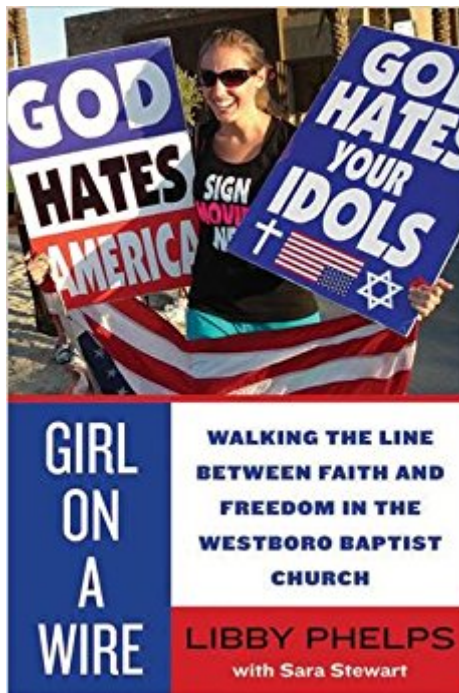




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Girl On A Wire: Walking The Line Between Faith And Freedom In The Westboro Baptist Church



Synopsis

It wasn't until Libby Phelps was an adult, a twenty-five year old, that she escaped the Westboro Baptist Church. She is the granddaughter of its founder, Fred Phelps, and when she left, the church and its values were all she'd known. She didn't tell her family she was leaving. It happened in just a few minutes; she ran into her house, grabbed a bag, and fled. No goodbyes. Based in Topeka, Kansas, the Westboro Baptist Church community is one the country's most notorious evangelical groups. Its members are known for their boisterous picketing; their zealous members with anti-military, anti-Semitic, and anti-gay signs; Thank God for Dead Soldiers; God Hates Jews; or Thank God for 9/11; and their notorious catchphrase God hates fags. Search for them online and you're directed to their website, www.godhatesfags.com. The church makes headlines in news across the country. You've driven past its picketers or seen them on TV. It has seventy members and ninety percent of them are part of Libby's family. They picket concerts, football games, other churches, and, most notoriously, the funerals of servicemen and victims of hate crimes. For its members, to question its rules is to risk going to hell; where worms eat at your body and fire shoots out of your eyeballs. In *Girl on a Wire*, Libby is candid about her experience and what's happened since her escape. On *Anderson Cooper Live*, she was confronted by the mother of a soldier whose funeral had been picketed, and had to respond. Despite it all, she cares for her family. Her grandfather's sermons were fear mongering, but she loves him. This unusual memoir presents a rare, inside look into a notorious cult, and is an astonishing story of strength, bravery, and determination.

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Customer Reviews

"Very honest . . . surprising and powerful. I suppose we'd all like to believe that everything becomes much easier when you leave an oppressive environment. But of course, it doesn't work that way. In fact, life becomes more complicated."--Louis Theroux, documentarian "Fascinating"--Booklist "From the inside of one of America's most infamous churches, Phelps delivers a captivating study of how free speech can become a vehicle for cruelty and hatred."--Publishers Weekly

Libby Phelps was part of the Westboro Baptist Church until she was twenty-five years old. She participated in a BBC documentary titled *America's Most Hated Family in Crisis*, has been on *The Today Show* and *Anderson Cooper Live*, and featured in media such as the *New York Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *xojane.com*. Today, she's a physical therapist and lives with her husband and son in Lawrence, Kansas. Sara Stewart has been a features writer for the *New York Post* for over a decade and wrote an extensive profile of Libby for the *Post* in April 2013. She has also written features for *The Contently Foundation for Investigative Journalism*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, the feminist site *Women & Hollywood*, and more. She splits her time between Brooklyn, NY and Indiana, PA.

Such a great book. I ordered it because Libby was (is) my friend. I've admired her courage as I've followed her on social media. But I wasn't expecting all the emotions I felt. I've just finished chapter 3 but I've already experienced tears and laughter. Anger and sorrow. Regret for not being a more intentional friend. You don't grow up in Topeka, KS without knowing the Phelps but this book gives such a unique view and makes you question all the assumptions that are made. It makes you reflect on your own intolerance of those who don't think like you. Regardless of our views, right or wrong, we are all people. The Phelps too!

After reading the book *Banished* written by Lauren Drain I thought all the bases was covered in regards to the life in the Westboro Baptist Church as seen by a former member of the WBC. *Girl on a Wire* by Libby Phelps shows us more of the day to day life in the WBC and how it changed over

the years. There are several differences describing several WBC members as seen by Lauren Drain and Libby Phelps. One example is Shirley Phelps-Roper was described as a maternal force in the WBC by Lauren Drain while Libby Phelps describes Shirley as a mean control freak. The book is a page turner that I completed reading it at one sitting. For those that are curious about the WBC this book is highly recommended.

I read it in two days since it was both a page turner and not very long. After having read *Banished* by Lauren Drain and seeing Libby talk about leaving the church in the Louis Theroux documentary, it was interesting to hear about her experience in her own words. This book differs from *Banished* in several ways, but one key one is that Lauren came into the church as a teenager and was therefore already (probably) educated on concepts such as puberty and sex whereas Libby spent her childhood in the church and had an extremely limited- she describes it as sheltered- experience with such concepts. It was wonderful to read about her essential transformation, after she had left the church, to becoming not only far more accepting but a gay rights activist. It gives me hope for the human race. My one recommendation: Do not buy a paperback version of the book. It was easy to take off the dustjacket since I had a hardcover copy, but the image of Libby with the signs on the front made me paranoid about people getting the wrong idea if they saw me reading the book in public.

I recently read "*Banished*," by Lauren Drain, and found the tone of that book to be a bit disconcerting - Drain writes as though she would never have left the WBC if she hadn't been forced to do so. This book by Libby Phelps is far more balanced and accessible, I think. She does an excellent job of describing the conflict in a way that makes me understand where she was coming from, both during and after her time in the WBC. I appreciated her honesty at the end of the book, when she describes her current thinking. Although not as lengthy or specific as *Banished*, this book shows the overall transition of Libby as a person within the context of the WBC, while *Banished* mostly focuses on the conflicts and abuse in Lauren's family. I do appreciate this book as a counterpoint to *Banished*, since it demonstrates that people can truly change and choose to leave the WBC, rather than only being thrown out.

Libby writes with an engaging and authentic voice about her journey to self-actualization and a normal, happy life. This journey just happens to take place within the context of one of America's most notorious extremist religious groups. For Libby, the hate-spewing picketers of the WBC are her

beloved immediate family, and she manages to paint a very human and at times even sympathetic face on them while also expressing disgust in at their destructive and intolerant belief system. Her story is powerful and heartbreaking, but uplifting in the end. Even with WBC fading out of the headlines in recent years, this is a must-read story of redemption and transformation.

I've been fascinated with the Westboro Baptist church for some time. I watched the Theroux documentaries and always wondered what the congregants actually thought and how the innerworkings were. I thought it was a well-written book that gives lots of insight into how the church functions and how it started through the eyes of a Phelps family member.

This is a very honest view of the Westboro Baptist Church written by a brave woman who had the courage to leave. This is relevant to the dark times our country is experiencing as well. An excellent read!

Much love to Libby and all her loved ones who made it out and are doing ok on the other side. Love to anyone and everyone recovering from their past and wanting a brighter future for us all

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