How To Be Brave – Book Review

How To Be Brave by Louise Beech is a special find. It is an incredibly powerful and immersive read, and that is an understatement.

I read this as a buddy read with Stephen, who has become a regular buddy-read friend. Our discussions were stimulating and thought-provoking, and through our shared love of not only books but of writing too, we particularly enjoyed discussing this well-written work. I am glad it was your turn to pick our next read, Stephen – excellent choice!

This book involves two cleverly entwined storylines in a flowing and complimentary manner. It begins with a young girl's life-altering diagnosis of diabetes, which leads her and her mother onto an unfamiliar, confronting and complicated path. Through storytelling and a touch of magical realism, the book moves between this modern storyline and one set in 1943 in which a group of soldiers are forced to fight for their survival on a lifeboat.

The writing style is lyrical and beautiful. With lines like, "How do words in books know where to go and who to be friends with?", you can't help but be drawn in. The characters are true-to-life, multifaceted and fantastically well developed. After a slow-build beginning, the second half of the book really picks up speed and by the last third, well, let's just say the old 'one more page' book-lover's problem kept me up past my bed time more than once! I love books that are told from differing perspectives or times and Louise Beech has done this in a clever and captivating manner.

I was excited as soon as I realised a few pages in that the experience of living with a chronic health condition is imbedded in the storyline alongside the magical realism aspect. As someone who deals with this too, and having worked

as a nurse, I am always interested to see how an author portrays it and am enthusiastic about the notion of increasing people's understanding of these issues. In saying that, I occasionally found myself wanting there to be another element in the modern storyline outside that which focused on Rose's health because it became a little repetitive at times, however this was only a minor issue.

The book's blurb describes it as "an extraordinary true account of bravery and a fight for survival in the Second World War", and the author tells of her experiences with her own daughter's health. However, I went into this book thinking that it was written loosely based on what happened during the war. This alone had a huge impact on me and my reading experience, knowing that what these characters were going through was similar to what men in real life actually dealt with. It was only when I read the afterword that I realised this story is heavily drawn from the author's own grandfather's experience and is very close to the truth. The power of this book grew exponentially. I can not remember a book that has literally made me say "wow" as I finished the final line. (My brother found it quite amusing that I went to a quiet room and lay down to contemplate the story and the truth behind it!).

Louise Beech reached out to Stephen and I and shared photos with us. This added to the reading experience, not only because it is always great to interact with an author, but because we had been picturing a certain type of lifeboat that turned out to be bigger than what Louise's photos demonstrated. Again the impact and reality of this book hit.



The type of boat that I was picturing as I read.



The actual size of the boat Louise’s grandfather was on.

This book is an important one in raising awareness of multiple aspects of life and history. It is hard-hitting and shows the strengths and weaknesses of humanity and the power of love, family, storytelling and words. My only complaint is that it took me days to be able to move on to another book!!! I most definitely recommend this to everyone. I am excited to read Louise's other books.

I gave *How To Be Brave* 5 stars.



Louise's granddad – a brave soldier in a war that should never have happened – a man we must remember alongside all the other amazing men and women involved in wars.