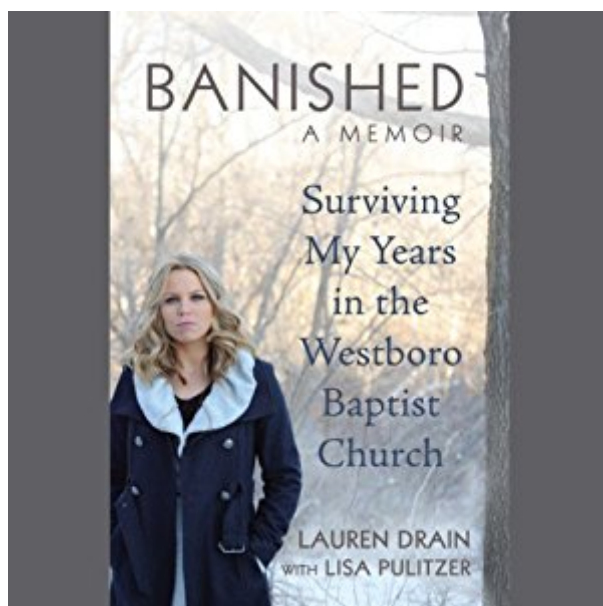


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# Banished: Surviving My Years In The Westboro Baptist Church



## Synopsis

You've likely heard of the Westboro Baptist Church. Perhaps you've seen their pickets on the news, the members holding signs with messages that are too offensive to copy here, protesting at events such as the funerals of soldiers, the 9-year-old victim of the recent Tucson shooting, and Elizabeth Edwards, all in front of their grieving families. The WBC is fervently anti-gay, anti-Semitic, and anti-practically everything and everyone. And they aren't going anywhere: In March, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the WBC's right to picket funerals. Since no organized religion will claim affiliation with the WBC, it's perhaps more accurate to think of them as a cult. Lauren Drain was thrust into that cult at the age of 15, and then spat back out again seven years later. *Banished* is the first look inside the organization, as well as a fascinating story of adaptation and perseverance. Lauren spent her early years enjoying a normal life with her family in Florida. But when her formerly liberal and secular father set out to produce a documentary about the WBC, his detached interest gradually evolved into fascination, and he moved the entire family to Kansas to join the church and live on their compound. Over the next seven years, Lauren fully assimilated their extreme beliefs, and became a member of the church and an active and vocal picketer. But as she matured and began to challenge some of the church's tenets, she was unceremoniously cast out from the church and permanently cut off from her family and from everyone else she knew and loved. *Banished* is the story of Lauren's fight to find herself amidst dramatic changes in a world of extremists and a life in exile.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Firstly, ignore the review by "Jack"; he is a Topeka resident and shill for the Westboro Baptist church. All his review really shows is that, even after all these years, Jesus can still sometimes be seen carried on the back of an ass. This book is a sobering testament. It is one thing- tragic but comprehensible- for children or even a teenager to be indoctrinated into a ravingly inhumane religious ideology. But for an educated articulate adult, and an atheist no less? The sad fact shown in this book is that the members of this ridiculous church are for the most part highly intelligent people. They have gained the world of pure righteousness, but at the cost of any possibility of self understanding. This was a bargain that Lauren Drain seemed unsuited by nature to keep, so her conflict with the church was painful but inevitable. Go girl! The good news is that while this book was in press, two more young women defected from Westboro Baptist. Hopefully with publication, more will follow.

I have to admit, this was tough for me to read--not because of grammatical errors or writing style--but because of all the hardships Lauren went through as a child, as a teenager, and as a young adult. I wanted to cry so many times. Most of the book deals with Lauren's life with the Westboro Baptist Church (WBC) and definitely gives an insider's perspective. She is a person a lot of us would be able to relate to: a girl who seeks parental approval, a teenager who's confused about what the world teaches and what her parents teach her, an adult trying to make her mark in the world. I would recommend this book to anyone who 1. is curious about the WBC, 2. needs a little motivation/inspiration in their life, and/or 3. feels that the mistakes of their past overshadow their present and future. A word of advice for those in the second category (or anyone for that matter): finish the book to the end, including the epilogue and the acknowledgements. I think this is the first time I have ever read the acknowledgements portion of a book. All that being said, I wish all the best to Lauren Drain and I pray that God will bless her in the years to come.

Lauren Drain's family joined the Westboro Baptist Church when she was 15. 8 years later, she was kicked out of the Church. Her story is gripping, tragic, heartbreaking, and ultimately inspiring. The systemic emotional, mental, psychological, (and also some physical) abuse that shaped her into a "good Christian girl" and the simple inquisitive nature that made her too rebellious for her church left her without family or friends. The fact that she rose above that and put her own life together on her own, no longer preaching hatred and bigotry, is the kind of thing that can restore one's faith in humanity.

Lauren Drain is one of many members that have been ex-communicated by the cult known as the Westboro Baptist Church. She tells all in this fascinating read about how she became a member and how she survived their grand illusion. Unlike many members, Lauren was not born into the church. Her father, Steve, moved the family to be part of this cult. There are many interesting things I have learned from reading Lauren's book, but here are a few:

The character of Steve Drain is an interesting sort. He was basically a "lost soul" himself that was full of aimless direction. It was only when he joined the cult that he started to see himself as someone with a purpose. Even before he joined, Steve put the principles of the WBC to work in his own home, and the typical teenage life that Lauren knew was over as Steve started to overreact to the littlest of things. He began to see Shirley Phelps-Roper as his guiding light over his wife, Luci. After reading this book, I saw Luci as a mostly subservient woman to her husband and aches to have her family in Florida back, but having them back would cost her husband and children. I also thought Steve tried too hard to be like Shirley, as he wanted to go to law school only to have that dream quashed when Shirley told him he would not be hired on at their law firm.

If Fred Phelps ("The Pastor", as he is referred to by Lauren throughout the book) is at the top of the WBC pyramid, then Shirley and her sister Margie are the seconds-in-command at the cult. They are the faces of the Church that one will most likely see in television interviews with their sick, perverted grins. From the way Lauren describes them, it is almost a case of "good cop, bad cop". Shirley would lecture Lauren and then calmly telling her how to correct her behavior, while Margie would just be stern to her. Lauren also goes into great detail how the church was run and even some of the "tricks" that were used to fool the public. All of these tricks used by Shirley, Margie and the other "elders" would be viewed by the church as a win.

My heart sunk when Lauren talks about her excommunication by her family and the other members. Not only would her excommunication be from the church, but they would constantly try to make her life in Topeka afterward a living hell (ex. Jael Phelps tries to get her transferred at work claiming she is hard to work with, but her manager was not buying it). They say that running away never solves anything, but for Lauren (and others that have been excommunicated), leaving Topeka was the best thing she ever did for herself. The second best thing she did was starting to look at other points of view instead of what she was indoctrinated with at the Westboro Baptist Church. In the end, Lauren made her peace with it and that is all one can do.

I highly recommend this book. She dedicated it to her sisters Faith and Taylor and her brother Boaz, who are still left behind in the cult. One day, she hopes she can see them soon, and I believe she will since many third generation members are not hip to the hate. Unfortunately, like many second generation members, her parents have probably had too much of the Westboro Kool-Aid and may be too far gone. Time is the only decider in seeing

if I am wrong, and I hope I am.

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