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Debbie Palmer and Dave Perrin. *Keep Sweet: Children of Polygamy*. Lister, British Columbia: Dave's Press, 2004. xv, 396 pp. (No photographs, maps, notes, bibliography, or index.) Paper: \$28.85 (Canadian); ISBN 0-0968-7943-3-5

Jenny Jessop Larson. *Brainwash to Hogwash: Escaping and Exposing Polygamy*. St. George, Utah: Jenco Publishing, 2004. iii, 240 pp. Photographs. Paper: \$20.00.

Kathleen Tracy. *The Secret Story of Polygamy*. Naperville, Ill.: Sourcebooks, 2002. ix, 230 pp. Bibliography, index. Paper: \$16.95; ISBN 1-57071-723-0

Reviewed by Brian C. Hales

Debbie Palmer and Dave Perrin teamed to write *Keep Sweet: Children of Polygamy*. The title comes from a phrase frequently employed by Fundamentalist Latter-day Saint (FLDS) leader Rulon Jeffs (1909–2002) to hearten his followers as they confronted life's challenges. Dave Perrin, a veterinarian, who has authored several other books,¹ practiced near the FLDS community of Bountiful, British Columbia. In 1982 he married a woman who had broken away from the nearby Mormon fundamentalist group. Through his contacts with the FLDS, he met Debbie Palmer and followed her through her experiences with the polygamist faction.

Keep Sweet gives a brief history of Mormon polygamy to 1904 and then jumps ahead to the Mormon fundamentalist movement of the 1920s and 1930s (x–xi, 189–90). The Canadian connection to Mormon fundamentalism began in 1947 when a small group of Latter-day Saints at Cardston, Alberta, Canada, was excommunicated from the Church for practicing polygamy. Traveling to Creston, British Columbia, an isolated area in the southeast portion of the province not far from the U.S.-Canadian border, they formed a new settlement called Bountiful. Within a few years they aligned themselves with fundamentalists at Short Creek, Arizona. Leroy Johnson, the polygamist prophet, visited them in 1961.² Ray Blackmore became the first local leader of the group until his death in 1974.³

Palmer and Perrin have created a remarkable account of Debbie's life within the fundamentalist group. Born in 1955 to Dalmon Oler, Palmer recalled: "My father had six wives and I have forty-seven brothers and sisters" (back cover). She recounts her experiences growing up within that distinctive environment. Her conflicts with her father's plural wives created immense stress for her. She also recounts incidents of sexual abuse committed by teenage boys in the community (74–77), although she never accuses leaders or parents of being involved.

Palmer remembered early divisions within the Canadian polygamist group (14–15, 40–44) but notes a general unity supporting Leroy Johnson. She quotes an undated Blackmore sermon: "All peoples, Jew or Gentile, who don't seek out and come under the sound revelation of our prophet and revelator, LeRoy Sunderland Johnson, are in darkness at noonday, and the great destroyer, yea even Lucifer, son of the morning, will take them and drag them down into eternal damnation in the last day" (80).

At age fifteen, Debbie was directly affected by a doctrine unique to

¹*Don't Turn Your Back in the Barn* (2000), *Dr. Dave's Stallside Manner* (2001), and *Where Does It Hurt?* (2003), all published by Dave's Press.

²Leroy S. Johnson, *The L. S. Johnson Sermons*. 7 vols. (Hildale, Utah: Twin Cities Courier, 1983–84), 7:60.

³*Ibid.*, 7:57, 229.

the FLDS called the “Law of Placing.” She relates: “The priesthood brethren were putting a stop to men thinking they could run after young girls at will, and were starting the system of ‘placement marriage,’ whereby God would tell the prophet exactly who each young woman promised to marry in the pre-existence” (5). “The Lord would make the decision and tell the prophet whom we . . . were assigned to marry. Only the prophet would know for sure who was promised to us in the spirit world” (249). The Law of Placing figured prominently in this young girl’s life (5, 63, 163, 189, 198, 202, 203, 204, 215).

While Debbie and the other Bountiful polygamists esteemed early Church leaders Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and John Taylor as prophets (189), they failed to identify the contrast between the law of placing and Brigham Young’s 1853 teachings: “I am free, and so are you. My advice to the sisters is, Never be sealed to any man unless you wish to be. I say to you High Priests and Elders, Never from this time ask a woman to be sealed to you, unless she wants to be; but let the widows and children alone.”⁴ He also instructed: “When your daughters have grown up, and wish to marry, let them have their choice in a husband, if they know what their choice is. But if they should happen only to guess at it, and marry the wrong man, why let them try again; and if they do not get in the right place the second time, let them try again. That is the way I shall do with my daughters and it is the way I have already done.”⁵

Obediently, Palmer promised fundamentalist prophet Leroy Johnson, “I’ll never marry anyone the Lord has not revealed to be the right one. I’ll marry anyone you instruct me to” (270). Fortunately for her, the man she preferred was the same man the prophet had selected. In 1969 at age fifteen, she became the sixth wife of Ray Blackmore, then fifty-seven. She immediately became a stepmother to thirty-two children, most of whom were older than she. “My oldest daughter is my aunt and I am her grandmother” she recalled. “When I was assigned to marry my first husband, I became my own step-grandmother since my father was already married to two daughters of my new husband” (back cover).

As a married woman, she agonized over Joseph Musser’s Law of Chastity,⁶ which states that sexual relations are only acceptable when a wife is fertile. Abstinence during lactation, menstruation, and pregnancy is mandated. “This commandment weighed heavily on a woman; if she deceived her husband and did not inform him of the proper times, she

⁴Brigham Young, April 8, 1853, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1855–86), 6:307.

⁵Fred C. Collier, ed., *Teachings of President Brigham Young*, (Salt Lake City: Collier’s Publishing, 1987), 3:292; discourse given April 16, 1854.

⁶On May 6, 1936, the sixty-four-year-old Musser recorded in his journal a strict law governing sexual relations in marriage. These regulations are accepted as standard for many Mormon fundamentalists today.

would be guilty of adulterating the birth canal, and the consequences would be 'dire and severe'" (281, see also 300–303).

Palmer chronicles the poignant events leading up to husband's 1974 death of leukemia, which is where her narrative ends. She was re-assigned to marry another man and remained in the community for another fourteen years. In 1988 at age thirty-five, she left Mormon fundamentalism.

Palmer and Perrin's book is a treasure trove of accounts of early fundamentalist leaders and their dealings within the group. While many names have been changed, the authors retained the names of Priesthood Council members. Fundamentalist ministerial contributions of men such as Guy Musser, son of Joseph W. Musser, are recorded in detail (83, 118, 202–3, 267, 270, 324). Richard Jessop is also mentioned (267, 324) with numerous references to Leroy Johnson.

I feel some skepticism about the accuracy of word-for-word conversations that occurred decades before the book's writing. Perhaps all readers will not find the book "shocking" as Jon Krakauer asserts on a back-cover endorsement, but certainly I agree that the authors have created a "richly detailed portrait" and "heart-rending story" of polygamist life in Bountiful, British Columbia, during the mid-twentieth century.

Jenny Jessop Larson, prior to publishing her boldly titled *Brainwash to Hogwash: Escaping and Exposing Polygamy*, had a dream:

In my dream I was talking to my sister who had died. A man's voice came between us like a flash of lightening [sic]. He said, "I interrupt your dream to tell you what to name your book." I threw my hands into the air as I said to him. "Oh, I'm dreaming! How will I remember it until morning?" In a very monotone voice he repeated three times, "From Brainwash to Hogwash." His voice faded away and I awoke from a sound sleep.
(v)

The title also reflects Jenny Jessop's personal response to plural marriage. She was born in 1934 to Vergel Yeates Jessop and Verna Spencer Jessop, making her a niece to Mormon fundamentalist leaders Richard S. Jessop (FLDS Priesthood Council) and J. Lyman Jessop (Allred Priesthood Council). She spent her first twelve years in and around Short Creek with the Mormon fundamentalists located there. In 1946, her mother escaped from her polygamous marriage and took her family to St. George, Utah. Nevertheless, twelve-year-old Jenny continued to maintain contacts with her fundamentalist friends and family for years.

Larson recalls that, after her parents' excommunication from the LDS Church in about 1940, "my Mom's double cousin Mae came into the picture" soon afterward as her father's plural wife (7). She concluded: "I saw enough of polygamy to know that there was always a favorite wife. Of course maybe it wouldn't be too bad if I could be the first and favorite wife. That way I could carry the man's name and be his favorite too.

There weren't very many first wives who were favorite wives too, the way I saw it. The plural wives were usually a lot younger and prettier but it didn't take very many years for them to look as haggard and tired as the other wives" (49).

In Larson's polygamous family, her mother, the first wife, was apparently not the favorite: "If I was a man and had to choose between Mae, a little young teenager, and Mom, a sickly woman with a bunch of kids, I don't think it would be hard to decide. Especially if I was forty years old like Daddy was. I know Mom tried to make it work but it was too hard to share her husband with a pretty young girl. Of course Daddy wanted it to work! His spot in the Celestial Kingdom depended on polygamy according to his religion" (20). Although Vergel had apparently supported Verna and her nine children, after the plural marriage "Daddy didn't give us any money so Mom had to get on public welfare" (21; see also 35).

One of Jenny's Short Creek childhood memories was of "a funny man who built a little one room house out of old tires. . . . His wife was pretty and she had a little baby. That man wouldn't let his wife wear jewelry. He'd go around growling like a lion. He claimed to be the one mighty and strong. I thought he was mighty odd. His name was Ben LeBaron" (24). Jenny's memory of the 1944 polygamy raid when she was ten is an interesting narrative from the child's perspective, also unique in that she describes her father's travails apart from the more famous fifteen men who were tried in Phoenix. Jenny's father was convicted and incarcerated in Denver, Colorado (61-65).

Larson, unlike Debbie Palmer resisted the "Law of Placing": "God tells men who to marry and yet we're all supposed to be his children. No one ever talked about God asking if the girls minded who he had chosen for them. Besides, why did he have to tell it to a man? Didn't he think girls had ears? I know of quite a few girls who were told who to marry, that didn't like the idea at all. Even tears didn't keep them from being given to some old geezer they didn't want. If its [sic] God's will and you get your reward in heaven you must keep in mind that the more you suffer here, the bigger the reward in Heaven" (42). Then she added her own commentary: "Hogwash!"

Larson did not live at Short Creek after age twelve and does not always specify how she knows some of the episodes she describes. However, many of her narratives fit other accounts. For instance, she states that, after attending school through the eighth grade, girls "were supposed to get married." She noticed the disappearance about this time of several girls her age: "It wasn't hard to figure out what happened. Whenever any young girl came up missing you automatically knew she'd been given to some old man in polygamy. . . . After several months of absence the girl would reappear carrying a baby. The big mystery was solved. Many times the girls didn't even leave town. They would stay under cover during the day only to sneak out at night to take a little stroll" (30, 34).

She also reported: "I'd already been told it was all right to marry a first cousin if your last names weren't the same" (70).

By the time Jenny was sixteen, even though she was living in St. George, she received "several marriage proposals from the boys from Short Creek." The most formal proposal came when she was seventeen and was called out of class to talk to a visitor waiting in the hall:

I saw an older guy from Short Creek standing there and I sort of suspected what it was all about. He asked me to go for a walk so we could talk. As we left the building and started walking up the sidewalk, he looked at me and told me the brethren had sent him down to talk to me about marriage. They thought I would make him a good wife and he was sent to propose to me. When he asked me if I would marry him I gasped, "My gosh! I don't even know you. I mean I know you but we've never dated. Besides I'm not ready for marriage!" . . . He begged me to go with him out to talk to the brethren. . . . My thoughts were getting wild. Who the heck did they think I was anyway, some piece of furniture being auctioned off? Well, I had news for them. What right did those old men have trying to control my life? . . . What hogwash! (77)

Jenny refused to go with him, married a non-polygamist at age eighteen (79), and kept her distance from all religions professing polygamy as a tenet.

This homespun memoir is full of interesting recollections and the writer's frustrations with polygamy beginning in the 1940s. The second half of the book contains more than a dozen vignettes of other individuals who suffered as a consequence of FLDS polygamy. No index is provided, but the text is richly supplemented with dozens of photographs, many never previously published. While it may be difficult to document some of Jenny Jessop Larson's assertions, she has produced a fascinating and entertaining recollection that would prove useful to anyone interested in Mormon fundamentalism as practiced at Short Creek (later Colorado City), Arizona.

In December 2001, Kathleen Tracy, a Los Angeles-based writer focused her journalistic attention on Mormon polygamy. As the author of more than twenty books and as a contributor to numerous domestic and international magazines, she knew a story when she saw one and wrote *The Secret Story of Polygamy*.

Unfortunately, it is unlikely that students of Mormon history will find her contribution very useful. While four chapters of *The Secret Story of Polygamy* are devoted to a history of the LDS Church and polygamy (19-79), it appears that her eye for the sensational got the best of her. In addition to a summary of the well-known pre-1890 period of Mormon polygamy, she also includes a three-page discussion of the alleged connection of the Spaulding Manuscript to the Book of Mormon (40-42), four pages on the Mountain Meadows Massacre (67-70) and four pages on "blood atonement" (35, 74-76). Her sources include a disturbingly disproportionate number of acknowledged anti-Mormon writers (24, 31,

38, 40, 70, 76, 116), and she claims, “It is extremely difficult for any non-Mormon to obtain a copy of the book [Doctrine and Covenants]” (79).

Concerning the history of contemporary polygamy, Tracy commits an error that is common to essentially all historians documenting the rise of post-1904 polygamy. She skips over the crucial start-up years of 1904 to 1934 without a single sentence (80–81).⁷ The details she provides are often in error but invariably create a negative view of the LDS Church and its leaders (115, 118). Echoing a common Mormon fundamentalist tradition not found in the teachings of LDS Church leaders, she claims that “a minimum of three [plural wives] was required” (27) and “the more wives you had, the higher your place would be in heaven” (37).⁸

Unfortunately Tracy provides no references for such statements as: “In 1978, 70 percent of the teenage brides [in Utah] were pregnant at

⁷For example in dealing with the 1904–34 period of renegade plural marriages, Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 182–85, discusses the 1904–11 conflict of Apostles John W. Taylor and Matthias Cowley with their quorum, then moves immediately to a discussion of Lorin Woolley and his claims during the 1920s and 1930s. Admittedly a one-volume history may have required compression; however, that crucial period has been significantly neglected.

⁸Tracy is repeating a common fundamentalist tradition that equates the blessings of exaltation with the number of wives. Lorin Woolley was apparently the first to suggest this idea in 1932: “To be the head of a Dispensation, 7 wives necessary. [The head of] the Patriarchal Order must have 5 wives. President of the Church—3 wives.” Quoted in Joseph White Musser, “Book of Remembrance,” 21, holograph, n.d., photocopy in my possession; see also *Items from a Book of Remembrance of Joseph W. Musser* (N.p., n.d.), 16; Moroni Jessop, *Testimony of Moroni Jessop* (N.p., n.d.), 2, photocopy in my possession. The LeBaron polygamists in Mexico apparently share this doctrine: “A small percentage of the leaders of the sect have between five and nine wives, adhering to the sect’s code of building up a ‘quorum.’ Three are needed for a rudimentary quorum, five wives are adequate for a medium quorum, but seven and sometimes twelve wives are required for the highest quorum of all.” Janet Bennion, *Desert Patriarchy: Mormon and Mennonite Communities in the Chihuahua Valley* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004), 135. I am unaware that any LDS Church leader ever taught that a greater number of wives and posterity equates to greater eternal glory. President Wilford Woodruff’s letter to Samuel Amos Woolley, fourth bishop of Salt Lake City Ninth Ward, on May 22, 1888 (before the Manifesto), states that being married to two wives constituted full compliance: “You ask some other questions concerning how many living wives a man must have to fulfill the law. When a man, according to the revelation, married a wife under the holy order which God has revealed and then married another in the same way . . . so far as he has gone he has obeyed the law. I know of no requirement which makes it necessary for a man

their weddings. And a young woman is more apt to be raped in Utah than she is in California” (119). She also asserts:

While civil divorces in Utah are easily gotten, it is very difficult for Mormon women in general to obtain divorces in the Church because of the doctrine of celestial marriage. . . . After a civil divorce, a woman’s “temple recommend” is revoked; in other words, she is then considered unworthy to enter the Temple until she can prove to the heads of the Church that the divorce was not caused by adultery. To do this, the woman has to describe her sexual activities in a series of letters to male church authorities. Once she is deemed worthy again, she needs to obtain a “cancellation of sealing” so she doesn’t have to spend eternity with her ex-husband and so she can remarry in the church. In addition to the cancellation of sealing, Mormon women have always been required to obtain permission from their estranged partners and the Mormon church First Presidency before being allowed to remarry in a temple ceremony. (115)

However she provides a useful bibliography and index.

Despite her mistaken view that John Daniel Kingston is “one of Utah’s most prominent Mormons” (v), she provides one of the best in-depth looks at the super-secret Kingston financial empire currently available, a genuine contribution. She also furnishes a detailed though undocumented history of sixteen-year-old Mary Ann Kingston’s ordeal (8–18, 85–121, 143–74), who was forced to marry her uncle, David Ortell Kingston. When she tried to escape, her father, John Daniel Kingston, belt-whipped her until she fainted. John Daniel pled guilty and served a seven-month jail sentence (151, 168). David Ortell fought the charges, was convicted of incest, and was given a four-year prison term (154–81).

Tracy also includes an interesting history of former polygamist wives and Tapestry against Polygamy founders Carmen Thompson, Laura Chapman, Vicky Prunty, Rowenna Erickson, and Lillian Bowles, recording their frustrations with polygamy and Utah state law enforcement agencies (123–42).

It appears that Tracy’s limited research and biases have undermined the usefulness of the history of plural marriage she provides. Nevertheless, her documentation of some contemporary practices of polygamy, especially concerning the Kingston clan, will be helpful to anyone studying Mormon dissenters practicing plural marriage today.

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to have three living wives at a time.” Photocopy of typescript in my possession.