

Laya.



AUTHOR | SPEAKER | ENTREPRENEUR

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About the Book

When Your Family Says No is an inside look at the Orthodox Jewish Community, told by a girl who fled one of its most prominent families. The book explores the terror and self-determination that come from breaking taboos and tradition and finding the strength needed to discover God and a family that finally says yes.

Book Title: When Your Family Says No

Author Name: Laya Martinez

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About Laya

Laya was raised in a traditional Orthodox home and was destined to become a housewife until her life took an unexpected turn. After initially studying at Yeshiva University, she began working during the infancy of computers, climbing the industry's ranks to become one of MasterCard's first female programmers. Laya went on to found two successful data processing companies serving Fortune 500 clients and was identified by the Philadelphia Business Journal as one of Philadelphia's Top 25 Women Business Owners. She is credited with founding the first female club (and business club) table at the Union League of Philadelphia.

Laya has three grown children and works in the Philadelphia suburbs where she resides with her second husband. As two-time president of her local Rotary Club and a Paul Harris fellow, she regularly engages in international community service projects. When not writing, speaking, or spending time with her grandchildren, she travels extensively throughout the world.

Her next project will be the creation of a secular cultural center called, "Our Cultural Center". The Center will be a warm and loving place that accepts and finds value in each person. It will be a space for families and individuals to be embraced by a community and participate in lessons and events, with no religious affiliation. This will build a community of character that endures from generation to generation.

Media

SPORTS FICTION: IF BRADY HAD NEVER REPLACED BLEDSOE // THE POWER OF SHALANE FLANAGAN

Globe Magazine

THE BOSTON GLOBE | APRIL 15, 2018

Spreading kindness
on the Marathon
bombing's fifth
anniversary.
BY DENISE RICHARD

The North Atlantic
right whale is in grave
danger of extinction.

CAN ANYONE SAVE THE RIGHT WHALE? INSIDE AN UNUSUAL EFFORT

BY KATHRYN MILES

Through Rough Seas

BY: LAYA MARTINEZ

ESSAY PUBLISHED IN THE BOSTON GLOBE ON APRIL 15, 2018



Robert, the passenger on our 41-foot yacht, was screaming. “We’re going to die! What’s wrong with you two? Why are you smiling? We’re all going to die!”

My husband, John, and I swallowed our grins for Robert’s sake, but this was our kind of afternoon — biblical. Six-foot waves crashed over us as the unexpected storm on the Chesapeake Bay intensified. Wind whipped our hair. Rain pelted our faces.

Danger, fear, excitement — I loved it.

Would we die? It was certainly possible that this storm would be our last. And I had no regrets. My relatives would be devastated but vindicated. They would say, “As we feared, God has punished Laya for her terrible sin.”

You see, John is not a Jew. Marrying him was the greatest crime possible in my ultra-Orthodox family. Unforgivable. Blasphemous. Insane.

Before I met John, I knew without a doubt that I would marry a *Talmud Chacham* (Torah scholar) and raise my Jewish children in my Jewish home, and that because I had done so, God would reward me from heaven.

But then I fell in love. I didn’t seek it out. The whole situation was absurd, a disaster. I had lived a blameless Orthodox life, dedicated to serving God. Yet it became impossible to live without John. After seven anguished years, we married, and I knew my family would never accept me again.

I had cast myself out to sea for love.

My relatives thought it was madness. Or Satan. Why else would anyone give up a life of safety for something as reckless as love?

“Tie yourselves down!” John commanded.

Robert started to cry.

If I had resisted love, I would have gone from the house of my father to the house of my Jewish husband, always protected. I would never have started my own companies or flirted with financial ruin — or become a success. I would never have discovered the thrill of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Darwin,

or too many others to name. After a lifetime of not finding answers in the Torah and the Talmud, I was blown away by thinkers who wielded a power no physical storm could match.

The box with our raft, medical equipment, and survival gear came loose and exploded open against the deck. John radioed the Coast Guard. The staticky voice on the other end was just barely audible: “— can’t help — overburdened — overturned boat — aiding others.”

We are truly on our own, I thought as I watched our lifeboat blow away. I was OK with that.

If John had play-acted his conversion, we could have returned to the fold. Like people everywhere, many in the Orthodox community did what was necessary to belong: covering windows with blackout curtains so nosy neighbors couldn’t see the blue glow of forbidden tele-

visions, eating *treif* (non-kosher) food when they thought no one was looking, praying to a God they didn’t truly believe in so that they could stay in the community.

But my religious faith had taught me that only God mattered. So I faced the storm head-on. I said to my God, *I must do this. I can’t live without him. Do with me what you will.*

And now here we were. I would die with no regrets. I would die with the man I loved — and Robert. Poor Robert!

The wind shifted. John managed to turn the boat toward shore in the still-angry sea. After five hours, we finally reached the dock, exhausted but exhilarated.

Robert leapt onto dry land, probably never to leave it again. “We’re alive! I’m alive!” He ran for the clubhouse. John and I looked back at the churning sea. It seethed before us, awesome in its power.

Laya Martinez is a writer and entrepreneur in suburban Philadelphia. Send comments to connections@globe.com.

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Q&A

Q: *What prompted you to write this memoir?*

A: The impetuosity to write this memoir came as early as when my first child entered the Jewish Nursery school. What created attention to me from the beginning of my marriage was my last name being 'Martinez'.

Without exception, every new person who met me commented "Are you Spanish - You don't look Spanish - how did you get that last name?" That led to the conversation about my intermarriage to a non-Jew. The fascination always ended with, "You must write a book- your story is fascinating. Years later, one of my friend's daughters, wrote her Senior Thesis on me and my story.

Q: *How did writing this memoir make you feel? Was it hard to revisit some of your memories?*

A: I never had a desire to write this memoir, because I never thought my story was anything special or spectacular and nothing to write home about. Because of the continuing comments from "everyone" I met, day to day, I gave in after I sold my company, affording me the time to write. "You must write a book about your life" were the comments over and over again.

Q: *What did you discover about yourself that surprised you?*

A: How strong a person I was and how different my thinking was from others. How wrong it was to eschew me and my children, which is what the world is about - Family.

How many other important brave, heroic, courageous and honorable characters were treated the same way? Some of them took the 39 lashes to get back into the community and forgive their ex-communication.

My most admirable hero Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza (1632-1677), a Dutch Philosopher, and how it continues to grow daily. How incredibly strong he was with admirable self-

Q&A Continued

esteem and independence, leading a good happy life, notwithstanding the harshest writ of ex-communication ever issued by the Amsterdam Portuguese-Jewish congregation.

The very sad story of Uriel de Costa, a crusader for free thought, lived in virtual isolation, shunned by his family and loved ones. Ultimately, the loneliness was too much for him to handle, and he again returned to Holland and recanted. As a punishment for his heretical views, he was publicly given 39 lashes at the Portuguese synagogue in Amsterdam.

Q: *Looking back, is there anything you would have changed in your earlier life that stands out?*

A: Yes, very much so. I would have been more open to my family and taught them the ultimate sin, is to throw away a member of your own family, especially, a person with a virtuous character. The importance of embracing the good, who make the world a better world. Looking back, my mistake was keeping it all to myself, just not to hurt my family members. It was an injustice because my innocent children were not accepted.

Q: *What is something about your life that you didn't include in your book that you wish you had?*

A: I wanted to keep the memoir to 260 pages - I had no room for anything else. I would have included more dating experiences, and stories of other characters... I had quite a few vignettes that didn't fit. An interesting one was how my mother chased the train - skipping red lights, for five miles, so we could jump on, three stations later so as not to be late for school, while our friends held the door open, against the rules.

Q: *What is one of the most pivotal points in your memoir, or in your life beyond your memoir?*

A: Having to work Full time and never taking vacations, as most people do. Although it was made up for, having our 41' yacht that we lived on during the summer weekends.

Q&A Continued

Q: *What was the most challenging part of writing your memoir?*

A: Having to work full-time and not being able to be a full-time mom.

Q: *What is your relationship with your family now? Have they read your book?*

A: My family does not know that I wrote a memoir, but it will soon come out. And when it does, I expect that I will be cut off again.

Q: *What is/are the most important lesson(s) you want readers to ponder?*

A: Remember, every person has the right to their own life, even if it doesn't conform to what your parents designed for you. This is crucial to having a meaningful life.

Q: *Whom do you want to reach, and why is it important to read "When Your Family Says No"?*

A: The importance is to make a better, virtuous world. It's apparent, that a large percentage of our population, have been isolated or shunned by their family for any number of reasons.

Q: *What is your next project?*

A: So many projects....

But first, a movie to feel the love, and warmth of the characters. After that, to open my cultural center, which is "The cultural Center for Wisdom and Virtue. A place for people who don't fit into the Religious institutions, but need Community as well.

So many dreams to fulfill, to make a better world.

Press Release

Main Line Entrepreneur Pens New Memoir: When Your Family Says No

Destined to become a homemaker in a traditional Orthodox home, Laya changed the trajectory of her life by choosing her own path.

[Philadelphia, PA, October 3]—When Your Family Says No: The Journey to Freedom, Independence, and Happiness is an inside look at the Orthodox Jewish community, told by a girl who fled one of its most prominent families. Laya Martinez’s compelling story is the tale of tens of thousands of others, Jewish or otherwise, who choose to lead lives in ways that do not neatly conform to the expectations of their families.

Severed from every single member of her family and community, Laya recalls, “It was the hardest decision I ever made. The lessons I learned are painful.”

At 19, Laya Steinberg fell in love and ran away with a non-Jewish man – violating centuries of tradition and religious law. In the wake of ex-communication and an intense campaign to win her back, including private detectives and family spies, she managed to make a new life for herself and her children.

After initially studying at Yeshiva University to become a Hebrew School teacher, Laya used her experience working as a part-time administrative aide at a software company to climb the industry’s ranks and become MasterCharge’s only female programmer at that time. Laya went on to found two successful data processing companies serving Fortune 500 clients and was identified by the Philadelphia Business Journal as one of Philadelphia’s Top 25 Women Business Owners. She is credited with founding the first female club (and business club table) at the Union League of Philadelphia.

Press Release Continued

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Now, after 25 years of being urged to write this book, Laya is giving hope, solace and insight to others whose families have said “no.”

Set during the Vietnam era through present day, *When Your Family Says No* is a memoir about choice, about the complexity of family love and how desire does not stop because of the confines of rigid rabbinical rules.

The highly personal narrative mixed with historical insight gives the reader a snapshot into the secreted world of Orthodoxy where everything from how a girl puts on her socks in the morning to the prayer she recites after using the bathroom, to when her husband makes love to her, is determined by rabbinic law.

As Laya chooses love over religious and cultural traditions, she wakes up to a new world of independence and freedom, a world where she must risk everything she has known to become the woman she was meant to be.




When Your Family Says No is for anyone who has fallen in love, strayed from their family’s rules of conduct or needed to break out: it’s for Muslims who do or don’t want to wear the headscarf; gays raised in a born-again culture; teenagers just starting to have doubt and mid-lifers who are about to make a change from a culture that presupposes their identity; for anyone who chooses love over tradition.

Laya’s memoir, *When Your Family Says No*, reminds us of the beautiful, unexpected turns life takes if we are brave enough to take the helm of our own truth.







Contact Laya

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