



Shattered Dreams: My Life as a Polygamist's Wife

By Irene Spencer

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Irene Spencer did as she felt God commanded in becoming the second wife to her brother-in-law Verlan LeBaron. When the government raided their community—the Mormon village of Short Creek, Arizona—seeking to enforce the penalties for practicing polygamy, Irene and her family fled to Verlan's family ranch in Mexico. Here they lived in squalor and desolate conditions with Verlan's six brothers, one sister, and numerous wives and children. This appalling and astonishing tale has captured the attention of readers around the world. Irene's inspirational story reveals how far religion can be stretched and abused and how one woman and her children found their way out, into truth and redemption.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Just as *A Mormon Mother* is the standout memoir of a 19th-century polygamous woman's life, this autobiography offers the compelling voice of a contemporary plural wife's experiences. Daughter of a second wife, Spencer was raised strictly in the Principle as it was lived secretly and illegally by fringe communities of Mormon fundamentalists—groups that split off from the LDS Church when it abandoned polygamy more than a century ago. In spite of her mother's warnings and the devotion of a boyfriend with monogamist intentions, Spencer followed her religious convictions—that living in polygamy was essential for eternal salvation—and became a second wife herself at the age of 16 in 1953. It's hard to tell which is more devastating in this memoir: the strains of husband-sharing with—ultimately—nine other wives, or the unremitting poverty that came with maintaining so many households and 56 children. Spencer's writing is lively and full of engaging dialogue, and her life is nothing short of astonishing. After 28 years of polygamous marriage, Spencer has lived the last 19 years in monogamy. Her story will be emotional and shocking, but many readers will resonate with the universal question the memoir raises: how to reconcile inherited religious beliefs when they grate against social norms and the deepest desires of the heart. (Aug. 22)

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From [Booklist](#)

Spencer's riveting memoir recounts her experiences as a plural wife. Merlington infuses her reading with a sense of the author's spiritual struggles over her lifestyle. She reads the early parts of the memoir dealing with Spencer's childhood in a brisk, almost youthful voice. After the author's marriage at age 16 to Verlan LeBaron, in which she became the second wife, Spencer's sense of the ordinary collapses in her struggles to understand the religious dictates of her marriage. Merlington expresses Spencer's internal and external conflicts with sympathetic understanding and heightens the woman's physical and mental distress with a well-modulated and clearly paced narration. The near death of her 10-month-old son is one of the many horrors Spencer experienced during her 28-year marriage to LeBaron, and one that Merlington highlights with an empathetic tone. --Mary McCay

Review

Spencer writes grippingly . . . in this brave and honest book, [and] lays bare the secrets of her heart and of a devastating religious practice? **People Magazine (4-star review)**

[Irene's] story will be emotional and shocking, but many readers will resonate with the universal question the memoir raises: how to reconcile inherited religious beliefs when they grate against social norms and the deepest desires of the heart.? **Publishers Weekly**

Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Bauer:

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