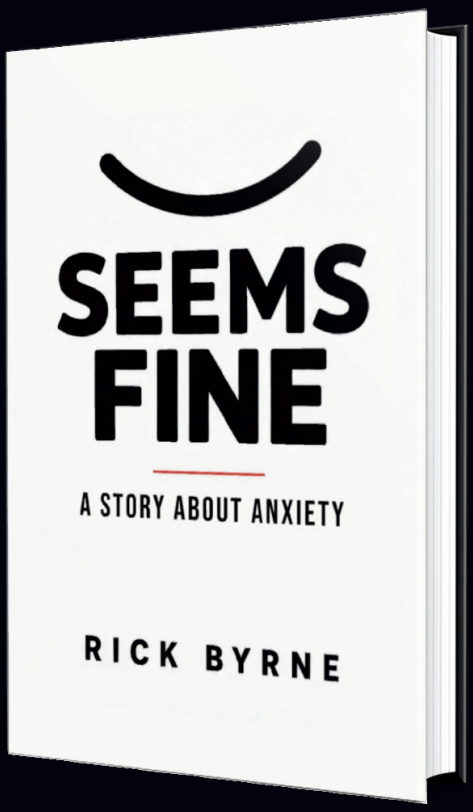


ABOUT THE BOOK

He seemed fine.

He showed up, worked hard, built a career, raised a family, and kept moving forward. From the outside, everything looked steady. Inside, anxiety was quietly shaping every decision, every reaction, and every need to stay in control.

Seems Fine: A Story about Anxiety is a personal memoir about living with Highly Functional Anxiety before having the words to name it. Through childhood memories, family moments, career pressure, self-doubt, and hard-earned reflection, Rick Byrne explores what it means to succeed while silently struggling.

This is not a clinical guide or a promise of easy answers. It is one person's honest story of fear, resilience, overthinking, growth, and learning to live with anxiety instead of being ruled by it.

For anyone who has ever looked okay while feeling anything but, this book offers recognition, connection, and a reminder that being "fine" is not the same as being whole.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rick Byrne is a Canadian technology leader, speaker, and writer from Edmonton, Alberta. With more than two decades of experience helping organizations build resilience, Rick brings a practical and deeply human perspective to the topic of Highly Functional Anxiety.

Inspired by his own lived experience, *Seems Fine* explores the gap between how people appear on the outside and what they may be carrying on the inside. Rick writes with honesty, humility, and humour, offering readers a relatable look at anxiety, ambition, leadership, family, and the quiet pressure to always seem okay.

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A LOOK INSIDE

The Moment

It was supposed to be my first day of school.

I was five, chubby-cheeked, with more freckles than I could count, and red-headed. My Catholic school uniform felt like a prank someone had played on my skin: scratchy grey pants that itched behind the knees and a blue sweater that clung to my arms like a toddler with separation anxiety. My shoes were shiny black and far too loud for a hallway that didn't ask to be noticed.

My mom knelt beside me at the registration table. She looked tired but gentle, her eyes doing that thing where they smiled even when her mouth didn't. She was my safe place. I wasn't just holding her hand; I was wrapped around her leg like a squirrel afraid of open ground.

"Ricky," she whispered with half-laughing annoyance, "get off my leg."

I wasn't paying attention to the words; I was listening to the tone. She was nervous too. I could feel it in her arm, in how her fingers kept adjusting her purse strap. But she smiled at the nurse, at the teacher, and at me.

Then they called my name.

I thought we were filling out forms and maybe getting stickers. No one mentioned I'd be walking into a room where someone would jab me with a surprise.

When the needle appeared, I didn't scream or cry. Instead, everything inside went quiet. It felt like someone had flipped my internal breaker: lights out, nobody home. My mom panicked and tried to get me to respond. I was standing, but I felt as though someone had unplugged my personality.

She scooped me up and rushed me to Dr. Chaulk, our family doctor. He looked like Burt Reynolds' cousin, wearing a corduroy jacket and sporting a big mustache, and smelled like Old Spice and old books. He gave me a quick once-over and said, "He seems fine. But don't let him fall asleep."

I wasn't sick. I wasn't pretending. I wasn't fainting.

I was overwhelmed. My mind short-circuited. No words, no tears, just blank.

The Voice Inside

There was already a voice in my head then. It didn't speak in complete sentences. Not even words. Just a tightness. A sensation: shame, maybe; definitely fear; and always pressure.

- *"You're embarrassing her."*
- *"Why can't you handle this?"*
- *"Other kids are fine. You're not."*
- *"She didn't warn you. You should've seen it coming anyway."*

I remember staring up at the ceiling in the exam room, counting tiles, blinking too hard, and trying not to cry, move, or make a sound.

The message was clear: The world was a surprise attack, and I had not trained enough.

Looking Back

That wasn't my first anxious moment, but it was the first time it got the better of me. The first time anxiety took the wheel and left me in the backseat.

It was also the first time I realized how much I depended on my mom to prepare me for everything. She was my narrator, my script supervisor, and my advance scout. In that moment, she overlooked something.

The shot was not the trauma: The surprise was.

Back then, nobody talked about stress or trauma. Especially not for boys. Especially not in Newfoundland. You were expected to tough it out. Suck it up. Rub dirt in it and walk it off.

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