

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 the world and a family that finally says yes.



Book Title: When Your Family Says No

Author Name: Laya Martinez

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Where to Buy: authorlaya.com/books/when-your-family-says-no



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 club table for women (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 husband. As a 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 for Virtue." 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, 2016

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.

READ MORE MEDIA COVERAGE ON LAYA’S WEBSITE: AUTHORLAYA.COM/MEDIA

Q&A

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

A: There were many reasons to write this memoir, but it all started when I was dismissed by a Jewish Day School upon calling them to sign up my daughter for classes. Upon hearing that my last name was Martinez, assuming that I was not Jewish they responded with “We are not the school for you.” Coming from a prominent family, even our orthodoxy knew that a last name did not define a child’s religion! I was stunned.

Without exception, every new person who met me commented “You don't look Spanish - how did you get that last name?” That led to the conversation about my intermarriage to a non-Jew. I was urged over and over “You must write a book- your story is fascinating!”

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 excommunicate your own child. It affected not only my immediate family, and myself, but it was an injustice because eventually my innocent children were also not accepted. It had a ripple effect that could not be undone. My mistake was keeping it all to myself, in an attempt not to hurt anyone.

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, and to make their own decisions. These choices might not conform to what your parents designed for you, or what your community expects from you. We are each at the helm of our own story. 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: I have learned that a large percentage of our population have been isolated or shunned by their families for any number of reasons. I am seeking those people-who are searching for answers and looking for ways to move on and find happiness. I am asking parents to look at it from a different perspective- not to throw away their children for making life decisions they do not agree with.

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

A: I have a relationship with every member of my family. They do not know that I wrote a memoir, but it will soon come out. When it does, I expect that I will be cut off again. Although they will not read it, they will know the contents. They lived it.

Press Release

Laya's New Memoir, "When Your Family Says No" Launches to National Acclaim

When Your Family Says No takes the reader on a journey through Laya's life as she navigates her ultra-Orthodox Jewish community while trying to keep both faith and love alive in her life. A young woman raised in a controlling household, living in a deeply private community, and educated at a religious school for girls, Laya was not expected to continue her education beyond high school, but rather get married and lead a religious life. She had never even been out with a boy until the moment she fell in love with a non-Jewish man who would change her life forever. She then faced a dilemma: What would it take for her to stay true to her love for this person yet stay within family bounds?

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ardmore, PA, January 30, 2023 - Laya's new memoir *When Your Family Says No*, is now available! This highly personal narrative shines a light on the secret world of ultra-Orthodoxy, exploring topics such as prayer and lovemaking that are determined by rabbinic law. Through her story, Laya has the reader consider their own family's boundaries and how these might affect the journey through their own life.

Laya's memoir is based on her real-life experiences and invites you to follow along on her journey through painful secrets, unconditional love and unexpected heartbreak. It is a story about choice, between loving someone in spite of family traditions or sacrificing that love for the sake of belonging in the community.

In today's ever-changing world, where individual choice has become more important than ever before, Laya's work shows us that falling in love should never be restricted by religion

Press Release Continued

or family tradition. Her book gives readers the opportunity to open up to alternative points of view with respect and understanding. She isn't calling for revolution; rather, she is pushing for an evolution – an evolution that allows us all to honor our families for who they are but also recognizes our own unique needs as individuals.

What sets this book about love apart from other memoirs is its universal appeal – it speaks not just to people raised in Orthodox Judaism but to anyone who has ever fallen in love outside their culture or strayed from familial rules of conduct. *When Your Family Says No* is sure to captivate audiences around the globe with its powerful message about freedom of choice and unconditional love.

About Laya:

Laya was raised in a traditional ultra-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 MasterCharge's first women programmers. Laya went on to found two successful Electronic 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 also credited with founding the first club table for women at the Union League of Philadelphia.

Be sure to pick up a copy of Laya's courageous book *When Your Family Says No* – and learn more about Laya's adventure at www.authorlaya.com/.

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