



In Your Defence: Stories of Life and Law

Sarah Langford

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'A thoughtful, elegant book. ... often as thrilling as a detective novel.' - Thomas Grant, QC *The Times*. Sarah Langford is a barrister. Her job is to stand in court representing the mad and the bad, the vulnerable, the heartbroken and the hopeful. She must become their voice: weave their story around the black and white of the law and tell it to the courtroom. These stories may not make headlines but they will change the lives of ordinary people in extraordinary ways. They are stories which, but for a twist of luck, might have been yours.

To work at the Bar is to enter a world shrouded by strange clothing, archaic rituals and inaccessible language. So how does it feel to be an instrument of such an unknowable system? And what does it mean to be at its mercy? Our legal system promises us justice, impartiality and fair judgement. Does it, or can it, deliver this?

With remarkable candour, Sarah describes eleven cases which reveal what goes on in our criminal and family courts. She examines how she feels as she defends the person standing in the dock. She tells compelling stories - of domestic fall out, everyday burglary, sexual indiscretion, and children caught up in the law – that are sometimes shocking and often heart-stopping. She shows us how our attitudes and actions can shape not only the outcome of a case, but the legal system itself.

In Your Defence: Stories of Life and Law Details

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From Reader Review In Your Defence: Stories of Life and Law for online ebook

Rebecca *(book keeper)* says

3.5 ? stars

Erm for me this was a book of two parts, there was the frustrated author air to this in parts, "the wispy tendrils of the morning fog were ever evident on the cold ground"

But when you get to the meat and two veg of it this is a unique and thought provoking book that does not pull its punches. The family Court chapters are particularly hard if you are a parent.

Worth a read when it comes out on paperback

Jessica Ritchie says

Langford has beautifully and informatively described the lives of people who have engaged in the criminal justice system through family and criminal law. The problems which these people encounter are not the exception but the rule in most cases. Langford's description demonstrates how complicated people's lives are and how the criminal justice system is often unable to deal with the very human side to problems. She highlights that we need to stand back and realise we are in a system which is perpetuating legal issues through the generations. During times of austerity the ability to break the cycle of intergenerational crime and family problems is actually an investment and not something that should be avoided. The book is written in a very accessible way and does not use legal jargon or overcomplicate issues. In addition, there is a glossary of terms at the end for those wishing to obtain additional explanation. Highly recommended for all!

Ellen says

This was a brilliant re-telling of some of Barrister Langford's legal cases. Smart, poignant, real-life storytelling.

Mandy says

Great read. I love British Law and the workings of it. Interesting cases. Enjoyed feeding the author's description of the court buildings set the scene perfectly.

Enbee says

I read this book in one sitting. I cried and I laughed (sometimes at the same time!) and felt (at least) some of the emotions of the clients that Sarah Langford represented. For those that work in the discipline of law will

understand, there is a focus on 'sticking to the facts', and 'substantiating claims' etc... leaving little room for raw emotion in the legal system. Yet, not only does it have a profound impact on the client but also those defending the client. Sarah Langford must be commended for skillfully weaving the lives of those she has represented with the intricacies of the legal process so articulately and 'humanising' the legal profession. I can't wait to read her next book.

Sheila Howes says

I'm a bit lost for words on this one - I thought it was amazing! I was gripped.

Kathy Manchester says

fascinating. recommend highly

Dancall says

A bit like a book of true crime short stories, In Your Defence has accounts of eleven cases from the career of a barrister in her 30s. Some of the clients are acquitted, some are sent to prison, but all are described with great empathy. I was particularly moved by cases like 'Derek', 'Daniel' and 'Peter' where the accused could almost be seen as making small errors of judgement that led to terrible and protracted experiences in the justice system. Essential reading for anyone interested in the law, and modern Britain.

Petra CigareX says

A barrister is a specialist in putting the case of the adversaries in court. They are instructed by solicitors, lawyers, and work in Chambers where the clerk books in cases into the diaries of the barristers. Barristers generally don't have any choice of who they would like to represent.

These are the stories of a young woman barrister who represented a wide range of people. The most outstanding cases were the 17 year old - but 18 and an adult at the time of the case - caught with a mass of paedophile pornography on his computer. He'd been groomed and lured in at 12 himself. This struck a real chord with me.

I was in Santo Domingo on holiday with my 11 year old son. He was using the hotel computer outside our room door. I asked him what he was doing and he said, "Mummy there's a poor boy whose very sad who says nobody likes him in school. I'm going to be his friend." I said let me see. There was a young man, lying down on his naked apart from briefs. That's how easy it was.

(When I got home I positioned our pcs at 90 degrees from each other in the study which had no curtains - it's a rainforest - I could see the screen reflection in the windows. There was no wifi until he got to 16.)

There were other cases that were similarly moving, drug addicts caught in situations where rape, violence and prostitution were their inescapable daily routines. Men with mental issues that were visible to all except

for some reason court psychiatrists who were then imprisoned rather than sent for treatment. Children who had been turned against one parent by the scorned one. Other cases too.

It was interesting to see how the barrister, the author, mined the paperwork, the questions and answers from the witness box and what her client told her for the absolute nugget around which the case was built and which would prove one side or the other was right, or innocent, or otherwise.

Quite a fascinating read and a good start to the year.

The woman caught in a trap of being in a culture that allows what constitutes criminal abuse in ours (view spoiler)

Ros says

Their Day in Court

Sarah Langford is an excellent teller of true stories. Her choices of cases for this book, each reveal the vital role the legal system plays in making sense of the chaos of people's lives. She does not try to dramatise the way the Law works or the courtroom events, but she tells her clients' stories in a calm, objective and yet compassionate voice. As a result, we are there with Dom or Jude, and the others, as they have 'their day in court' and we care about the way that day could make or break their lives to come. Sarah Langford's legal explanations and her reflections put those stories in their crucial context. The real protagonist in this book is our wonderful, enduring legal system, the Law itself and the Barristers, Solicitors and Judges who make it work.

Siân says

Highly interesting book, walks you through the opaque world of family and criminal court. This book paints a realistic and appreciative view of parts of the UK legal system.

Highly appreciated reading about the chaos of families entering a system designed with lawyers and barristers at the heart, alone and representing themselves.

Legal aid cuts mentioned throughout which is to be expected also like the reference to the ramshackle nature of many of our Magistrates Courts.

Oddly enough I'd even like to have seen more about predictable fraud cases as the author put it, but I guess they made for a less interesting moral narrative.

Very easy to read, definitely worth it if you want a slice of the moral and social dilemmas you encounter being family and criminal court barrister.

Alice-Elizabeth (marriedtobooks) says

I would like to thank the publishers Doubleday Books for sending me a physical ARC of In Your Defence in exchange for an honest review!

This one did take me a while to read but that was basically I found all of the case stories inspired by real-life court cases extremely interesting. The author herself works in law as a defence barrister and In Your Defence chronicles a selection of her most memorable cases from her time in the courtroom. Some of them contained topics that were hard to read about since as rape, drugs and an abusive relationship but I liked how each case story got to the point and the majority of backstory was interesting to read about. I appreciated the notes section at the back of my ARC copy which talks about various laws in greater detail, in a way that is easy to understand. The pacing did drag a little but overall, it was a good real-life experience and one I can recommend!

Ken Punter says

The antithesis of the simplistic tweet/news headline culture, this is a careful, humane, eloquent, honest and (actually) loving description of the English legal system.

More specifically, "In Your Defence..." is a contemporary account of the work of an ordinary Barrister, plying their trade in the run-of-the-mill magistrate and Crown courts in the south of England, practising in criminal defence and the family courts.

Surprising in its ordinariness, the work described is far from the world of the elite, glamorous and very well paid QCs practising in the famous London courts. Instead we're shown a picture of contemporary England through 11 cases and 11 clients that Sarah Langford has represented.

Not always an easy read as the heartbreaking and woeful scenarios are laid out, but in giving us such a descriptive and accessible account it feels that a public service has been delivered.

Whispering Stories says

Book Reviewed by Stacey on www.whisperingstories.com

In barrister turned author Sarah Langford's book, 'In Your Defence: Stories of Life and Law', we meet eleven clients that Sarah represented (or had legal dealings with) and which their stories had have stayed with her. The cases are varied and whilst some were handled in the family courts, others were serious enough to go before the Crown.

Each chapter is a new case. At the beginning, you are given the clients name, where they were tried and the law which their crime comes under. For example, the first case is that of Dominic who was tried at Oxford Magistrate Court and Oxford Crown Court. The legal issue is covered under 'Children and Young Persons Act 1933, Section 50 – Age of Criminal Responsibility'.

Each case is unique and they were all very interesting. Some were heartbreaking, whilst others were heartwarming. The book does read like a fictional story, yet you are conscious that it is all real. You not only get to find out about the clients but also about Sarah herself too. Some stories are also truly harrowing, whilst others might have you wanting to know why Sarah would take the case on.

The book was riveting and I felt fully engaged the whole way through. I do like criminal case stories, whether real or fictional, so this book was right up my alley. It was an interesting look at the UK's criminal justice service and how it works. I was surprised to learn how close to the court case that Sarah gets the paperwork, sometimes only a matter of hours before.

Sarah's voice comes across so clear and she has a way of engaging the reader. The words just flowed naturally and I would love to have read about more cases as I was that intrigued in Sarah's legal world.

Helen Easterbrook says

While very much in the same genre as *Stories of the Law and How it is Broken by the Secret Barrister*, *In Your Defence* takes a much more personal-perspective based approach which I found quite off-putting. While stories of victory snatched from the jaws of defeat and of clients underestimated can be interesting, the repeated trope of the lone barrister walking back to chambers/the train/the tube with the weight of the world on their shoulders after every case became wearing.

Well written but not one I'd recommend.
