



## Crazy Brave

*Joy Harjo*

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In this transcendent memoir, grounded in tribal myth and ancestry, music and poetry, Joy Harjo details her journey to becoming a poet. Born in Oklahoma, the end place of the Trail of Tears, Harjo grew up learning to dodge an abusive stepfather by finding shelter in her imagination, a deep spiritual life, and connection with the natural world. Narrating the complexities of betrayal and love, *Crazy Brave* is a haunting, visionary memoir about family and the breaking apart necessary in finding a voice.

## Crazy Brave Details

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Author : Joy Harjo

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## From Reader Review Crazy Brave for online ebook

### ElphaReads says

(originally reviewed at [elphareads.tumblr.com](http://elphareads.tumblr.com) )

I love me a good memoir. Reading books about other people's lives with a focused theme or style is much more appealing to me than biographies or even autobiographies, because to me it feels like memoirs have a lot of emotional charge to them a fair amount of the time. CRAZY BRAVE by Jo Harjo is no exception. I will admit that when I tossed CRAZY BRAVE on my request list, I had no idea who Jo Harjo was. I soon found out that she was an American Indian poet, and that she has had a number of artistic feats under her belt. So I started CRAZY BRAVE one morning and found myself done with it by the afternoon. I took a chance on it and it felt like it paid off pretty well.

Jo Harjo grew up in the 1960s, a time of turmoil and change in the United States, just as much as it was a time of turmoil and change in her life. She tells the stories of growing up with an alcoholic father, a resilient and determined mother, an abusive stepfather, and a feeling of isolation in her teenage years. As she became passionate about art and artistic hobbies, she started to find her voice. After going to an Indian arts boarding school, she really started to tap into her creative side, and started to become more aware of the physical and spiritual world around her. Though she faced a lot of different kinds of adversity, Harjo triumphed through her creativity and through finding her artistic voice.

Even though I knew little to nothing about Jo Harjo when I started this book, I had a very good sense of who she was by the end of it. She combines poetry, life stories, and tribal myth from her ancestors and family to tell the story of growing up in a time of transition and change. Though I'm not very big into poetry, I do really like different kinds of folklore from all kinds of cultures, and Harjo has a serious talent for creating images and narratives that flow beautifully off the page. I did like her poems quite a bit as well, which is always a feat when it comes to me. This book was a pretty quick and easy read, as while the content was hard and upsetting to read at times, Harjo is very matter of fact about her experiences and how they changed her and shaped her into who she is today. I also liked that this gave a historical lens into the American Indian rights movement that was starting up in the 1960s, showing the unrest of the time and how it went across all groups of people in this country. Harjo has a lot to say about these matters, and I greatly enjoyed reading her perspectives in both prose and poetry form.

CRAZY BRAVE was a very enjoyable memoir about a very fascinating artist, and I want to know more about Jo Harjo now that I've read it. Those who like memoirs should really put this one on your list.

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### Amy (Other Amy) says

*I played with garter snakes, horned toads, frogs, June bugs, and other creatures. Some of my favorite playmates were roly-poly bugs. They busied about with several legs and didn't trip themselves up. They protected themselves when threatened by curling into a ball. As we played, I could see the light shining around their little armored bodies.*

Roly-polys! This is like an automatic 5 star from me! OK, no, I will be good. 3.5 stars overall. I must say I really enjoyed this book, maybe more so because even though I know next to nothing of Native American culture, it is clear that this author and her folks are my people. From the children running through yards playing with reptiles and bugs to the struggles making ends meet and the bouts of too much alcohol and

smoke and the housework that is never done and the poetry that might make it all better. My folks, to the core. (I say this with full awareness of one massive genocide standing between our peoples, which kills me because I am helpless as to what can bring any healing. It is clear to me that we are different, but as all differences do, this resolves down to our same. Because we have been the same kind of coward, and I aspire to be the same kind of brave.)

As a read, it is a little disjointed having no grounding in the dream travelling and the visions of things that happen before birth and such, but by the end of the book these things fall into a rhythm, become one of its charms. But then it all ends very abruptly. Nonetheless, I probably would round this up to a 4 star were it not for one of the most gripping stories she tells being "partially fictionalized," with no indication of what exactly was fictionalized. Names changed to protect the innocent? What actually happened? People's reactions? No idea. It is one of the best stories in the book. Ah, well. (3 stars means "I liked it" and I in this case I totally recommend this book.)

From page 56:

*And whom do I call my enemy?*

*An enemy must be worthy of engagement.*

*I turn in the direction of the sun and keep walking.*

*It's the heart that asks the question, not my furious mind.*

*The heart is the smaller cousin of the sun.*

*It sees and knows everything.*

*It hears the gnashing even as it hears the blessing.*

*A door to the mind should open only from the heart.*

*An enemy who gets in risks the danger of becoming a friend.*

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## Mark says

“A story matrix connects all of us.

There are rules, processes, and circles of responsibility in this world. And the story begins exactly where it is supposed to begin. We cannot skip any part.”

“I am born of brave people and we were in need of warriors.”

I discovered Harjo, through her poetry, recently finishing *In Mad Love and War*. It was a collection, I immediately fell in love with and once, I learned she had penned a memoir, I knew I had to read it. It did not disappoint. Harjo was born in Oklahoma, in 1951 and is a member of the Mvskoke/Creek Nation. Her story follows her childhood, ducking her abusive stepfather and struggling on the fringes of poverty. She finally enrolls in an Indian arts program, as a teenager, finding solace in painting, music and eventually poetry, her true salvation.

As expected, the writing here is beautiful, as we watch this troubled girl, blossom into an artistic young woman. I hope Harjo continues her story, in another volume.

“It was in that same classroom I learned to read. The moment the letters became sounds and sounds became stories and poems, I lit up...Each book was it's own matrix and contained a world you could carry in your hands. I read all of the books in the first-grade classroom, then started on the books in the second-grade classroom.”

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## James Giddings says

I love the way she covers traumatic incidents in her life briefly and matter-of-factly but dwells lovingly on her visits to the spirit world and relationships with ancestors and guides. Hers has been a triumphant and successful life in spite of great personal and historic tragedies. I'm so glad to understand more of where her poetry and music are coming from.

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## Sherri says

I read this in a single sitting. I didn't intend to, I had things to do but all that fell away when I began to read. Even now I have things to do but they don't seem as important; Wal-Mart can wait.

I plan to buy and give copies of this book to my sisters and a couple of friends. There is so much truth, pain, beauty and humor in this tiny book. I found myself laughing out loud at some paragraphs, outraged at others and feeling the same sadness Harjo recalls in others. She writes simply and beautifully, with honesty and her use of imagery is extraordinary. The poetry flows through her prose and what could seem strange in another writer's hands is natural and real in hers.

I enjoy reading her monthly column in the Muscogee Nation News and there are similar elements from the columns in the book. Understated and without anger or bitterness she recounts a life that would have crushed a woman less strong. The book ends with Harjo as a struggling college student with two young children and I hope this means there will be a sequel.

I've seen her perform twice and both times were mesmerizing. She includes some of her better known poems in this book and I felt a little thrill recognizing opening lines and reading further familiar words. I also like that she mentions she discovered a fondness for Bizet and the Doors, much as I did a generation later. She deals with some harsh realities of Indian life and I winced a few times and found myself nodding sadly.

I'd recommend this to anyone who enjoys poetry, biography, feminist thought, contemporary history and Native history. No, I just recommend it to everyone.

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## Claudia says

Audible memoirs read by the author are quickly becoming a favorite....to HEAR the author say her own words, with the exact emphasis, inflection, she intended is a gift. But the down side is not SEEING the words on the page. I'll be getting the kindle version also so I can see.

This is a book that needs to sit next to I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS. Two towering talents whose childhoods did not necessarily hit at their gifts. Two little girls who struggled with relationships, who watched and wondered. Who collected words and images for later. Who became single mothers so young.

Harjo is an Oklahoma native and we claim her with pride. Her story is an important one -- a woman who is determined to use her gifts and talents, who brings her heritage with her wherever she is, and who faces obstacles with crazy brave-ness.

Short enough to read with my ears again...after I read it with my eyes.

## V says

Ate this book in a sitting. One to be passed down through generations. Hauntingly beautiful, poignant, and true. Carefully tells its own story while calmly talking of the universe.

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## Tina Cipolla says

Joy Harjo is a fixture among college English majors. Somehow I managed not to read her until now, and I'm sorry I waited. This memoir was touching, realistic and honest. She paints a vivid picture of her life growing up in the American West in the 60s, and no matter your cultural background this book resonates. I was rooting for her on the whole way; I found her both likable and courageous. Harjo takes a hard look at some very difficult, if almost universal, issues (poverty, child abuse, incest, domestic violence, alcoholism, teen pregnancy, etc.) and never once does this author feel sorry for herself for having to deal with these things--and you can't help but admire her for this.

Most notable for me in this book, Harjo accomplished quite a feat of describing her Creek religion without it sounding flaky (as some other Native American writers unfortunately do--I'm thinking of Leslie Marmon Silko for example.) She talked at length about "the knowing" and although it goes by other names in other traditions, you will recognize it and be able to relate to it, and you will cheer when she allows it to lead her down the right path and into a situation that permanently alters her life for the better. This is not to say she doesn't still face significant challenges, but she manages to persevere and succeed and in the end the book is an affirmation of a life well lived in the face of sometimes seemingly insurmountable odds.

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## Karen says

This one was a hit or miss for me, in the beginning especially. I enjoyed it more toward the end because she wrote about places where I'd lived in New Mexico -- Farmington in the Four Corners region, Santa Fe and Albuquerque. When she described UNM and crossing the traffic on Central Ave. I got little a nostalgic. Other times, though, it felt like I'd start to get into a story and she'd abruptly shift to a memory or a myth or a poem. I guess there's nothing wrong with a metaphorical style and no rule that says you must tell your story in the most direct way possible, period. She has another book coming out soon, and I would read it.

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## Chrissie says

The GR book description states: *In this transcendent memoir, grounded in tribal myth and ancestry, music and poetry, Joy Harjo, one of our leading Native American voices, details her journey to becoming a poet. Born in Oklahoma, the end place of the Trail of Tears, Harjo grew up learning to dodge an abusive stepfather by finding shelter in her imagination, a deep spiritual life, and connection with the natural world.*

The author's lines describing the abusive family situation of her youth are clear, albeit emotionally draining.

When she speaks of her personal development and transformation through transcendental spirituality the

lines become abstruse. Perception of the world around her becomes vague, clothed in bewildering metaphors and unclear. What I saw happening could easily have been expressed in ordinary words. For example, while I might explain a nagging suspicion through intuition, she speaks of diffuse ancestral Native American beliefs confusingly described. Poetry is pretty, but to convey a message is it the best means?

The author's connection with the "natural world" is scarcely touched upon.

Her passage toward psychological stability is not explained in a manner that I can understand. I do not believe others can learn from her experiences.

You learn little about Native American beliefs or customs. This is a personal story.

The author reads her own book. There is a beauty in **some** of the author's poetic lines, but unfortunately the flow of the words is jagged. Pauses are inserted in the wrong places and the wrong words were emphasized. The import of the lines became unclear. She does have a strong, deep voice that resonates well.

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### **Herman says**

This is such a good book I don't know where to begin. It makes me recall my own childhood and with the joy of a child I want to run up and share with someone my love of this book. I want to give a copy to my friends and read this again with my wife and read it to my daughter and have my son read it to me. I love her use of language and her life story is compelling, I have to read more from her anyone who can write like this it's a waste of my time not to be reading her.

"Once the world was perfect, and we were happy in that world.  
Then we took it for granted. Discontent began a small rumble in the earthly mind.  
Then Doubt pushed through witty with its spiked head.  
And once Doubt ruptured the web, all manner of demon thoughts jumped through.  
We destroyed the world we had been given for inspiration, for life. Each stone of jealousy,  
each stone of fear, greed, envy, and hatred, put out the light.  
No one was without a stone in his or her hand.  
There we were, right back where we had started.  
We were bumping into each other in the dark.  
And now we had no place to live, since we didn't know how to live with each other.  
Then one of the stumbling ones took pity on another and shared her blanket.  
A spark of kindness made a light. The light made an opening in the darkness.  
Everyone worked together to make a ladder.  
A Wind Clan person climbed out first into the next world. Now, follow them.  
Everyone is carrying a light that was given to be shared."

(oooooooooh! Drop the mike)

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### **Lisa says**

Joy Harjo is an amazing poet, writer, songwriter, artist and strong Native woman. Her memoir is heartbreaking and full of life at the same time. Heartbreaking because it is the story of so many native

persons. Generations of trauma, generations of colonization. She stated it eloquently when she wrote: "As peoples we had been broken. We were still in the bloody aftermath of a violent takeover of our lands. Within a few generations we had gone from being nearly one hundred percent of the population of this continent to less than one-half of one percent. We were all haunted."

As a Native, you think about this constantly as you try to figure out how to fix things, how to help your Nation heal and become whole again. I know that I constantly think about what I can do to make life better for Natives as a whole. This is why I became an attorney and chose to focus on Indian law. I am still trying to figure it out. :)

It is also full of life as you read about culture, traditions, storytelling, the strength in our people. Great book!

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### **McGuffy Morris says**

I have been a follower of Joy Harjo for many years. I have her books and CDs.

Her wisdom is deep, abundant and true. It is born of experience, pain and survival, though she imparts her truths with insight and clarity.

In this memoir, Joy Harjo recalls important aspects of her life. Joy's journey in life has been a difficult one. Being of Native American heritage (though mixed), her experiences are clearly rooted in tradition and spirit. Yet, she has always felt this "knowing". It has been her guide and her saving grace throughout her life. Her ability to trust her inner vision, her "knowing", and this unspoken voice is indeed more than brave. Her example in following this is powerful.

I greatly respect the strong ties to nature and the earth found in Native American spirituality. I incorporate many of these beliefs and thoughts, personally. My own heritage is mixed and rough. Unfortunately, I do not know much about this part of my ancestral history.

In addition to this brave, lyrical memoir and her poetry, Joy Harjo is a gifted musician. I highly recommend all of her creative and important offerings. She is both inspiring and wise.

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### **Neile says**

I love Joy Harjo's poetry, but at first when I started this it felt way too all over the place and stream of consciousness for me--but I'm glad I kept with it, as like some poems it gradually came into more and more focus as Harjo talked about her life after early childhood. The earlier images/stories began to her shape the later images and stories. It ended up feeling like an impressionistic, but vital, depiction of childhood, teenage years, and early adulthood. Not an easy read or life, but Harjo shines through it like a meteor. Highly recommended.

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### **Pam Bustin says**

This book came in the mail, this morning, from a friend.

I got my partner to drive home, so that I could rip open the envelope and begin reading. Crazy Brave: A

Memoir

Something in this woman calls to me.

I just finished the book and ... Ahhhhhhhhhhhh ... So grateful to Sian who sent Joy's words winging across the miles to me.

What do I love most? The straightforward way that she weaves the day to day and the mythical/spiritual and oh the poetry.

Three small tastes, to whet your....desire....

From Page 20

Though I was reluctant to be born, I was attracted by the music (her mother's song - p). I had plans. I was entrusted with carrying voices, songs and stories to grow and release into the world, to be of assistance and inspiration. These were my responsibility. I am not special. It is this way for everyone. We enter into a family story, and then other stories based on tribal clans, on tribal towns and nations, lands, countries, planetary systems, and universes. Yet we each have our own individual soul story to tend.

From Page 164

To imagine the spirit of poetry is much like imagining the shape and size of the knowing. It is kind of resurrection light; it is the tall ancestor spirit who has been with me since the beginning, or a bear or a hummingbird. It is a hundred horses running the land in a soft mist, or it is a woman undressing for her beloved in firelight. It is none of these things. It is more than everything.

"You're coming with me, poor thing. You don't know how to listen. You don't know how to speak. You don't know how to sing. I will teach you."

I followed poetry

And a final ... Blessing.... From Page 168

May our eyes and ears continue to open to hear and know our ancestors. May we remember the stories. May this story be food for your own.

Much thanks, Joy, for this wonderful work.

Go easy ~ p

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