



The Blood Lie

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September 22, 1928, Massena, New York. Jack Pool's sixteenth birthday. He's been restless lately, especially during this season of more-times-at-the-synagogue than you can shake a stick at. If it wasn't Rosh Hashanah, then it was Yom Kippur, and if it wasn't Yom Kippur, it was the Sabbath. But temple's good for some things. It gives him lots of time to daydream about a beautiful but inaccessible Gentile girl named Emaline. And if she isn't on his mind, then he's thinking about his music and imagining himself playing the cello with the New York Philharmonic. Yup, music is definitely his ticket out of this remote whistle-stop town—he doesn't want to be stuck here one more minute. But he doesn't realize exactly how stuck he is until Emaline's little sister Daisy goes missing and he and his family are accused of killing her for a blood sacrifice.

Blood Lie was inspired by a real blood libel that took place when a small girl disappeared from Massena, New York, in 1928, and an innocent Jewish boy was called a murderer.

The Blood Lie Details

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From Reader Review The Blood Lie for online ebook

Heather says

Wow. To think that this was inspired by a true story ... it's sickening, really. Those poor (as in unfortunate) people. My heart aches for them!

That's what I wrote on Goodreads immediately after finishing. It just really, really pissed me off. Reading how Gus, a diner owner who apparently hates Jews, fabricates some story just to divert attention so he can get his booze (this was during Prohibition) – ugh! I was very, very angry at that man.

So, clearly Vernick wrote this very well. It has quite the impact, and really made me think. I knew that in general Jewish people tend to be persecuted, but I had no idea the extent to which they are – outside the Holocaust, of course. I had never heard of the blood lie – what a horrible thing! Vernick's characters – especially Jack – are interesting and make you feel for (or against, I suppose) them.

And beyond this, I'm left speechless. What does one say to this kind of thing? I know, I'm suppose to talk about the book. I did a little. Here's more: Vernick writes well. The story flows well, is easy to follow, reads quickly, and has characters that make the reader feel. And it makes you think. Hard. My only complaint: It ends a tad bit too soon.

Sandra says

In 1928 a four-year-old girl in the small town of Massena goes missing and soon the blame is placed on sixteen-year-old Jack Pool, his family, and other Jewish community members. Several of the local citizens on Massena believe the local Jewish population has killed the young girl as a blood sacrifice for their upcoming holy day, Yom Kippur.

A short review for a short book: What a heartbreakingly good novel. There was a lot of prejudice early on in the twentieth century and this book really shows that off. The book as a whole was really well written and a great glimpse into a few days of the life of a small town in Upstate New York. I liked the added plot line of Jack's crush on Emaline, I thought that added an extra depth to the story.

In the author's afterword she mentions specific examples of how this kind of prejudice still exists in our world. A lot of us don't see that on a daily basis and I think this book is a good reminder that we still have leaps to make as a society to overcome prejudices of all kinds.

Four stars to this really well-written historical YA novel. It's short and can be read in a couple hours so I do suggest you take the time and read it.

PS: Even though I won this book and it was provided to me for free, that did not affect my review.

Erin says

I appreciated a number of things about this book. First and foremost is that this story was based on a true story, one that I had never heard of and I always love historical fiction that makes me want to research. Shirley Vernick is from the town that the book is set in, and you can definitely tell that thanks to the details she's presented. The conversations between secondary characters felt very authentic. It is a short book (more on that later) and because of that, I think it would fit in really well for teachers of middle grade/early YA with a unit on World War II or even with the Salem witch hunts.

Now, the improvements. This is a short book, short enough that we don't really get a satisfying conclusion to everything. I understand that the point of the book was more about how fast the townspeople jumped to conclusions and violence based on biases, however not actually figuring out what happened to Daisy, a little girl who disappears, means that the book feels unfinished. What happened in the town immediately after? What are the relationships in town like once they've reached such high tension?

This wasn't a bad book, it had a lot of really good things going for it. But I think that the brevity sacrificed some of the plot.

Shirley Vernick says

Well, I wrote it!

Kellee says

Jack Pool loves Emaline. He knows that because of their faith, he is Jewish, she is Christian, that it will never happen, but he truly loves her. If he isn't thinking about Emaline, he is thinking about his cello audition in 4 days for a music school in Syracuse- he'd be able to escape his town without even an orchestra or band. Music is his key to escaping and becoming something. Then on his 16th birthday, he walks home Daisy, Emaline's 4 year old sister and goes to work. Daisy disappears later in the day and the true colors of his neighbors shows even more why Jack needs to get away. Because of his faith and the belief that for certain holidays Jews murder human children to sacrifice, Jack is suddenly a murder suspect.

Whenever you hear about prejudices against the Jewish faith and people who practice the faith, you automatically think of things that happened in other countries such as the Holocaust or unrest in Israel, not here in America; however, the prejudice was (is) alive and well here as well. The Blood Lie is a story that shows the reality of what it was like to be Jewish during the 1920s.

What surprised me even more was in the Author's Notes, Vernick mentions that this horrible stereotype of human sacrifice still exists today. I am always shocked (maybe naively) when I learn about the horrible racism that exists in our present time of diversity.

Britta says

While this novella has a very important message of the damaging effects of hate, the way it is presented is not in the most effective manner. When a young girl disappears, a lie is created to divert police away from a different crime and in the direction of the Jewish "murderers". Rumors circulate, fingers are pointed, and an

entire religion is blamed for the murder of a child.

My issue with this novel was that it just didn't read powerfully enough for such a huge subject matter. It takes place during Prohibition, but other than a few lines that seems a bit like forced role-playing the story really could have taken place in modern day. Maybe I'm just picky because historical fiction is my favorite, but if a story is going to be set in the past, it should really take place in the past. Other than that, the story peaks very early and then kind of just ends. There is no real build up, no suspense, no real emotion. That was my biggest issue, I wanted to connect to the characters and the plot, I just didn't care for any of them.

Based on a true story, the basis of the novel is very powerful in itself. Unfortunately, the power and raw emotion in such an event were not transferred well from page to reader. However, it was a very quick read (I read it in one sitting) and it is interesting how lie from one selfish person turns a town into chaos and socially turns against a religion.

Edward Sullivan says

A chilling story of anti-Semitism.

Jessica says

The synopsis above essentially says it all. The Blood Lie is a rather short, extremely realistic, look at one Jewish boy's first look into what is now commonly termed "Religiousism". When Daisy goes missing the townspeople look for someone to blame, and Jack becomes their target. Jack is shown that his religion can trigger people to hate him and it changes his whole perception of life.

What I did enjoy about Shirley Reva Vernick's take on these actual events is how innocent she shows Jack to really be. From the beginning of the story, his whole thought process is basically focused on Emaline and his music. Jack has big dreams. He hopes to remove himself from his tiny town. His thoughts are pure, and rather adorable at times. Then, when everything takes a turn for the worse, you can easily see how much it affects his psyche. Poor Jack. Just an innocent boy who is thrown into the middle of a blood libel.

Everything else about The Blood Lie was pretty cut and dry though. It read less like Historical Fiction to me, and more like Non-Fiction. I know that Vernick obviously had to make Jack's character a lot more vivid than the original story would have. Still, there is very little to the story that is overly dramatic or exciting. It moves at a nice pace, slowly inching along to the end. When I got there I was a little underwhelmed. I'm glad I read this. It provided me with new knowledge. However I didn't feel anything besides that about this book.

Truth be told this probably just wasn't a book geared for a reader like me. There is nothing wrong with the writing in The Blood Lie, or with the characters, or even with the pacing. It's just that the story is so realistic that it lost the wow factor that my fantasy based brain clings to. Therefore I still highly recommend this to others! If you like a realistic story line, if you are a fan of historically based books, this is one for you.

Sara Latta says

It's September 22, 1928, and sixteen-year-old Jack Pool is itching to leave his small town in upstate New York. A talented cellist, he has an audition at the Bentley School of Music in three days. Acceptance to the elite boarding school will be his ticket out of Massena. It will also mean leaving behind the girl that he knows he can never have: Jack is Jewish, and Emaline Durham is Christian.

In the opening pages of "The Blood Lie: A Novel," by Shirley Reva Vernick (Cinco Puntos Press, 2011), we learn the connection between the two: their mothers had become friends as newlywed brides recently moved to Massena. The mothers' unlikely friendship—and a such a close relationship between Jewish and Christian women was unlikely in a small town at that time—spawned a friendship between their children as well. But when Emaline's four-year-old sister Daisy goes missing after playing with Jack's little sister, Jack finds himself the prime suspect in her disappearance.

It is two days before Yom Kippur, the holiest and most solemn day of the year for the Jews, and someone in town with a definite interest in the case has revived the centuries-old lie that Jews sacrifice Christian children for their rituals—the blood libel.

"The Blood Lie" is based on a true story, which is described in an author's note at the end. As a sophomore in college, Vernick was given the assignment of identifying a local controversy—past or present—in her hometown, and writing a paper about the outcome. This is her interpretation of the story that she uncovered. Vernick's afterward also makes the point that the blood libel has not died. Stories of the Jewish sacrifice of Christian children persist, with a 2008 campaign in a Russian city claiming that Jews were "stealing small children and draining their blood to make their sacred bread."

The book is not without its flaws. I found the ending a bit too abrupt. What's more, after Daisy was found—safe, if a little unsound—there was speculation that the little girl had been molested, prompting some of the townsmen to vow that they would take their revenge on the Jews. I fully expected a dramatic confrontation, but oddly enough, there was none.

Still, "The Blood Lie" is an engrossing story of forbidden love, terrifying bigotry, and, eventually, forgiveness. The rabbi in particular has some graphic remembrances that would be disturbing to younger readers, but this book is appropriate to middle grade and young adult readers. And honestly? Adults, too.

This review originally appeared in the Sunday, November 20 edition of The News-Gazette. The review copy was supplied by the publisher.

Adam says

(If you don't want to see any spoilers, stop reading after "The conclusion is good.")

I feel like Shirley Vernick's first novel deserves more than the three stars I'm giving her, I would have chosen three and a half if Goodreads allowed. The selling point of the story, especially from the point of view of a teacher, is the thematic elements.

In an era of ever-growing attention to bullying and bigotry, this novel puts forth the story of a Jewish boy who is accused of murder by the people in his town with absolutely no evidence. It immediately forces readers out of their comfort zone, especially when they know the story is based upon a true story. The boy's name is Jack and he is very well developed throughout the story. He is our main character, although Vernick repeatedly shifts the point of view away from Jack. He is shy, love-struck, family-oriented, musically driven,

and has a spark of rebellion that prevents him from being an unrealistic, teenage male. His story touches the heart and the fear he feels is fully experienced by the reader.

The descriptive language and the style of writing are also very well done. I enjoy Vernick's attention to detail, although it can occasionally distract, and the shifting point of view really helps her story. Coming from a guy who isn't a fan of shifting points of view, this is quite an accomplishment. On top of that, using a combination of fact and fiction, Vernick paints a very real small town. Of course, the story is based upon an actual town in New York which were infused with her own characters and plot details, but this doesn't take away any of her set building ability.

After listing all of these positives, and there are more than the ones mentioned, you may be wondering why I gave the text a three, or a three and a half, out of five. The conclusion.

The conclusion is good. The conclusion wraps up the main story and offers a mature, realistic ending for a novel set in the 1920s, not the happy ever after that young adults may have preferred. However, the conclusion leaves a number of untied threads. What happens in this battle between Gentiles and Jews? Do they sweep it under the rug (which is what happened in real life) or do they head towards another outpouring of violence as the story suggests? Does Jack escape the town or remain trapped in Massena forever?

And most importantly ... what the hell happened with Daisy out in the woods?

What do you mean, Adam? Daisy returned to her sister and told the audience what happened.

Yeah, except for three things. First, Daisy brings up the fact that her panties were torn, something about tearing them while climbing over something. Why does she bring that up? Okay, maybe that's just an unnecessary detail to add to the story. However, the second thing that happens is that Daisy holds her sister tightly and starts crying. Okay, she missed her sister. Big deal.

Third, Emaline asks Daisy to thank the twins. Daisy stares at the twins, slams the door in their face, and, when Emaline scolds her, Daisy yells "No!" and holds the door shut until she hears that the twins have gone down the steps and walked away. Not to mention, Emaline is confused by the twin's explanation of events and refers to them as "crazy and mixed-up" even though the story seems relatively simple to follow. Combine this information with the fact that Daisy has a bump on her head and doesn't remember a portion of her adventure and ...

You freaked out yet? You should be. Never mentioned again, Daisy doesn't even appear after the family is reunited. I can only identify two possible scenarios. First, the whole scene is just a lot of bad character development. This seems unlikely due to the fact that Vernick has proved adept at developing characters, such as Jack and Emaline. The second scenario is that Vernick created this scene and either forgot about it or didn't use the ending that explained the odd occurrences. I have heard that her editors told her to cut nearly a third of the novel out, so this scenario seems the most plausible.

Overall, I think Vernick's book is interesting and worth glancing through. Her book kind of drops off at the end and only resolves one of her multiple plot threads, including the one that is equally as interesting and shocking as her main focus. Besides that, the only problems I had with the book were minor, small sections of the text that seemed out of place and distracting. The theme is intriguing, the main characters are interesting, and the whole novel can be a good place to introduce young adults to the ideas of hatred and bigotry in the real world.

Pamela Kramer says

Blood Lie by Shirley Reva Vernick is not a book that might be recommended as a light beach read. Instead, it's the kind of book middle school English teachers love to use to force students to think outside of their comfort zone.

And that's a good thing.

This book uncovers the naked truth about prejudice and discrimination as it existed in the early 20th century in a small town in New York. The whole book covers four days -- four horrible days when the very existence of Jews in this small town is questioned and threatened.

It's Jack's sixteenth birthday and he's excited for a very important reason. He's going to audition in a few days for a scholarship to a prestigious music school in Syracuse where he can study cello and have a chance to make something of himself.

Jack's mother has an unusual friend, a woman who is not Jewish. Jenna Durham and Eva Pool became friends when they first moved into town and they have remained friends. It's Daisy, Jenna's young daughter who is the unwitting cause of the problem.

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Trini says

This is a very meaningful, educational and eye opening read. One that everyone one should take the time to enjoy. I love stories that provoke deeper thinking and give you new insight into different cultures, lives and experiences. I feel the more I know, the more I understand, and the less chance I will judge. The events in this book are a prime example of what ignorance can do to innocent people and how easily lives can be destroyed by one lie from one person's selfish reason.

The Blood Lie is about how one man's ignorant decision to purposely points the finger at a innocent sixteen year old Jewish boy for a missing four year old Catholic girl who happens to be a very close family friend. This miss direction sends chaos and frenzy through out this small town of Massena, New York while the Jewish community takes quite a beating from uneducated mobs.

This is a very short book but packs quite a impact on its reader. The writing is clear cut and to the point. You get to see the story from different characters point of view as different parts of this horrible event unfold. But, mostly you get the story from Jack's POV. It was a great read and I'm glad I was asked to review this book because I don't often branch out of my usual genre of paranormal or romance picks but this book is definitely worth reading.

Ricki says

Jack has a crush on Emaline, a gentile. He knows their romance can never develop because he is Jewish, and their relationship would be unacceptable in 1928. The unthinkable happens when Emaline's younger sister, Daisy, goes missing--Jack is blamed for her disappearance.

This short novel shows the hatred and anti-semitism that existed in the 1920s. Based on a true story, this novel will teach young people what it means to hate, and more importantly, what it means to forgive.

Joemmama says

Finally a good book with blood in the title that has nothing to do with vampires! "The Blood Lie" is a fascinating book based on a real incident that happened in 1928.

Jack Pool is a promising musician, falling in love for the first time, and Jewish. He longs for a Gentile girl, Emaline. He knows his music will take him away from his small town of Massena, New York, and that he and Emaline can never be together.

When Emaline's little sister, Daisy goes missing, the town turns against the Pool family and the Jewish population living there. The rumor is that Jews use children's blood to make their special holiday bread. A shocked town starts accusing Jack of using the child's blood,(an actual myth that people believed), as the search for the child continues. When things start to get really ugly, Jack sees his chances growing smaller, for the future he wanted so badly. The Temple is raided, homes are searched and vandalism is perpetrated against the Pool family farm.

The speed with which the town turned upon Jack and his family, shocked me. The fact that it was based on a true incident shocked me even more.

This was a compelling story, written for the YA crowd, but it was interesting for an adult as well. I had wanted to get Vamp Child to do a joint review, but she did not get the chance to read it yet.

I recommend this book for anyone interested in true life, written as a fascinating novel.

I received this book from the author for review. Thank you so much!

Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says

Shirley Reva Vernick bases this suspenseful and gripping novel on a true event that occurred in Massena, New York, in 1928. When a four-year-old girl named Daisy goes missing in the woods, certain prejudiced bootlegging townspeople are convinced that the Jewish residents of the town are responsible. Happening the day before Yom Kippur, they believe that the Jews need the blood of a Christian child to bake their bread. This is called "the blood lie," hence, the title of the book. Several of the Jewish characters in the book fled such prejudice in Europe, and thought it did not exist in the United States. The incident in Massena was

supposedly the first "blood lie" incident in America, according to the author's note at the back of the book.

Points of view shift in this story between Christian and Jewish characters. Jack, the main Jewish character, is accused of killing the missing child, but Emaline, the main Christian character and the girl Jack is secretly in love with, does not believe this. The story takes place over a four-day time period, during which violence erupts as the new police chief in town believes the blood lie and allows an angry crowd to search and, essentially, vandalize the town's Jewish businesses. I couldn't put this book down as I kept wondering with an anxious knot in my stomach if Daisy would be found, and would she be dead or alive? Would further violence erupt if she were found dead? I found it hard to believe that people could be so ignorant of Jewish customs that they would believe the "blood lie." It made me uneasy to think how quickly some people accepted this idea without question. Thank goodness for multiculturalism these days!

I highly recommend this book to teen and adult readers, especially those interested in Jewish history and in the history of New York State.
