ForeWord Reviews

RELIGION

Church of Lies
Flora Jessop
Paul T. Brown
Jossey-Bass
978-0-7879-9462-4
(Jan 27, 2009)

Keep sweet or you will go to hell. Never forget the core teaching. Perfect obedience produces perfect faith. So said the leaders of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FDLS) to their women and children. But keeping sweet didn't save Flora Jessop from the wandering hands of her father; she had to do that herself.

The FDLS, which became infamous in 2007 when its leader Warren Jeffs was found guilty of rape as an accomplice, organized the lives of its followers around the principal of plural marriage. Church leader Jeffs himself taught that a man had to have at least three wives in order to get into heaven, and the more wives a man had, the closer he was to heaven. Jessop, born in 1959, ran away from that life three times. The first time occurred after a friend witnessed Jessop's father molesting her in the barn. The girls stuck out on foot across an isolated desert, but returned home cold and hungry. The second escape came at age fourteen, when she was forced to abort a fetus, the result of her father's serial rapes. "The abortion opened up the floodgates of the emotional pain I'd been storing up over the years. … I began to understand the magnitude of the abuse I was enduring," wrote Jessop.

That was only the beginning: "After I turned fourteen, I had something else to worry about: Being assigned a husband. Every FDLS girl understood that as soon as she turned twelve, she could be married off at the whim of the Prophet [Church president]." With the help of ex-church members, Jessop was brought safely to the home of a volunteer. But FDLS members tracked her down and frightened her into surrendering into the hands of a powerful uncle, a rich and influential leader of the sect. She was imprisoned in his house as a virtual slave for two years.

It was not until two years later that Jessop finally succeeded in escaping completely the tentacles of FDLS. By that time she'd learned that the world outside of the compound wasn't pure evil. She'd also learned that there was a Diaspora who fought the sect's sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. Finally, she discovered that her own life story could have an impact on the

lives of those still inside.

Interviewed on *6*0-Minutes*, by Anderson Cooper on *36*0 degrees*, and on ABC television's program *Primetime Live*, and in countless print articles, Jessop has become a high-profile opponent of the FDLS. Her co-author, Paul T. Brown, is an award-winning nature photographer whose images have been used widely in outdoor magazines as well as captured in his book *Conserving Wild America*. He also co-wrote the memoir *Escape In Iraq: The Thomas Hamill Story*.

The Mormon Church, or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) was founded by Joseph Smith, Jr., on April 6, 1830. In 1890, the Church offered a Manifesto officially suspending the practice of polygamy. That move was reinforced in 1904 when Joseph F. Smith, nephew of the founder and the Church's president at the time, testified before congress and called for all illegal marriages to cease. The Fundamentalist branch split in the early 1900's when the LDS began excommunicating members over the plural-marriage issue.

The twin towns of Hildale, Utah, and Colorado City, Arizona, a location of longtime support of plural marriage, became the nexus of the splinter movement. There were some state and federal attempts to stamp out polygamy, but after a 1953 a raid resulted in the arrest of the entire community, including 236 children and, ultimately, extremely bad press, the government adopted a hand-off approach. The reverberations of the raid still echoed when Jessop sought help from state agencies in the 1980s, both as a child fleeing abuse and as an adult fighting to assist women and children who left the FDLS.

Jessop's transition from a systematically-abused child to a self-assured activist was not a straight path. She rebelled and became involved with alcohol and drugs, as well as inappropriate men. For a while she worked as a dancer at a strip club. But in this compelling memoir, she unflinchingly reveals the trials and proves that no amount of subjugation is enough to crush every human spirit. The fact that she has moved beyond surviving to organizing a network of people determined to help break up polygamous sects is a testament to her inner strength.

Deirdre Sinnott