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# The Witness Wore Red: The 19th Wife Who Brought Polygamous Cult Leaders To Justice



THE WITNESS WORE **RED**

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POLYGAMOUS CULT LEADERS to Justice

REBECCA MUSSER WITH M. BRIDGET COOK



## Synopsis

Rebecca Musser grew up in fear, concealing her family's polygamous lifestyle from the "dangerous" outside world. Covered head-to-toe in strict, modest clothing, she received a rigorous education at Alta Academy, the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints' school headed by Warren Jeffs. Always seeking to be an obedient Priesthood girl, in her teens she became the nineteenth wife of her people's prophet: 85-year-old Rulon Jeffs, Warren's father. Finally sickened by the abuse she suffered and saw around her, she pulled off a daring escape and sought to build a new life and family. The church, however, had a way of pulling her back in - and by 2007, Rebecca had no choice but to take the witness stand against the new prophet of the FLDS in order to protect her little sisters and other young girls from being forced to marry at shockingly young ages. The following year, Rebecca and the rest of the world watched as a team of Texas Rangers raided the Yearning for Zion Ranch, a stronghold of the FLDS. Rebecca's subsequent testimony would reveal the horrific secrets taking place behind closed doors of the temple, sending their leaders to prison for years, and Warren Jeffs for life. *The Witness Wore Red* is a gripping account of one woman's struggle to escape the perverse embrace of religious fanaticism and sexual slavery, and a courageous story of hope and transformation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

\*\*\*If you don't already know the story--then this review contains the basic plot spoilers. Also, as of

November 22, one of Rebecca's brothers has made some mildly inflammatory comments about this book in a short ebook. Short story--it's sensationalism without any substance over minor details and reads like that of a jealous family member angry at the way he was portrayed. Don't bother purchasing it (for anyone interested--I wrote a detailed review of it)\*\*\*First things first. This book is not an attack against Mormons, God or even polygamy. And neither is this review. It makes clear distinctions about why the type of FLDS that Warren Jeffs was leading was in fact very different from both Mormonism as well as other forms of Christianity. If I recall--not once does Rebecca even use the word cult--but for the purposes of this review, I am going to. In my opinion, whether it's under the guise of religion or helter skelter--when you have a population of people who are both terrified of as well as essentially worship a singular leader, cut off from the rest of the world, indoctrinated from birth, driving out all those who dare to question, and most importantly creating a system of that greatly disadvantages and mentally stunts a portion of the population so that they are easier to control--that is in fact a cult. I rarely read books like these (although I did greatly enjoy the Susan Atkins' autobiography), but every once in a while I come across a news story that just captures my imagination. I remember seeing news articles when Jeffs was arrested where there was just a lot of controversy about whether or not Jeffs and his congregation of FLDS members were just misunderstood or whether they were in fact criminals. Eventually, during his trial--more evidence came to light that Jeffs was in fact a serial pedophile and abuser not to mention was a total con artist concerning his "religion". Jeffs would preach about abstaining from "worldly sins" but then would use the substantial tithe money to live the very type of life that he preached against. Enough tales of 12 year old brides, rape and systemic corruption emerged that I think eventually the media finally came around to the side of the prosecutors--but some still made the case that Jeffs and his members should have just been left alone. I dare anyone who thinks that to read this book. It's clear that even the prison terms that Jeffs and several high ranking members received was only just the tip of the iceberg. This book is positively heartbreaking. Told through the eyes of Rebecca Musser, this book gives a gripping perspective into the tragedy of the Warren Jeffs era FLDS. Rebecca starts with her traumatic childhood of her siblings and mother forced to live in a dark basement and abused by her father's first wife. The physical and emotional trauma she received in this house was in no way merely a form of physical discipline. This was not spanking a child carefully--this was full on bloody beatings from the first wife to the point of organ failure in the case of one of her beloved brothers, sexual molestation from a half brother, and grievous mental and emotional abuse. Rebecca makes it clear though, that at least in her mind---she viewed this as unusual and not the norm for all polygamous families. She makes it clear that child abuse is not a

necessary byproduct of bigamy--though she did see reoccurring jealousy leading to violence or passive forms of aggression repeatedly in in first/second/third/etc... wife relationships. Something that was surprising to me though, was the realization that the FLDS movement was much more like the Amish than cult like towards the beginning of the book. While I would disagree with many if not all of their views, the FLDS church was not always synonymous with human trafficking and child rape. It seems it used to have a more democratic (though barely) structure not to mention didn't seek to wholly cut off their children from the outside world. Rebecca even attended a normal school up until somewhere in elementary I believe. Unlike many in the church, her father was a highly educated engineer who clearly passed on his mental acuity and passion for knowledge to Rebecca. It seems things honestly didn't reach the point of outright major law breaking (for the greater organization--certainly Rebecca and her siblings would have all been taken away and her parents put in jail if authorities were aware of the child abuse) until maybe the late 90s early 00s. What changed things was Warren Jeffs. He had taken over the "school" system and little by little chipped away at whatever real knowledge these kids had and replaced it with a systematic indoctrination of both the church, himself, "sexual purity"/total submission of women and how evil the rest of the "Gentile" world was. When his father (the revered yet lecherous Prophet who Rebecca was married off to at 19 and he 85) became sick, he took over the main religious not to mention purse strings of the cult. When his father died, Jeffs began a systematic purge of all those who opposed him as well as rewarding young and younger girls as wives to those who backed his rise to power. When Jeffs started to pressure the sister wives of his father--specifically Rebecca--into marrying him, this was the moment when Rebecca found the courage to escape the compound as she was absolutely sickened and terrified of Jeffs. In the time Rebecca left and the time Jeffs was finally arrested--it's clear that things just got worse. Just because these young brides weren't chained physically, they might as well have been. When you have virtually zero education, poor communication skills and own zero property to your name, you really don't have a choice. It's either leave (provided you aren't dragged back like many girls were) or marry. Neither of which is a fair choice. And many boys were also either raped or sent off to work in almost chain gain like conditions for various construction FLDS owned companies if they showed the slightest sign of mere hesitation or rebellion. As she became increasingly aware of just how great some of the lies told to her were, not to mention broken over the unknown fates of her biological younger sisters--she began a relentless yet cautious effort to locate her littlest sisters who she was concerned had been forced into marriage. Eventually, as the federal and state governments began to make a case against Jeffs and senior members of the church--they called upon Rebecca to help them. At great emotional and

psychological harm to herself and her marriage, Rebecca slowly started helping the authorities build a case against these members. Eventually, she became the star and fearless witness in a series of trials which eventually ended up in prison sentences for Jeffs and other members. She symbolically wore red during her testimony in Jeffs trial, a moment of defiance as Jeffs had banned the color red from ever being worn in the FLDS church. While emotionally difficult to read, I do want to make it clear that this book was incredibly riveting. I knew the ending, I knew Rebecca had survived, I knew Jeffs was arrested and sentenced to life--and yet this was genuinely more tense and gripping than several thrillers I've read recently. All credit to Rebecca as well as Bridget Cook (co-author) for masterful storytelling. Part of what made this book so powerful to me is that it's not a rant. It's not a pity party. It's not even about how heroic Rebecca was--which she unquestionably was. It's clear the journey Rebecca went through was gradual and that she often felt hopelessly alone and not in control. And yet, with each little decision she made--she got one step closer and closer to not just freedom for herself but many of her siblings and others. Her steely determination and self respect is what saved her. And that's an incredibly empowering message. I would highly recommend this book to anyone simply curious about the history and insight into the world of the Jeffs era FLDS, as well as young girls. One of the many powerful ideas from this book that has really stuck with me--is that Rebecca didn't know she had the choice to respect herself. She had been taught that she was nothing except a body in which to sexually and otherwise serve the whims of the men in charge. And it was the moment that she realized that she was special that she was able to start questioning what she saw around her. Emotional, visceral, enlightening and riveting--this book can help you see the world a little bit clearer. Highly recommend.\*\*\*\*\*Promised myself I wasn't going to write any more--but ended up buying and reading the book by Rebecca's little sister Elissa who had been married off at 14 to a first cousin and repeatedly raped. I don't want to take anything away from her story--but the perspective here is wholly different. Elissa was a kid and related her story through the eyes of a kid--and tho Rebecca wasn't much older, she had much more knowledge and an awareness of what was actually happening due to her status as the elder Prophet's wife. Honestly, Rebecca is also simply a much better writer. Essentially, this book is much more detailed and provides a better perspective of the entire FLDS situation.

This is the inside story of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, which could be called a polygamist cult--but that doesn't really do justice to what went on behind closed doors with the Jeffs family. Though they called themselves "Latter Day Saints" and their cult copied some rituals from the LDS Church, it had absolutely nothing do with the actual LDS Church in

reality. Was this a band of serial pedophiles who set up an elaborate system to supply underage girls for sex? Rebecca Musser escaped and helped bring this group to justice. This story was in the news but the details and history are so much more shocking in this memoir that I felt as if I had known nothing about it beforehand. Sometimes, the details are revolting--"temple" chambers set up as bedrooms for unspeakable and immoral acts cloaked in cultish religion, familiar if you read about the "Children of God." The same pattern of a leader coercing followers to supply children for sex. But what was worse to me was the physical abuse of children; one "sister-wife" ruptured the kidney of one of the children of her husband; the husband did nothing and there was a lot more abuse of this kind. Fasts in honor of ailing leaders sapped the health of adults, injuries and illness went untreated with serious consequence. It's so sad. This is the story behind the scenes and it put so much more detail and background that it is a fascinating, if horrible look at a cult that systematically abused women and children. Nothing in the news really prepared me for the true horrors these women experienced.

This book touches the heart. It's hard to wrap your mind around all the complexities Rebecca Musser endured growing up in the fundamentalist LDS church (FLDS). Noble ideals, like faith and endurance, are hopelessly entangled in a web of human faults of the darkest kind. Years of indoctrination in the FLDS faith prepare women to accept subjugation of every kind. Teenage Rebecca is forced to become the nineteenth wife of the eighty-five-year-old prophet of the FLDS church. At his death, given no other option but to marry again, Rebecca knows the time has come to leave. Though she escapes, Rebecca carries heavy burdens. Her younger sisters, open to exploitation, are never far from her thoughts. Knowing those left behind are being beaten and assaulted, Rebecca makes a decision that will forever change the lives of everyone she's known and loved. She takes the stand to testify against the men who have subjected those she loves. In that decision, she is forever changed. I read *The Witness Wore Red* because I have deep respect for Bridget Cook, who worked with Rebecca to bring this book to life. They present this world like none else can. Reading this book is a transformative experience, promoting a deeper understanding of the world we live in and our power to change it.--Kate Calina

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