalyn offered to teach me sign language and I gladly accepted. We spent the rest of the evening swooping our hands and fingers, twisting them to make shapes and letters that my brain could only begin to understand.

After dinner my mum and dad sat me down in the living room for some quiet family time. We ended up watching *The Little Mermaid* while my mom rocked my brother James to sleep. At eight o'clock bedtime had arrived and my parents brought us upstairs to tuck us in. Each gave me a gentle kiss on the forehead and whispered "I love you, sweet dreams" into the darkness.

That night I fell asleep with ease, and finally had the sweet dreams my parents promised each night.

