SOFTWARE & TECH

Leaving My Amish World My True Story

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Introduction: The Day I Walked Away

The rumble of a car engine was a sound I had only heard from a distance for the first eighteen years of my life. But on a cool September morning, I sat in the passenger seat of a borrowed sedan, watching the familiar landscape of horse-drawn buggies and vast cornfields shrink in the side mirror. I was leaving my Amish world my true story of departure began not with a dramatic final stand, but with a quiet, trembling exhale. My name is not important, but my journey is one that thousands of Amish youth face each year during their **Rumspringa**—a period of exploration that often leads to an impossible choice between faith, family, and personal freedom.

For those who have never stepped foot inside an Amish home, the idea of leaving such a tightly-knit community seems almost incomprehensible. The Amish are known for their simple living, plain dress, and reluctance to adopt modern technology. But behind the picturesque postcard image lies a world of strict rules, communal pressure, and an identity that is nearly impossible to shed. This is the story of how I found the courage to step into the unknown, and what I discovered on the other side.

Understanding the Amish World I Left Behind

A Life Governed by the Ordnung

To understand why anyone would leave the Amish, you must first understand how deeply the **Ordnung**governs every aspect of life. The Ordnung is not a written code but an oral tradition of rules and expectations passed down through generations. It dictates everything from the color of your buggy to the style of your clothing, from the technology you may use to the person you are allowed to marry. Conformity is not just encouraged—it is required for salvation and community belonging.

Growing up, I was taught that pride was the root of all sin. Mirrors were discouraged because they promoted vanity. Photographs were forbidden because they captured a graven image. And education beyond the eighth grade was deemed unnecessary because it would fill our heads with worldly ideas. The world outside our settlement was referred to simply as "the English" world, a place of moral decay and spiritual danger.

The Weight of Community Expectations

In my Amish community, family was everything, but it was also a cage wrapped in love. Every Sunday, we gathered for services that lasted three hours, held in a different home each week. We sang from the **Ausbund**, the same hymnbook our ancestors used in Switzerland and Germany. The hymns were slow, somber, and sung without harmony—a reflection of our belief in humility and uniformity.

I loved my family deeply. My mother was a gentle woman who could quilt a blanket in three days and grow vegetables that would feed us through the winter. My father was a master carpenter, a man of few words but steady hands. They were good people by any standard. Yet even their love came with conditions rooted in tradition. The unspoken rule was clear: you belong to the community, or you belong to nothing.

The Confusion of Rumspringa

Rumspringa, which means "running around" in Pennsylvania Dutch, is often misunderstood by outsiders. Many believe it is a free pass for Amish teenagers to experience the modern world before choosing baptism. The reality is far more complicated. For me, Rumspringa was a time of intense internal conflict. I was allowed to attend parties, wear "English" clothes, and even drive a car—but I was never truly free. Every taste of the outside world came with a side of guilt and the knowledge that I was being watched by my family and church leaders.

During this period, I made a friend named Leah who had been secretly reading books she bought at a thrift store. She introduced me to a novel by a non-Amish author, and I was mesmerized. The characters in that book had choices. They questioned authority. They changed their minds. That simple act of reading fiction opened a door in my mind that could never be closed again. I began to realize that the Amish way was not the only way—it was simply one path among many.

The Pain of Holding Two Worlds

The most difficult part of questioning my faith was the isolation. In the Amish world, doubt is a private shame. You do not voice it because doing so risks your standing in the community and, more painfully, your relationship with your family. I remember sitting in the barn one evening, milking a cow by lantern light, and thinking about astronomy—a subject we never studied. I wondered what it would be like to look at the stars and understand them through science rather than scripture.

That night, I cried. Not because I was sad, but because I realized I was already gone in my heart. I was leaving my Amish world my true story had already begun to unfold, but no one else knew it yet.

The Decision to Leave: A Moment That Changed Everything

The Final Sermon

The turning point came during a Sunday service in late summer. The bishop was preaching about the dangers of pride and the importance of yielding to God's will. He spoke directly about young people who "stray" into the English world and lose their souls. As I listened, I felt a strange calm settle over me. I realized that staying would be a lie. I could not honestly confess my faith in a tradition I no longer believed. To be baptized under those circumstances would be a betrayal of both God and myself.

After the service, I found my father working in the woodshop. I told him, quietly, that I would not be seeking baptism. He did not shout. He did not argue. He simply looked at me with an expression I had never seen before—a mixture of sorrow and resignation. "You are choosing the world over your family," he said. "I hope you find what you are looking for." Those words cut deeper than any punishment ever could.

Making a Plan in Secret

Leaving the Amish is not as simple as packing a bag. Without a car, a phone, or a bank account, an Amish person who leaves must rely on the kindness of outsiders or former community members. I had saved a small amount of money from selling eggs and quilts at a roadside stand, but it was barely enough to survive for a month. I contacted a former Amish woman I had met during Rumspringa who now lived in a nearby city. She agreed to let me stay with her temporarily.

The night before I left, I walked through the house one last time. I touched the wooden floors my father had sanded smooth, the quilts my mother had stitched, the cast iron stove that had warmed us through countless winters. I left a note on the kitchen table. It said simply, "I love you. I need to find my own way. Please forgive me."

The Shock of Modern Life

The first few months after leaving were overwhelming in ways I had not anticipated. Simple tasks that everyone else took for granted were foreign to me. I had never used a microwave. I had never made a phone call on a cellular device. I had never driven a car alone, paid a bill, or navigated a grocery store with hundreds of choices. The noise of the city was constant and exhausting. I missed the silence of the countryside and the rhythm of the seasons.

I also struggled with technology. The internet was both a marvel and a minefield. I had to learn how to use email, how to search for information, and how to protect myself from scams and inappropriate content. I made mistakes—many of them. I accidentally ran up a large data bill because I did not understand Wi-Fi. I clicked on a phishing link and had to cancel my first bank card. But each mistake taught me something, and slowly, I began to adapt.

Finding Work and an Identity

Without a high school diploma or GED, my job options were limited. I found work as a cleaner in a hotel, a job that was humbling but honest. I learned to interact with people who spoke differently, dressed differently, and thought differently than anyone I had known. For the first time in my life, I was judged by my work ethic rather than my family name or church affiliation. It was terrifying and liberating in equal measure.

I also began to discover who I was outside the shadow of the Amish community. I took evening classes at a community college, slowly earning credits toward a GED. I discovered a love for writing and history. I made friends who knew nothing about buggies and barn raisings but accepted me anyway. I learned that identity is not something you inherit—it is something you build, brick by brick, choice by choice.

The Emotional Cost of Leaving My Amish World

The Pain of Separation from Family

No part of leaving was harder than the loss of my family. In the Amish community, shunning—or **Meidung**—is practiced to varying degrees. In my settlement, those who left were not completely shunned, but relationships became strained and distant. My mother called me once, using a neighbor's phone, to tell me she loved me. She also told me she prayed every night that I would return to the faith. That call was both a gift and a wound.

I have not seen my father in several years. I send letters to my siblings, but I do not know if they receive them. The birthday cards I mail are never acknowledged. The silence is not born of anger, I believe, but of grief. In leaving, I became a reminder of what they had lost and what they feared for their own children.

Building a New Support System

One of the most important lessons I learned is that leaving a high-control group requires rebuilding your entire support network. I found a therapist who specialized in religious trauma and high-control groups. I joined an online support group for former Amish and Mennonite individuals. I connected with a local community center that offered free classes and social events. Slowly, I surrounded myself with people who understood that my past did not define my future.

I also discovered the importance of self-compassion. For years, I carried guilt for hurting my family. I felt like a traitor, even though I knew I had made the right choice for my own well-being. A friend once told me, "You are not responsible for the happiness of everyone in your family. You are responsible for living your truth." Those words became a mantra I repeated during the darkest days.

Reflections on Leaving the Amish Faith

What I Gained and What I Lost

Leaving my Amish world my true story is not a simple tale of liberation. It is a story of trade-offs. I gained the freedom to ask questions, to choose my own career, to wear whatever I want, and to love whomever I choose. I gained the ability to vote, to read without censorship, and to explore spirituality on my own terms. I gained a future that was not predetermined by the circumstances of my birth.

But I also lost things that cannot be replaced. I lost the sense of belonging that comes from being part of a unified community. I lost the comfort of knowing my place in the world without having to question it. I lost the daily presence of my mother's cooking, my father's quiet wisdom, and the laughter of my siblings. I lost the rhythm of a life that was simple, predictable, and safe.

Lessons for Those Considering Leaving

If you are reading this and considering leaving your own closed community, whether it is Amish, Mennonite, Orthodox, or another high-control group, I offer these reflections from my own experience:

- Prepare as much as you can. Save money, gather important documents, and identify people who can help you transition. The outside world is not hostile, but it requires knowledge you may not have.
- Seek professional support. Leaving a high-control group is a major life transition that can bring up complex emotions. A therapist or counselor who understands religious trauma can make a significant difference.

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