

Battling Silence: James Roskell BSC and the Journey Through Selective Mutism

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Chapter 1: Silenced in School: Coping with Selective Mutism in Childhood

Poulton C of E Primary School was where my selective mutism began. I was in year 5, and I can still remember the overwhelming feeling of anxiety and fear that would grip me every time I had to speak in front of the class.

I was a shy child by nature, but my selective mutism made things much worse. I would freeze up, my heart pounding in my chest, my mouth dry, and my mind blank. I couldn't even bring myself to say my own name, let alone answer questions or read out loud in class.

My teachers were concerned, of course. They tried to coax me into speaking, to make me feel safe and comfortable, but nothing worked. I felt like a failure, like there was something fundamentally wrong with me. I saw the disappointment and frustration on their faces, and it only made things worse.

As time went on, my selective mutism began to affect my relationships with my classmates. I felt isolated and alone, unable to join in with conversations or games. I was too scared to ask for help or to tell anyone what was going on. I felt like I was trapped in my own silence.

Looking back, I wish I had known more about selective mutism and how to manage it. But at the time, it felt like an insurmountable obstacle. It wasn't until years later, when I finally received a diagnosis and began therapy, that I started to understand what was happening to me.

But those early years at Poulton C of E Primary School will always stay with me. They were the beginning of a long and difficult journey, but also the start of a journey towards acceptance and healing.

Chapter 2: Pen and Paper

When I started at Baines High School, I knew that I couldn't go on like I had in primary school. My selective mutism had only gotten worse over the years, and I knew that I needed to find a way to communicate with my teachers and classmates.

That's when I hit upon the idea of using pen and paper. It wasn't a perfect solution, but it was a way for me to express myself without having to speak out loud. I could write down my answers to questions, ask for help, and even participate in group work, all without having to overcome the paralyzing fear that had plagued me for so long.

At first, it was difficult. I was afraid that my classmates would make fun of me, or that my teachers would be annoyed by my constant note-passing. But to my surprise, everyone was supportive. My teachers were impressed by my dedication to learning, and my classmates were intrigued by my unique approach.

In some ways, using pen and paper became my lifeline. It allowed me to participate in school in a way that I never could have otherwise. I wasn't just sitting in the back of the class, invisible and silent. I was actively engaging with the material,

asking questions, and even cracking jokes.

Of course, there were still challenges. There were times when I wished I could just speak out loud like everyone else. There were moments when I felt left out of conversations or group activities. But overall, my experience at Baines High School was a positive one. I learned to adapt, to be resourceful, and to never give up on finding ways to communicate.

Looking back, I'm grateful for the support of my teachers and classmates, and for the resilience that I developed during those years. Without them, I'm not sure I would have been able to make it through high school at all.

Chapter 3: Adapting to College Life

As I transitioned into college, I knew that I couldn't rely on my pen and paper strategy forever. I needed to find new ways to manage my anxiety and to communicate effectively. So, I decided to seek out resources on campus that could help me. I also utilised my computer skills by using various pieces of technology to type notes instead of writing on pen and paper which is more efficient.

I attended workshops on social anxiety, practiced relaxation techniques on my own. Through these efforts, I found a new sense of community and support that I had been lacking before.

I also pushed myself to take risks and to step outside of my comfort zone. Each of these experiences challenged me in new ways, but they also helped me to grow and to build my confidence.

Despite these efforts, my selective mutism still presented challenges at times. I found it difficult to make small talk, to approach professors for help, or to participate in group discussions. But instead of seeing these moments as failures, I learned to reframe them as opportunities for growth.

By the time I graduated from college, I had developed a new set of skills and coping mechanisms. I had learned how to manage my anxiety, how to communicate more effectively, and how to advocate for myself in academic and professional settings.

Looking back now, I can see that my selective mutism was not something that I overcame, but rather something that I learned to live with and manage. It continues to be a part of my life, but it no longer holds me back in the same way that it once did. Instead, I have found new ways to adapt and to thrive, both

academically and personally.

Chapter 4: Graduating with a 2:2 Bachelor's Degree

As I approached the end of my university years, I was excited to graduate and start my career. However, I couldn't help but feel a bit disappointed that I didn't achieve a higher grade. I had worked hard, but I knew that my selective mutism had held me back in some ways.

Despite this disappointment, I still felt proud of myself for what I had accomplished. Graduating from university was a big accomplishment for me, and I knew that I had overcome many obstacles along the way.

I had to work harder than most of my peers to communicate effectively in class, to participate in group projects, and to network with professionals in my field. However, I also knew that these challenges had helped me to develop valuable skills such as persistence, resilience, and adaptability.

When I received my 2:2 Bachelor's degree, I felt a mix of emotions. On the one hand, I felt proud of myself for

completing my degree and achieving a respectable grade despite my challenges. On the other hand, I felt a bit uncertain about what the future held for me.

I had always envisioned a certain career path for myself, but I wasn't sure if my selective mutism would limit my opportunities. However, I refused to let my anxiety hold me back. Instead, I continued to work hard, to network with professionals, and to seek out new opportunities.

Despite some setbacks, I eventually landed a job as a cleaner with keyholder responsibilities. While this was not my dream job, it provided me with the opportunity to build my skills, gain experience, and prove my reliability.

Over the years, I continued to work hard and to seek out new opportunities. Today, I am proud of where I am in my career, and I know that my selective mutism has played a role in shaping who I am and what I have accomplished.

In hindsight, graduating with a 2:2 Bachelor's degree was not a setback, but rather a learning experience. It taught me that success is not measured solely by grades, but by one's ability to overcome challenges and to continue striving towards their goals.

I would like to thank you the reader for reading this book. I look

forward to the future whatever challenges, it may bring.

James Roskell BSC. (Written April, 2023)