

MONOLOGUE  
MY ESCAPE FROM POLYGAMY

*Rowenna Erickson*\*

I was born and raised in a polygamist cult, the Davis County Cooperative, Latter Day Church of Christ. It's part of the Kingston clan, which started in 1935 in Bountiful, Utah. The desperation of people during the Depression of the 1930s was conducive for the organization of the group. They wanted to restore their true gospel of Jesus Christ: consecration, united order, and plural marriage. My mother was a Mormon and my father was Lutheran. My parents provided our family with love and the basic needs of a good family, which was superior to what the other families within the organization had. Being born into a family of four brothers and two sisters was a real asset for me.

I grew up in the 1940s going to public schools and living in Salt Lake City, on Ninth East between Sixth and Seventh South. This was the beginning of my learning to lie, to keep the secret of my family's membership in "The Order" as we called it. My father wasn't a polygamist, being from Illinois, but he knew about cults from the Ku Klux Klan there. My mother was more of a true believer in the Order. Much as it affected our lives, we could never talk about the events or happenings outside the Order, because we were breaking the law. Living like this, I became aware at an early age of the conflict within me of living both in and outside the Kingston clan.

Sundays we would drive clear up to Bountiful to go to church with the Kingston clan. Our friends in the neighborhood weren't really churchy, so they didn't ask. Before graduating from East High School in 1958, I dated a few boys outside the Order. I was supposed to remain chaste, but I did experience a few kisses on those dates. I felt so guilty. I never told those boys I was part of the Order. Davis County was being investigated in 1959 so they were all worried about anyone outside the clan knowing.

It was a great burden to carry. I learned to believe that plural marriage sealed men and women in marriage for time and eternity. That a worthy man holding the priesthood, and having many wives, would become a God in eternity and populate other worlds with his wives.

As I grew up in the Order I became dedicated to all of the doctrine in the group and was easily swayed to moving in the direction of a plural marriage. I sensed I was supposed to be a plural wife mostly because my mother guided me in this direction. I really didn't want to marry this way but I felt pressured and thought that this was what I had to do.

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When I was twenty years old, I became the second wife of my brother-in-law. My oldest sister was his first wife. The next thirty-four years of my life were filled with confusion, heartache, and loneliness like I had never experienced before. The first time I really felt love was when I held my first child in my arms. Then, I had something to really live for and at the same time I developed a strength and courage that empowered me to endure. It took twenty years before it occurred to me that I had been “had.” I was in my forties. I was standing in my home in Swede Town, the one where I raised eight kids in a two-and-a-half bedroom house.

What if you died and went to heaven and they told you, “April Fool”? I asked myself, standing there. I answered my own question: “Man I’d be pissed. All this work, and sacrificing, and lying I’ve done. If I found out I was doing it just for them, when I thought I was doing it for God. You have got to be kidding me.”

But I didn’t leave right away. I had eight children, all born at home, six girls and two boys. They didn’t know their father because he didn’t acknowledge them. He’d come over late at night, have dinner, boss them around, sleep with their mother, then leave in the morning. He never talked to them. He was real quiet and unemotional. Sometimes my daughter would ride twenty minutes with him from Swede Town to Taylorsville to visit her half-sister and he wouldn’t talk to her the whole ride.

What helped me out had been with me all along. I have this ability of knowing things before they happen. Growing up, I’d play psychic games with my brothers and win. Around the time I had the thought about “April Fool” in the kitchen, I was developing a spiritual connection with my higher self. I began to see that religion was what I was trying to obey, but spirituality was overriding it.

This led me to discovering hypnosis. I turned the Donohue Show on one day. They had a guest come on and do a root canal on a person in a hypnosis-induced trance. I thought “wow, I’d like to be able to do that.” It stuck in my mind. A couple of weeks later a brochure arrived in the mail from West High School. I saw a class, hypnosis for self-improvement. The cost was fifteen dollars, and I thought “oh man I can’t afford it.” But I saved pop bottles and nickels, and was able to do it. The used the old pendulum method and I learned to do it with my kids.

I was certified in 1986. Then I moved from Swede Town, and started working with women from Colorado City. These polygamous women from Colorado City came to me with their problems. I had never heard of problems like this. I knew sexual abuse existed, but not on this scale. Some of them went on to get more counseling, and some of them I am still friends with.

It was the beginning of finding the truth because I had empowered myself. I learned in my hypnotherapy training that brainwashing occurs through isolation, deprivation, hypnosis, and torture. When I heard that, I thought, “that’s it!” I was being brainwashed, and so was everybody else.

As time went on I wrote a letter to the matriarch of the Kingston group whom I knew. I spilled my guts to her and said I’d been hoodwinked and how they’d stolen money from people and married people off at young ages. I’ll be darned, I

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was excommunicated. I was the first and only plural wife excommunicated! I thought “what am I going to do now?” I’d been a part of this all my life. Later I saw it was a blessing. I didn’t know how to get out, but they did it for me.

One more thing I learned in my spiritual journey was that when you pass from the dark into the light, you need something to stabilize you so you don’t fall off. That’s what the hypnosis training was about.