

# The Women of Fundamentalism: Short Creek, 1953

*Martha S. Bradley*

AT 1:00 A.M. ON 26 JULY 1953, Arizona state officials and police officers moved through the inky darkness of an eclipsed moon to begin an armed invasion of the tiny village of Short Creek in the isolated area north of the Grand Canyon. The crime of these American citizens? They were practicing polygamists, nearly all of them of Mormon antecedents but repudiated and excommunicated by their Church.

At 9 A.M. that same morning, Arizona's Governor Howard Pyle intoned solemnly over KTAR radio:

Before dawn today the State of Arizona began and now has substantially concluded a momentous police action against insurrection within its own borders.

Arizona has mobilized and used its total police power to protect the lives and future of 263 children. They are the product and the victims of the foulest conspiracy you could possibly imagine.

More than 100 peace officers moved into Short Creek. . . . They arrested almost the entire population of a community dedicated to the production of white slaves who are without hope of escaping this degrading slavery from the moment of their birth. (*Arizona Republic*, 27 July 1953)

This 1953 raid was the third of three, launched not simply against offending individuals in a community but against the entire community.

The first had come in 1935, and the second in 1944. What was it about the men and women of fundamentalist Mormonism that threatened the “moral fiber” of America? Why did the state of Arizona find it necessary to launch a crusade to “protect” the women and children of an entire community? Why was their communal seen as un-American?

### THE WOMEN OF FUNDAMENTALISM

A girl growing up in the shadow of Short Creek’s red butte knew the boundaries of her world. She and the other women of Short Creek were geographically and socially isolated, living in the rigid gender-marked world of patriarchy. The powerful male world of fundamentalist Mormonism does not exist without the supportive and obedient female world. Bearing children to a righteous husband as one of his several wives was, in these women’s views, not only the husband’s will but also God’s will. One of the government’s motives in the 1953 raid was to “free” these women from a form of sexual slavery and to “protect” the young women of Short Creek from an untenable situation in which their sexuality during early adolescence became the property of a husband who was usually much older in a situation of limited choice.

How did these women function as individuals? How much did they have to say about the way they lived their lives?

Perhaps the most crucial question was that of arranged marriages, after plural marriage itself undoubtedly the single custom that ran most deeply counter to American culture. Two years after the third raid, the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency heard testimony in 1955 about social conditions in Short Creek. One senator asked whether young girls had been free to choose their own husbands, and Robert S. Tuller, Superior Court judge in Pima County, emotionally testified that they had been denied that right, then added:

To force a young girl not yet competent to think or speak for herself into a plural marriage with a man not of her choosing, is to force her into bondage. To say that a fifteen year old girl who marries a thirty, forty, or fifty year old man, selected for her by a committee of other men, does so voluntarily without force or duress is merely to quibble with words. Our law wisely decrees a child of such age is incompetent to make any voluntary decision in that. (*Committee 1955, 28*)

Mrs. Alfonzo Nyborg, a monogamous resident of Short Creek raised in a polygamous home and wife of the town’s deputy sheriff, testified before the same committee that teenage girls and boys were allowed very little autonomy by comparison with the larger society: “The children, they don’t have a mind of their own. They [the male leaders] just

live their lives for them. The same way with the young boys. They go out and work and do what they tell them to do, and they hand the money over, and they [the male leaders] give them back what they want." Mrs. Nyborg expressed pessimism about young fundamentalists' ability to break out of the system. "It seems that once they get them it is awfully hard to get loose." She also reported once commenting to a girl, the wife and daughter of polygamists: "They must hold something over you so that you do like that." The girl answered, "They do, but I can't explain it" (Committee 1955, 32).

Although the doctrine of individual free agency, one of the classic foundational beliefs of Mormonism, occurs repeatedly in fundamentalist literature, the context and examples usually assume that the reader, like the speaker, is male, and the issue of choice was most frequently invoked in the context of being free from the constraints of society to live a polygamous lifestyle. Women in Short Creek had few choices to make as adults. Here the culture of fundamentalism collaborated with the limited opportunities offered in this isolated, rural frontier community. Shiryl Jessop Blackmore (1985), the daughter of Edson and Alyne Jessop, grew up in Short Creek and married into polygamy but later moved to LaVerkin. She described her adolescent awakening to the realities of her limitations in a recent oral history interview: "When I was sixteen I first realized that I would probably never see the world. That Short Creek and the few miles of fields around it that I could walk through might be all I knew of life." Then a woman in her forties, she shuddered in remembrance, then summarized what she had seen as her choices: "1. Finish high school and then get married. 2. Get married as a teenager. 3. Leave the town altogether, which would bring disgrace to my family and shame on my head."

But leaving was not a real alternative because she was ill equipped to fend for herself: "I was not trained for a job, I knew no one outside of town, the thought of a world full of strangers terrified me. Leaving was simply not an option." She also understood clearly that discussing her concerns with either her father or her mother was not an option either. They would have considered such questioning nothing short of treason, a sin to be repented of. She and others like her had to wrestle with their problems privately.

Short Creek itself reinforced the authoritarian nature of fundamentalism in allowing its young people little room for independence. In 1953 Short Creek was still essentially a frontier community. Homes had no electricity or central heating, often no plumbing. The sheer physical labor required of women to care for their children and houses under these conditions should not be underestimated. Furthermore, funda-

mentalism's *raison d'être*—large families—meant that pregnancy, child-birth, and nursing intensified the physical demands on a woman every two or three years from the time she was married until the end of her childbearing, typically in her mid-forties. Girls were pulled into their mothers' lives to supply necessary domestic help from childhood until their own marriages.

In 1953 there was no local public high school nor avenues to trade or higher education. The Short Creek Academy offered only limited classwork. Partially as a consequence, the marriage pattern differed markedly from general U.S. norms. The average age at first marriage for fundamentalist women in Short Creek was sixteen, though fourteen and fifteen were not uncommon. Eight of the sixty-four women arrested in the 1953 raid were minors (Superior Court 1953). Four teenage wives testified, agreeing with Mrs. Nyborg, that women in Short Creek typically married in their teens and had frequent pregnancies. This information about age at first marriage admittedly was extrapolated from a small sample group (approximately one-third of the total female population); but at the time of the raid, at least a dozen girls between fourteen and seventeen were either pregnant or the mothers of up to three children (Committee 1955, 14). Those at the academy would leave class to nurse their babies (Pyle 1984). All girls between the ages of eleven and eighteen, perhaps fifty in number, were a particular concern of the juvenile justice system for they were potential plural wives and mothers (Committee 1955, 20). The raid seemingly did nothing to dissuade these young girls from marrying polygamous husbands.

Evidence indicates that this situation was due, in part, to limited opportunities. As the public school system improved over the next two decades, the average age at first marriage increased dramatically until, by 1988, it had leveled off at nineteen, much closer to the approximated state average of twenty-one (Bureau Vital Records 1985).

Marriage decisions were considered religious decisions—not private ones—and hence fell within the domain of the presiding patriarchs. Sect leaders John Barlow and LeRoy Johnson exerted tremendous influence on the distribution of wives. When approached, they advised men when and who to marry and how to live in plural households. Even when Dan Barlow (1986) married his fifth and final wife at age forty, he deferred to the judgment of his patriarchal leader and foster father, LeRoy Johnson. Because Dan believed LeRoy Johnson was the mouthpiece of the Lord, he was predisposed to accept his advice.

Such a system is not necessarily coercive or exploitive. When fewer than five hundred individuals lived in Short Creek, the patriarch knew everyone and probably had reasonably accurate ideas about how well

two people might be suited to each other. In other cases, parents arranged marriages. Also, young men usually married girls near their own age for a first wife, although later marriages tended to see increasing gaps in the ages of bride and groom—a pattern that had also held true for nineteenth-century Mormons practicing plural marriage. In these young marriages and even in later plural marriages, romantic involvement was a frequent element in the courtship. Love in marriage, no matter what the age, was an esteemed value (V. Barlow 1988).

The primary aim of marriage, however, was not love but a celestial social order. Plural marriage was part of a deferential and hierarchical society that was strictly ordered along patriarchal lines. The child was subordinate to the mother. The mother bowed to her husband's authority. He, in turn, looked to the prophet for direction, while the prophet was answerable to and spoke for Jesus Christ. As God was at the head of the world, the husband was the earthly head of the family. The appropriate behaviors directed toward one's superior were deference and obedience. The appropriate behaviors directed toward one's subordinates were instructional, benevolent, and either rewarding or punitive.

The official fundamentalist requirements for women are summarized in Joseph Musser's editorial in *Truth*, the Salt Lake-based fundamentalist periodical, in 1948: "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. In placing man at the head, he bearing the Priesthood, a law, an eternal law, was announced." The roles of both were rigidly prescribed, "Man, with divine endowments, was born to lead, and woman to follow, though often times the female is endowed with rare talents of leadership. But women by right, look to the male members for leadership and protection." Women were taught to "respect and revere themselves, as holy vessels, destined to sustain and magnify the eternal and sacred relationship of wife and mother." She was the "ornament and glory of man; to share with him a never fading crown, and an eternally increasing dominion" (1948, 134). Musser also spelled out these male-female roles in more secular matters: The man "shall fight the physical battles in protection of his loved ones, and bring into the home the necessaries of life." The wife "adorns the home, conserves the larder and renders the habitation an earthly heaven where love, peace, affection, gratitude, and oneness shall abound, she the queen and he the king" (1948, 134).

Men were encouraged to look for women with a "kind and amiable disposition; love, unaffected modesty, for industrious habits, [and] for sterling virtues." The ideal wife had "cleanliness in person, in apparel, in cooking, and every kind of domestic labor." She was cheerful and had "genuine religion to control and govern every thought and deed" (*Truth* 10:113).

If a wife were found wanting in any of these areas, it was the husband's responsibility to instruct her and remedy her deficiencies: "Let him realize the weighty responsibility now placed upon him as the head of the family and also let him study diligently the disposition of his wives, that he may know how to instruct them in wisdom for their good." Because men were superior to women, the "weaker vessels," it was the husband's responsibility "to nourish, cherish, and protect; to be their head, their patriarch, and their saviour" (*Truth* 10:114).

Traditional gender assignments were reinforced by a dress code which was spelled out for the women though not for the men. Pants, scanty attire, and make-up were all discouraged: "The female cannot wear men's attire and display to the world those finer and more sensitive qualities that crown her with beauty and grace known only to her self," editorialized Musser in 1947. "When a corpulent woman forsakes her protective skirts for overalls she displays a figure that is anything but attractive. Her feminine charms have forsaken her" (1947, 19). Polygamist Edson Jessop of Short Creek explained in a national news story, "We believe in covering our bodies and we frown upon make-up; silence itself is reproof enough if one's wives come out with short sleeves or painted faces" (1953, 30).

Interestingly enough, these prescriptions—right down to the prohibition against pants—could have appeared in any nineteenth-century Mormon publication without sounding even faintly strange; what is more, they could have appeared in any twentieth-century Mormon publication up to approximately the mid-1970s and still have sounded completely familiar to orthodox Mormon women and men. Even today, it is the intensity of the decree, rather than the concept itself, which would sound extreme to orthodox Mormon women.

Perhaps the only substantive difference in how Mormon and fundamentalist women viewed their position in society was the literalness with which the latter took this advice and the pervasiveness in fundamentalist society of the belief that women were in a separate class from men. They willingly took their place in this rigid society and—conditioned by tradition, history, and spiritual experiences which reinforced such roles—considered it to be God's will for them and a source of great personal happiness. One young plural wife in a Salt Lake City fundamentalist family said in a recent interview that she and her sister wives gladly looked to their husband's leadership as a priesthood holder. "We are lucky to have one of the elect of God in our home," she emphasized. Her sister wife added, "When you only get a small part of your man, you glory in what you have" (Mrs. S. W. and C. W. 1986).

Clear roles have the useful social function of providing cultural stability. Against the turmoil, materialism, and "juvenile delinquency" which characterized post-war America, the psychological security and emotional reassurance of a profoundly religious, home-centered life must have been deeply consoling for many fundamentalist women. As the "outside world" came to be characterized as a threatening place of persecution, legal action, and imprisonment, the ideal of home as a haven acquired peculiar power.

The polygamist also married to follow God's injunction to Adam and Eve: "Multiply and replenish the earth." Accordingly, sex was for procreation only and governed by strict guidelines based on theological considerations. The fundamentalist patriarch spoke of sexual activity in puritanical terms, again an echo of nineteenth-century Mormonism, and saw in polygamy the cure-all for the world's problems of prostitution, homosexuality, infidelity, and sexual debauchery. Monogamy, claimed Musser in another *Truth* editorial, was a lesser sexual law which had put "many women . . . in their graves [as] the victims of the sexual over-indulgence of their husbands." Polygamy "will at least modify this trouble and subdue the natural animal in man" (1948, 182).

Sexual activity within marriage was, in the polygamous system, for procreation. Rulon Allred describes first approaching patriarch Charles Zitting in the early 1940s with the idea of marrying a plural wife. Zitting, one of the original practitioners who claimed John Taylor's ordination to plural marriage, put Allred through a grueling interview on his private life, sexual experience, past history and attitude toward religion, and attitudes about women. Zitting seemed to look straight into Allred's heart with his piercing dark eyes (Taylor 1953, 76). "If you are ready to enter the Principle," he said, "this is the law." Zitting then declared the purpose of plural marriage to be producing children, forbade sexual intercourse between conception and the child's weaning, and warned, "A man who looks upon his wife with lust is damned. A man who can live this law is worthy of his exaltation, but don't enter the Principle unless you can meet the requirements" (in Taylor 1953, 76).

Zitting's explanation of "the law" of abstinence during a woman's pregnancy and lactation seems to have been a generally accepted rule. Polygamist husbands were counseled to exercise self-control and moderation; then, "the sexual relation, properly employed, rather than reflecting mortal weaknesses and being immodest, lewd, coarse, vulgar or indelicate, and something to blush over," would be elevated to a higher plane and become "a divine principle dedicated by the Gods for the perpetuation of life and birth of earths" (Musser 1944, 102).

The rhetoric of fundamentalism does not celebrate sexuality but treats it with respectful caution as a necessary evil—at best a force which men must learn to control and from which pregnant women must be protected. Still, sexual consummation sealed the marriage with a powerful bond. Musser went so far as to say “a real man could not live sexually with a woman without loving her” (1948, 182).

Although the polygamists were fundamentally opposed to contraception, sharing a husband with five other women could work against quick conception. Nor is there any reason to believe that all husbands expected to provide or were capable of providing sexual intercourse every night, since “tempering the lust of the husband” was also one of the residual effects of righteous living (Musser 1948, 184). Perhaps the most effective contraceptive device was the commandment to observe gestational abstinence, thus insuring that children would be spaced at least eighteen to twenty-four months apart, “thereby conserving [the mother’s] health and enabling her to bring forth healthy and beautiful children” (Musser 1948, 185). It was bearing these children that, for the polygamous woman, was the ultimate blessing and her unique role in the plan of salvation. Barrenness was seen as a reproach—God’s curse on the woman and her husband (*Truth* 14:135).

Musser and other fundamentalist leaders derived their philosophy of gestational abstinence or the “sexual law” from extensive readings about the relative virtues of abstinence during pregnancy and picked from those readings a combination of ideas that made sense in their minds. It is virtually impossible to document how extensively this doctrine was practiced, but the ideal was in place by the 1940s. For the fundamentalist, gestational abstinence emphasized the theologically sacred nature of birth. During gestation and lactation, the woman was separated from earthly passion and joined with God in the act of creation (Musser 1942, 187).

Practical arguments in fundamentalist literature concentrated on the benefits of gestational abstinence for both mother and unborn child. According to one unidentified mother, writing in 1941, it “results in superior brain development, while the reverse leads to idiocy. Intercourse during pregnancy drains the nerve-vitality of the mother and child . . . when the nervous system of the mother is so sensitive and may be so easily upset” (*Truth* 7:185).

One polygamous woman expressed this same concept in highly colored language: “The embryo and fetus destroying practice [intercourse during pregnancy] is hideous. It is little short of involuntary baby slaughter. An ugly unholy picture it makes.” She continued with a poignant observation that told much of the complicated nature of these

marriage relationships. "Yet the loving, faithful wife submits, usually without protest, because she wants to please her man and keep him loving her alone" (in Musser 1942, 130). Fundamentalist women were often reluctant to speak about sex outside of the context of reproduction. This woman, at least, acknowledged its role in the husband-wife relationship.

Short Creek was the "lambing ground" where the women of plurality from all over the region—Utah, Arizona, and Idaho—came to give birth in a home setting with the assistance of an experienced midwife. For example, in the east wing of her lovely plantation-style home in Short Creek, nurse-midwife Lydia Jessop, first wife of Fred Jessop, delivered hundreds of babies. She brought to her work a sense of professionalism and careful standards that soon were acknowledged as appropriate by county health officials (Jessop 1988).

During the three Short Creek raids, the women of Short Creek were dealt with as mothers. Several women were indicted on charges similar to those applied to their husbands, but none were imprisoned. Rather, they were allowed to stay with their children and put under the protective custody of the state. Furthermore, it was as mothers that these women exerted power and influence. Although the state "protected" them, it also attempted to limit their capacity for teaching the doctrine, for they were recognized as crucial in perpetuating both the doctrine and practice of plural marriage.

In fact, the role of fundamentalist women represents a distinct shift in the evolution of the defense of polygamy. Nineteenth-century Mormon polygamy defended its Constitutional right as a religious practice; twentieth-century fundamentalism defended a woman's "inalienable right to motherhood" (Musser 1945, 275). In the 1950s, fundamentalist Mormon polygamy was essentially a cult of motherhood. Musser called polygamy a "woman's rights program." What mattered most was not marriage, he said, but "quality" motherhood, "and to try and withhold the right thereof from any fit woman of our breed and nation is an infamy as well as national insanity" (*Truth* 10:275).

Idealized motherhood thus counterpoised patriarchal power in fundamentalist society, and it was as a mother that a woman in Short Creek exercised what influence she had. "Motherhood was the grand capstone of the life of the woman. Greatness, glory, usefulness await her otherwise but here alone all her powers, all her being can find full play," lauded Musser in 1949 (*Truth* 14:184).

"We who believe in polygamy are joyed at the role the Lord has given us," said Rhea Kunz in 1987. "Unlike so many mothers today, we don't fear childbirth." Another mother added, "We don't worry because

of the extra expense that another mouth will bring. We know that the Lord will provide and care for us" ("Polygamous Wife" 1944, 26).

According to Musser, polygamy offered to all women the lure of marrying a man of her choice and becoming a mother. From his perspective, "every normal woman yearns for wifehood and motherhood. She yearns to wear the crown of glory. The most precious and yearned for jewels are children to call her mother" (*Truth* 14:134). Polygamy also served the practical sociological function of integrating the "thousands of American women who are [otherwise] a permanent surplus on our marriage market and doomed to spinsterhood and childlessness" (1944, 102).

How did this practice work? Behind the theory and the theology of fundamentalist "celestial marriage," how did families live out their united lives?

First, fundamentalists viewed their unions as both sacred and eternal, thus increasing the significance of all relationships in the home. Much official counsel warned against anger and criticism and encouraged harmony:

Speak not the faults of your wives and others; for in so doing you speak against yourself.

Never seek to prejudice the mind of your husband against any of his other wives, for the purpose of exalting yourself in his estimation, lest the evil which you unjustly try to bring upon them, fall with double weight upon your own head.

Let each mother teach her children to honor and love their father, and to respect his teachings and counsels.

Suffer not children of different mothers to be haughty and abusive to each other; for they are brothers and sisters the same as the children of the patriarch Jacob. . . . Always speak well of each of your husband's wives in the presence of your children. . . . If you consider that some of the mothers are too lenient with their children and too negligent in correcting them, do not be offended, but strive, by the wise and prudent management of your own, to set [a] worthy example before them. (*Musser* 1944c, 113-15)

In Short Creek, a polygamous woman typically spent much of her married life in the same household as her sister wives and their children. Typically, she was also expected to generously love each of them. Making a plural marriage work thus required enormous sacrifice, self-control, and commitment to the principle.

One polygamous wife in an anonymous interview acknowledged the difficult times. "Sure we became angry and jealous. We are after all human beings. But when I felt most hateful I went into my room and closed the door." There she inhaled slowly and "prayed for the strength to endure—or at least to be pleasant" (Janice T. 1986).

Husbands minimized jealousy in various ways. Rulon Allred was careful to express his affection only privately to his wives. To flaunt his romantic involvement with six separate women would have, Allred believed, resulted in discord. It was something they all knew existed, but it was easier not to witness it.

A second patriarch, Edson Jessop, attempted to encourage thinking first of the group and considering the plural family "above all a unit. My wives trust me. A man of our faith never walks the chalk line as does the man with only one wife." Jessop tried to "spend my time where I'm most needed, perhaps where there is sickness or trouble," and claimed that his wives "trust me to do whatever is best for the family as a whole" (Jessop and Whipple 1953, 29).

Jessop saw his role as "diplomat" and explained, "Even when my families lived separately, I rotated my evenings; once a week we met together at one Home Evening." In this setting it was possible to "pray and sing together, air your problems and your grudges, play games and visit and afterward sample Marie's special angel-food cake or Alice's cream puffs. You not only have fun—you forge bonds that will endure a century" (Jessop and Whipple 1953, 27).

In one family, the five wives felt most content by alternating weeks in the kitchen, garden, and laundry (Janice T. 1986). Another family "specialized," with one woman caring for all of the children while her more proficient elder sister wife sewed, laundered, and ironed while the third baked bread and prepared meals.

Edson Jessop's six wives were nearly all the same age and good friends. "They cooperate efficiently, one handling the sewing for the family, another the cooking and so forth," he commented. "What counts is not the number of wives, but the number of united wives. In fact, there are times when I wish mine would at least get mad at me separately instead of all together" (Jessop and Whipple 1953, 30).

In answer to the oft-voiced question about the nonexclusive nature of plural marriage, polygamists simply turned away from metaphors of romantic love. Instead, they explained with analogies to a mother's love for her several unique and individual children (Johnson 1988). Edson Jessop also used the metaphor of friendship. "Naturally a man values his wives for different qualities, just as he values his friends. Perhaps one wife has pretty hair, and another is wonderful with the children, perhaps one is witty and keeps him cheerful, and another brings him closer to God" (Jessop and Whipple 1953, 29).

After childbirth or during illness, sister wives assumed the incapacitated woman's roles. "It is a joy to have a companion with whom to

share sorrow and happiness, sickness and health," commented one woman, "[to have] in times of distress someone to lean upon and turn to for assistance; [when sick], to know that your children are receiving a mother's loving care" (*Truth* 10:26).

This type of close companionship seems more analogous to the friendship between a husband and wife in a close monogamous marriage than to the more usual women's friendships of today. Perhaps in the absence of husbands, these women learned to meet most of their social and emotional needs with each other. In one family, when two plural wives were offered the option of living in separate homes, they chose instead to share a home as "best friends" (Mrs. S. W. and C. W. 1986). A first wife, preparing to meet a potential third wife, remarked candidly to her husband: "After all, it's more important that she get along with us than with you. A plural wife doesn't see much of her husband, but she is entering into the family of her sister wives" (Taylor 1953, 78).

The shared persecution of the three raids, in which the women saw themselves and their children as martyrs for a holy cause, also increased their shared commitment. Furthermore, the raids were simply dramatic climaxes in an ongoing saga that encouraged the women to see themselves as part of a larger family, the community of believers. Polygamy served as a boundary separating those inside the community from all outsiders, including blood kin who did not accept the principle of plural marriage. It functioned as a powerful adhesive that enhanced the resolve and unity of the group.

Unlike Mormon polygamy of the nineteenth century, which had its roots in the marital traditions of monogamy, this highly enmeshed society looked for guidelines in its own hundred-year Mormon history of the practice. In the 1950s mothers of the new generation of young polygamous women taught their daughters what it was to be a plural wife, what it was to be female in fundamentalist society. Through their behavior, through example and tradition, and through belief these women taught their daughters to continue on the path they believed was the one sure way to salvation.

Young polygamous women like Colleen Jessop Darger learned from their mothers' examples. Vera Black attested to this fact in her testimony before the court, *In Re State in Interest of Black* (283 P. 2d 887). In answer to the question "Now that principle (plural marriage) was taught in the home, in your home, while you were a young lady?" Vera said, "Well I don't know what you mean exactly, if anyone lives the situation, why they naturally get it in their lives."

Vera's testimony continued along this same vein.

- Q: It had the sanction of your parents, didn't it, your father and mother?  
 A: I presume it did.  
 Q: And were you opposed when you proposed to become a plural wife of Mr. Black, were you opposed by them?  
 A: I guess I had my free choice.  
 Q: You sought their counsel I am sure didn't you?  
 A: Well they never stopped me.  
 Q: They rather encouraged it did they not?  
 A: They didn't have too much to say about it, they gave their children their free agency.  
 Q: It was discussed in the home?  
 A: Well that is what I mean, I was along enough in years that I had knowledge enough to think for myself, I had my own head.  
 Q: Do you feel like you would be willing to continue to violate the laws of the State of Utah by living as man to wife with Mr. Black in the future?  
 A: It would be a pretty hard thing to do to give anybody up after you have lived with him as I have. I couldn't live without him.

Thus, paradoxically, fundamentalist women triumphed by accepting limitations. The patriarchal order stressed a woman's need for male guidance and support. The exaltation of her fertility locked her into the single role of mother. These very limitations led the courts to deal with fundamentalist women as dependents, like children, unable to take care of themselves and in need of protection and intervention. But in safeguarding their motherhood, the courts also gave them the cradle in which they would continue to nurture fundamentalism.

### THE 1953 RAID

Outsiders watched the growth of polygamy in the quiet shadow of the red butte that surrounded Short Creek and were alarmed at its increasing strength. The Mormons carefully guarded their temples, wards, and mission systems as they watched the polygamists in the Colorado Plateau area and quickly gathered information about those involved in any way with the group for excommunication proceedings. Increasingly, however, Arizona's government and the Mormon Church focused on the town's women and children. It was the "plight" of these "victims," more than any other factor, that led to the third and most socially devastating raid on the fundamentalists of Short Creek on 26 July 1953.

This concern underlay the rhetoric of Governor Howard Pyle's radio message which referred once to "insurrection within its own borders" but continued in the language of protectionism: "to protect the lives and future of 263 children . . . the product and the victims of the foulest

conspiracy . . . a community dedicated to the production of white slaves . . . degrading slavery." He continued:

Here is a community—many of the women, sadly right along with the men—unalterably dedicated to the wicked theory that every maturing girl child should be forced into the bondage of multiple wifehood with men of all ages for the sole purpose of producing more children to be reared to become mere chattels of this totally lawless enterprise.

As the highest authority in Arizona, on whom is laid the constitutional injunction to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed," I have taken the ultimate responsibility for setting into motion the actions that will end this insurrection. (Pyle 1953)

The day chosen for the raid, Sunday, July 26, was the same weekend as Mormon Pioneer Day, a state holiday in Utah. The Twenty-fourth of July held profound significance for the Mormon people and their unwelcome closet cousins, the fundamentalists. It marked the day of the Mormon pioneers' official entry in the Salt Lake Valley.

Friday, July 24 was hot and dry. Even farm animals lingered in the shade beneath the few trees that lined fields and streets in Short Creek. The weekend's festivities began with an evening social held in the schoolhouse, the only building in town large enough to seat a group of people. Still, the room was crowded with enthusiastic citizens singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" and the Mormon favorite "Come, Come Ye Saints." After the school orchestra performed, the town patriarch, eight-four-year-old Charles Zitting, rose to entertain his audience with stories of his youth in Utah. He also warned them of rumors of an impending raid. His listeners chuckled and exchanged disdainful glances. The threat of another raid seemed insignificant compared to the two years many had already spent in prison as a result of earlier raids in 1935 and 1944.

Saturday night the fundamentalists gathered beneath the stars for a dance that, like all socials, opened and closed with prayer. Again, the main topic of conversation that night was the raid. Mothers, sobered by even the remote possibility of arrest, returned home and told their children, "If we are separated we will be rejoined."

"You must be brave," whispered Viola Broadbent, cupping the trembling chin of a child about to burst into tears, "The Lord will be with us" (Broadbent 1986).

Earlier that same Saturday while Short Creek had been preparing for its evening dance, the forces of the raid had gathered at Williams, Arizona, 125 miles to the south, in the handsome red sandstone high school. Its auditorium on the second floor had boasted fifteen rows of permanent seats. Quickly the room filled with perhaps sixty or seventy

Arizona highway patrolmen, deputy sheriffs, national guardsmen, and liquor control agents. Many were returned vets eager to reenlist in the work of making a better America. The remainder of the room filled with civilians, attorneys, and social service workers.

The team was briefed and divided into two groups who would converge on the town from two directions, one from the Arizona side and another from the Utah side, thereby giving the illusion of support from the Utah government. As dusk fell, the lights of the first group could be seen fifty miles away like a trail of fireflies winding through the undergrowth. After descending from the Kaibab Forest, they turned out their lights, moving ahead cautiously by waning moonlight. An eclipse would occur at 4:30 A.M., making the darkness absolute except for starlight.

As the children of Short Creek slept, their supposed "saviors" were traveling along the more than four hundred miles of dusty roads in less secrecy than they had supposed. Fred Porter, the local sheriff and a monogamist, had alerted the polygamists about the impending raid. They were expecting something. Long before the cars doused their lights, lookouts on the red butte above Short Creek spotted the caravan coming from the Kaibab Forest like a streak of fire moving along a spill of gasoline.

"Holy cow!" muttered one lookout incredulously. "I counted one hundred cars in that line-up. Half the cops in Arizona to round us up" (D. Barlow 1987). Then Lydia Jessop, Fred's wife, sent up a young man to say that a phone call from "one of the boys" warned that "a hundred cars" were "coming from the Utah side."

One of the men scratched a match. It flared in the inky darkness, lighting the calm, clean-shaven faces with an eerie glow. A second man then lit a stick of dynamite, lobbing it up and out. It cracked in the sky like lightning in a summer storm, warning the families waiting below that the government had arrived.

After the tension, there was a certain amount of relief. In fact, the Johnsons, the Barlows, the Jessops, and the Broadbents welcomed martyrdom. Persecution for their religious beliefs had always hallowed their suffering.

When the caravan of "good samaritans" swirled into Short Creek at 1:45 A.M. with lights flashing and sirens blaring their arrival to the world, they found the people of Short Creek—men, women, and children—standing behind the picket fence that circled the schoolhouse. They had assembled during the preceding hour, dressed and hair brushed, to sing while they waited. Unlike their singing two nights before, the music was intermittently broken by nervous gasps, tears, and whispers moving through the crowd like a wave upon water.

When Sheriff Fred Porter climbed out of the lead car, LeRoy Johnson, wearing a clean white shirt, necktie, dark pants, and dark blue suspenders, stepped forward to meet him. "We've run for the last time," he told Porter. "We're going to stand right here and shed our blood" (Group 1988). His white hair framed his craggy, intelligent face. Porter did not respond to either the desperation or the near-invitation to violence. "We don't want violence," he said, raising his voice slightly so that it carried over the waiting congregation, "but we're here to do a job and we're going to get it done."

There was no violence. The warning stick of dynamite was the closest thing to force on either side. By 4:30 A.M. the town of Short Creek had been "secured" by the combined forces of the state of Arizona. Deputy sheriffs fanned out through the crowd to serve warrants on thirty-six men and eighty-six women. Within eight minutes, they had served warrants on all the adult fundamentalists on the Arizona side of town. The charges included statutory rape, polygamous living, cohabitation, bigamy, adultery, and misappropriation of school funds (Superior Court 1953). The highway patrol quickly strung makeshift barbed-wire fences around the school yard and put all the adults behind them. Some had their children with them; others had left children at home in bed asleep. None could leave to attend to their children or the animals that roamed hungry in the fields or stood patiently in the barns until late afternoon. Patrolmen also set up tents for the command center and a kitchen and promptly served heaping piles of bacon and eggs to the prisoners and their jailers. A third tent housed two Mohave County Superior Court judges, Lorna Lockwood and Jesse Faulkner, who took jurisdiction over every child, including the alleged juvenile wives, and made them wards of the court.

Late that afternoon the thirty-six men who had been arrested were driven to Kingman along with eight women who were either childless or whose children were grown. Kingman County Jail, where the fundamentalists arrived at 11 P.M., thoroughly disgusted them. "It was just horrible," shuddered Millie Johnson, then fifteen years old. "Unbelievable conditions for human beings. The walls were crawling with bugs. It was filthy, just filthy." The eight women immediately demanded clean sheets, hot water, and soap. Before they went to sleep that night, they had thoroughly scrubbed the walls and floors. But "we just couldn't seem to wash away the filth of what had happened to us" (M. Johnson 1988). Transferred to another section of the prison the next day, they began to scrub again. They also prayed and began to fast. By the end of the week, LeRoy Johnson had raised

\$43,000 to release all thirty-six men and eight women. In most cases their families were no longer in Short Creek to welcome them home.

#### SEPARATION: THE WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE

Twenty-four-year-old Viola Broadbent, the first wife of David Broadbent, had sat all that first day with the other women on folding chairs in the center of the school yard. Fanning their faces with their aprons and shading their babies with their hands, the women waited, chewing the state's sandwiches and drinking sodas. By 4 P.M., most of the mothers and their children had been sent home where they waited for the next three days. On the second and third days, a court photographer and a deputy sheriff photographed each home and each wife with her children. They also photographed outbuildings and junked rusting cars that the children played in, incorrectly labeling such cars as "dwellings" for some plural families. Later, the fundamentalists would mention, among their resentments, the added indignity of being linked with this image of slovenly indigence.

On Thursday night, 31 July 1953, 125 women and children attempted a mass escape through the hills north of Short Creek on the Utah side, but were caught and returned to their homes by the police officers (G. Johnson 1988).

At 9 A.M. on Tuesday, 29 July, the third morning, an officer appeared at Gwen Johnson's front door and told her to pack for a journey, not specifying for how long or how far. A strong woman, she and her husband, LeRoy Johnson, had six children. Furthermore, they had taken in the six orphans, ranging in age from ten to eighteen, of John Y. Barlow who died in 1949 and his first wife, Mattie, who died in 1944. Gwen was intelligent, serene, and dignified, inspiring love and respect not only in her home circle but among the other women of the community. Seven months pregnant with her sixth child, she was especially worried about three of her foster children, sixteen-year-old Sam, fourteen-year-old Truman and eighteen-year-old Alwin who would surely be left at home without anyone to care for them. She scrambled to pack for her five children and three youngest foster children.

Less than an hour later, Mrs. Johnson and her children gathered up their suitcases and joined other women and children who were walking up the street to the school yard where five big yellow school buses waited. Behind them, many left canning projects—bottles still sitting in pressure cookers on burners that had been hastily switched off, counters heaped with ripe fruit that was rotting within twenty-four hours, loaves of baking bread left to char or sour in the cooling ovens (G. Johnson 1988).

When one police matron summarily told a mother to be packed for a three-day trip in ten minutes, she protested, "I can't be ready in ten minutes. I've got all the squash cooking. How many clothes do I need for three days?" The matron immediately threatened, "If you don't hurry, I'll go and get someone that will make sure that you do" (Group 1988).

At the school, state welfare representatives explained to the 56 women that the government was taking custody of Short Creek's 164 children but that they could, if they wished, accompany their children into foster homes (G. Johnson 1988).

Because of the confusion of dealing with so many uncooperative women and children, it was almost 5 P.M. before they were all finally aboard the buses to begin the arduous seventeen-hour drive down the canyon to Phoenix. The state provided sandwiches, soda, formula, evaporated milk, and boiled water, but the ride was horrendous. The children cried and fidgeted in their seats. The bus drivers had been instructed to refuse to stop for any reason. The buses had no built-in toilet facilities, and the only provision was a single child's potty in the aisle of each bus. In addition to the children's needs, many of the women were pregnant. One mother, frustrated beyond endurance, snapped at the driver angrily: "When Governor Pyle can control my kids' kidneys, I'll leave plurality!" The bus drove on. One pregnant woman, close to her delivery date, went into labor as the bus twisted and jolted; she refused to tell the officials on board or ask them to stop. Marjorie Holmes's six-year-old daughter, Susie, already sick when they boarded the bus, was feverish and dehydrated by the time they reached Phoenix seventeen hours later. Holmes implored the matron on board to let her take the child to the hospital, but the matron, suspecting a trick, refused. The girl eventually died from complications of this illness (D. Barlow 1988).

Behind them, Short Creek's unnatural quiet lengthened into evening. Truman, Alwin, and Sam Barlow, and their half-brother Joseph Barlow, divided up the responsibility for the homes left vacant in Short Creek and worked hard into the night, rounding up and tending the dogs, chickens, and cows left roaming through yards, emptying ovens, washing dishes, and closing windows and doors (A. Barlow 1988). The thirty plural wives on the Utah side of the creek redoubled their sisterly efforts, canning the fruit, tending the animals, and helping the men in the fields (Black 1988).

At 7 A.M., the buses reached Mesa and Phoenix. Some went to the National Guard Armory, others to the YMCA. The Y's parking lot was crowded with women in bright summer dresses, LDS Relief Society sis-

ters designated by the state as foster mothers for the fundamentalists' children. Many were not assigned foster homes but were housed in the Y itself, jamming its gymnasium and hallways. Ester Spencer, ironically the only wife for the moment of Floyd Otto Spencer, was pregnant with her eighth child. For three and a half months, she shared a hallway, three cots, and a single toilet with five other mothers and twenty-nine children (in *Truth* 21:5). After a few days, most of the women and children left the armory and the YMCA and were distributed to foster homes throughout the Mesa area.

The children, as wards of the court, received state welfare aid. By 1955, the cost of supporting the children and their mothers in their foster homes for twenty-two months was \$110,000, the annual budget of Mohave County (Committee 1955, 8). Foster arrangements varied considerably. Alyne Bistline Jessop and her three children were ushered into a room with clean towels and a rocking chair (Blackmore 1985). Another woman led a mother and four children to a toolshed behind her Mesa home. It contained only four single beds, no chairs, dressers, or toilet facility. When the mother burst into tears, the foster mother commented, "If you break the law you have to accept the punishment," then turned and walked back to her own home. The family stayed there seven months (Group 1988).

When Margaret Hunter Jessop's bus reached the armory, her first priority was getting her children to the restroom, but instead they were all shepherded into a large gymnasium. "I noticed that there was a lady standing there watching me wherever I went. She came up to me and said, 'I've decided that you're the family I would like to take.'" Bewildered, Margaret and her children followed her out of the building. As they were driving down the street, the woman said kindly, "Now this is going to be quite an experience for both of us, and I hope you will be comfortable." The home was newly built on a quiet dead-end street where the foster mother's husband was waiting to meet them.

Margaret felt that she and her children were treated well but was appalled to learn that the woman had chosen her family because "she wanted to adopt another child." Margaret refused adamantly to even consider the idea; but still, "a number of different people came to that home and looked my children over. I remember so much how those people . . . followed them around, they were so hungry for a child."

The woman, Margaret recalled, "had been told that our lifestyle was sort of prehistoric. She was surprised that we weren't the backwoods type of people that she had supposed." In fact, when told to transmit an ultimatum from the authorities that Margaret would, the next day, have to choose either to renounce her faith or give up her children, the

woman “broke down and cried.” Fortunately, this forced choice never materialized, and the foster mother eventually helped the family find a comfortable apartment that a retired couple had cared for well. She also gave Margaret a washing machine, her mother’s sewing machine, and paintings by her mother, enlisting her sisters to help collect furniture and decorations (Timpson 1988).

Even the fundamentalist women who were treated well and lived comfortably were haunted by fears of losing their children to arbitrary government action. Many of them spent hours walking through their neighborhoods, gradually finding each other at parks, in shopping centers, or on the streets. The policy toward the polygamists was still in constant flux. There were those in control who still advocated the idea of permanent separation of the women from their children. Even after the women were in their own apartments, they had limited mobility. The government agents with whom they had regular contact, Arizona state social workers, attempted to keep them separated from other members of the group, refused to provide any information about their husbands, refused to tell them where their sister wives were, and gave them no information about how long they had to stay in Mesa.

Viola Broadbent found that a number of Short Creek women were living in apartments near her own. Soon they would meet each afternoon in the park. One day she noticed a man standing at the fence of the park watching her children. After a while he approached her, squatted down before one-year-old Lydia, and said, “I have been watching you. My wife and I would like to adopt your daughters and give them a good life in a Mormon home.” Recoiling in horror, Viola quickly swept Lydia up in her arms and, dragging her five-year-old, ran all the way back to her apartment. She never returned to the park and “never felt safe, even for a moment,” until she returned to Short Creek (Broadbent 1986).

Marie Darger was shy even before the raid. For her, at age five, Mesa was an ordeal in fear. “I was afraid every time I went to school that they would take my mother away while I was gone.” Even after their return to Short Creek, “I was always afraid of strangers, even strangers among us.” Ruefully she confessed, “I always felt like the raid was my fault. When I was a little girl they were always telling us that if we were good, if we were righteous, that the Lord would protect us. Well, I knew that I had been a bad girl from time to time and I reasoned in my own little mind that this was the reason why they raided us, God was punishing all of us for my sins. I was afraid and ashamed and I couldn’t ever shake it” (Darger 1988).

One of the more bizarre moments of the raid came a few days after the women and children had arrived in Mesa. Arizona highway troopers, struggling to reconcile their images of odious lawbreakers with the human tragedy of disrupted families, staged a picnic in Candle Park. Their wives baked cakes and prepared salads; the troopers paid the pavilion rental themselves. They didn't want the children to always remember them with fear and resentment and worked hard to melt their terror, playing with them, teasing and joking with them, tossing the little ones into the air. Marie Darger remembered "a big mountain of a man" breaking down and weeping at the grievous irony that his "protection" had inflicted such pain on them (Group 1988).

After six months in Mesa, social service workers moved Viola Broadbent, her four daughters, another plural wife, and her children to a small town outside of Flagstaff. This was part of a state policy to redistribute the mothers and children to small towns throughout Arizona, again attempting to destroy the unity of the group. After twenty-two more months, Viola's husband, David Broadbent, then out on probation, came for her in an old jalopy of a truck that many of the men shared to retrieve their families (Broadbent 1986). The ordeal of separation from their community was over. The series of hearings and trials of the past two years had led to legal victory for the Short Creek fundamentalists.

Only a handful of women did not return to Short Creek when they had the chance. They had not been broken. The principle of plural marriage had not, in their way of thinking, been tainted by the accusations, the arrests, and the legal action.

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