Blumenfeld, Laura 1964(?)-

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BLUMENFELD, Laura 1964(?)-

PERSONAL: Born c. 1964; daughter of David (a rabbi) and Norma (an attorney) Blumenfeld ; married Baruch Weiss (a lawyer); children: Daniel and one other child; *Ethnicity:* "Jewish." *Education:* Harvard University (/social-sciences-and-law/education/colleges-us/harvard-university), M. A. (international affairs.)

ADDRESSES: Home—New York (/places/united-states-and-canada/us-political-geography/new-york), NY. *Agent*—c/o Author Mail, Simon & Schuster, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York (/places/united-states-and-canada/us-political-geography/new-york), NY 10020.

CAREER: Journalist. *Washington Post,* Washington, DC, staff writer.

WRITINGS:

Revenge: A Story of Hope, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2002.

ADAPTATIONS: The film rights for *Revenge: A Story of Hope* was bought by Home Box Office (HBO).

SIDELIGHTS: A longtime correspondent for the *Washington Post,* Laura Blumenfeld used her experience as a reporter to hunt down the man who tried to kill her father and to delve into the universal human impulse for revenge when wronged. "I was inhabited by a grandiose thought: My father's injury should not go unanswered," writes Blumenfeld in her book *Revenge: A Story of Hope.* The story begins in 1986 when Blumenfeld's rabbi father, David, visited Israel as part of his effort to create a museum in memory of the Jewish Holocaust of World War II (/history/modern-europe/wars-and-battles/world-war-ii). A member of the rebel faction of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) shot him but fortunately only grazed his skull. Still for college student Blumenfeld, the incident shattered her sense of security. Shortly afterward, as part of a poetry seminar she was taking at Harvard, Blumenfeld wrote a poem in which she vowed to find the man who shot her father. "I was not a large person," Blumenfeld writes in her book, "neither ideological, nor heroic, yet for years I was inhabited by a grandiose thought: my father's injury should not go unanswered. The shooting was my first glimpse of the presence of evil the world—someone had tried to murder my father." Over the next thirteen years, Blumenfeld questioned why anyone would want to hurt her father and also considered her desire to seek revenge. In 1998, with a book contract in hand, Blumenfeld took a sabbatical from the *Washington Post* and began her quest.

"I was looking for the shooter, but I also was looking for some kind of wisdom," Blumenfeld writes of her yearlong odyssey. Blumenfeld not only wanted to find and learn more about her father's shooter, but also to delve into her own feelings about revenge and how others view it. "I wanted to master revenge," she writes.

Blumenfeld knew she had her work cut out for her, but the process was to be even more complicated because she had just recently married. As a result, Blumenfeld and her husband went to Israel for an extended honeymoon to coincide with her new project. Before long, Blumenfeld tracked down her father's Palestinian assailant, Omar Khatib, who was serving a twenty-five-year prison term. She also tracked down Khatib's family, introduced herself to them as an objective reporter working on a story about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and eventually began a correspondence with Khatib through them. Blumenfeld was initially horrified to hear the Khatib family's seemingly callous view of Omar Khatib shooting "some Jew," which one of Khatib's brothers said "wasn't personal," just "public relations (/social-sciences-and-law/economics-business-and-labor/businesses-and-occupations/public-relations)." However, with time, Blumenfeld and the Khatib family became friends, further complicating Blumenfeld's emotional struggles with the idea of revenge and her view of herself as "part journalist, part lonely girl, part cartoon avenger." Blumenfeld also notes that it "was embar rassing" for her not to be able to move on. "It's hard to admit to other people that you have a need to strike back, get even," she writes.

In addition to exploring her own family's association with terrorism and revenge, Blumenfeld explores revenge in a broader cross-cultural context by conducting numerous interviews, including feuding children and relatives, Sicilians who must grapple with vendettas carried on for generations, and an Iranian grand ayatollah. She also talked with Benjamin Netanyahu (/people/history/israeli-history-biographies/benjamin-netanyahu), a former prime minister (/social-sciences-and-law/political-science-and-government/political-science-terms-and-concepts/prime) of Israel who had an older brother killed by an Arab during an airplane hijacking. In addition, Blumenfeld explores her childhood, her struggles coming to terms with her parents divorce at the time of the shooting, and the strain that her efforts in researching the book put on her own marriage.

In the book's climatic scene, Blumenfeld, after an ongoing correspondence with Khatib that results in the shooter finally renouncing violence as a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, finds herself in an Israeli courtroom. The occasion is a hearing to determine if Khatib will be let out on parole. Khatib has asthma and is seeking an early release on medical grounds. During the proceedings, Blumenfeld reveals her true identity to the courtroom and Khatib as she asks the court to grant him parole, noting that Khatib has said he will no longer participate in violence. Although the judges denied the parole until 2010, they asked Blumenfeld why she put herself in such a dangerous position, traveling to Palestine as a Jew. Blumenfeld answered, in part, "You have to take a chance for peace. You have to believe it's possible."

Several reviewers had difficulty with Blumenfeld's personal wish for revenge, pointing out that her father was merely wounded while numerous other families had to move on when their loved ones were much more seriously injured or even killed. They also commented that at times the book is "too personal" in nature to represent a fair look at the issue of revenge. Blake Eskin, writing in the *New York Times,* remarked that the book's focus on the personal "has its advantages: by investing so much energy in the Khatibs, Blumenfeld manages to portray Omar with more subtlety then most descriptions of terrorists." In contrast, Jamie Edwards, in *Bookreporter.com (http://Bookreporter.com),* wrote that "Blumenfeld's personal obsession" can at times be "irritating in its shortsightedness." Edwards went on to note, "Perhaps, however, that speaks to the intrinsic honesty of her self-examination and the uncomfortable timeliness of the subject at hand." A *Kirkus Reviews* critic called the book "a gripping read," while a reviewer writing in *Maclean's* called the "experiences she shares . . . intimate and haunting." A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer called *Revenge: A Story of Hope* a "remarkable tale" that "is a rite-of passage story, an intense and deeply personal journey." The reviewer also commented, "The climax is astonishingly powerful—a masterfully rendered scene, crackling with the intensity of which great, life-changing drama is made."

In the end, Blumenfeld sees the story she imparts about revenge as having a silver lining. "I think more than ever it's a story of hope," she told Margaret Warner in an interview on the Public Broadcasting System's *Online NewsHour* Web site, "but it's a story we need to hold on to, because there's a saying in the Middle East (/places/asia/middle-eastern-physical-geography/middle-east), 'When you seek revenge you should dig two graves: One for your enemy and one for yourself.'" Blumenfeld also noted, "There is a spark of hope in my story because it says that the more we can see each other as individuals, the more likely the violence will decline. If we can step way back from the . . . daily hatred and if you can look someone in the eye, it's hard to shoot him in the head."

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