



His Favorite Wife: Trapped in Polygamy

Susan Ray Schmidt

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His Favorite Wife is the heart-stopping, inspirational narrative of a courageous, fifteen-year-old girl who becomes the sixth wife in a polygamous marriage. Cascading with rich, well-developed characters, this true story will capture your soul and imagination as the author reveals how a group of kind-hearted, sincere people are led to embrace this controversial lifestyle in their pursuit of the highest degree of glory. Laced with surprising brush-strokes of humor, this heart-rending saga will take its readers on a journey that outsiders whisper of and shudder about. It answers the question that a polygamist's wife is asked countless times: How can you tolerate sharing your husband?

In North America today there are over thirty thousand polygamists. They lead secret lives in their attempt to hide from society and U.S. laws. Their women are taught that obedience, unquestioning acceptance of polygamy, and giving birth to huge families of children to follow in their parent's footsteps will assure them a celestial crown. Few search out truth for themselves, but trustingly follow their prophet. Susan's book deals with this head-in-the-sand ignorance. She too, was one of these women.

His Favorite Wife: Trapped in Polygamy Details

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Margaret says

Interesting perspective from the 6th wife of fundamentalist polygamist, Verlan LeBaron. Susan Ray Schmidt's book was intriguing and definitely a fun read. From reading two accounts from the wives of LeBaron, I was able to glimpse into the horrific world of polygamy. I had no idea the lifestyle entails poverty, loneliness, intense jealousies and rivalries. Susan ultimately becomes a Christian after leaving the church; in this case, Church of the Firstborn of the Fullness of Times, a rouge Mormon cult.

Michelle Robinson says

I had a hard time staying engaged with this narrative. I don't know if it is because I have read several books on this subject matter, the writing (which wasn't awful), or just because I was totally disgusted by Verlan and Ervil LeBaron's predatory way of "courting" these underaged girls. It just turned my stomach, as a mother of girls, I just felt so strongly that they were being groomed by pedophiles. Ugh, it was really hard for me to read all of the stuff that led up to her "marriage" and if the way she described being treated by Verlan was even half true, I do not understand why he felt the need to marry her or any other "brides"? Just warehousing all of these women makes little to no sense.

When one is confronted by the abject poverty these poor children had to live in, I was just overwhelmed.

I also got really tired of all of the church jargon. It made me want to just give up. I appreciate it being there because that is what I chose to read the book for, an insider's experience but it got to be a lot.

I really appreciated her epilogue. I had googled several people's names to try to get an idea of what might have happened to them after the time period that the book covered.

This was a hard read for me. The ick factor was really high, for me. I felt so sorry for her and for the other child, polygamous brides and their children. o spend your life in squalor because of some sketchy religious beliefs is hard to fathom.

Again, this book took me longer to read than what is normal, for me. I cannot pinpoint exactly why. I am glad I read this book, it added to my knowledge of people who actually lived this lifestyle.

I would recommend this to others.

Jameya says

I thought this book was great. Very well-written, engaging, honest and generally fascinating. I don't know HOW this woman was able to recall so much, but she did a helluva job bringing it all together and actually

really making it feel like it was all happening to you! The story was so shocking in so many ways but amazing to know it's all true!

The last thing is, I felt this book to be SO good and interesting that I've already lined up at least five more just like it on my "to read" list. I really hope they turn out to be just as good, if not better.

Melanie says

I really enjoyed this book. From the minute I opened it up I could not put it down. I stayed up way too late at night because I wanted to see what was going to happen next. I would often find myself just thinking about this girl and her life and was eager until I could sit down next and read what was going to happen.

The way the Author, Susan Ray Schmidt, portrayed the life of polygamy was amazing. I took away an understanding of why polygamy is important to the fundamentalist Mormon people, and understand how easy it is to manipulate a young girl, and others, into believing this is the right life to live to get into heaven. The amount of brainwashing there was is amazing. I can not fathom the idea of sharing my husband with several other women. I can not imagine being married and having children at the age of 15 for my religion. This book really opened my eyes to the corruption of the fundamentalist Mormon Church. And to know that this is still going on is unbelievable.

I would highly recommend this book to anyone that can't grasp the idea of polygamy or understand why women choose this lifestyle. I would recommend this book to anyone who would like to learn about different lifestyles and who is looking for a book they don't want to put down.

Kate says

I wanted to educate myself to the world of Polygamy. This is a true story about a group of Mormons who broke away from the church in Utah in the early 70's and went to Mexico to start a cult called The Lambs of God. The book did go on and on sometimes, but I looked everything up and all of it was true. Story about 14 year old Susanna Ray who was married at the age of 14 to someone at least 20 years older. She was his fifth wife. By the time she was 23 with 5 kids her husband was on Wife No. 12 with a total of around 59 kids. This is an account of what it was like - severe poverty, left to take care of yourself on around 20 dollars a week with the other sister-wives. Eventually her husband Verlan LeBaron and his brother, Ervil, were at odds and it all ended up in many murders and family members killing family members. Susan came to her senses at age 24 and ran away to Utah with her 6 kids. What a way of life!!!! I suggest you read it although it does ramble about the same things at times.

Kartika says

I don't know a lot about polygamy. I know a little more now. What I did know before reading this book is that it the lifestyle didn't interest me, however it did make me wonder. Having read this account, I know this gal couldn't have tolerated the experience. Not for anything. I found that, that I may be interested in reading a book by Susan Schmidt's sister wife, Irene, as it would give a different point of view of the same situation from one of the sisters that I thought was portrayed as a strong, but at the same time dependent, woman.

Beth says

Sadly, while this story is remarkable, the writing is not. Susan Ray Schmidt's account of her life as part of Colonia LeBaron, plural-wife to one of the infamous LeBaron brothers, has all the elements of a juicy memoir. She is right in the midst of the warring fundamentalist polygamist communities, and her time with the LeBarons spans some fascinating, dark, real-life stories. Unfortunately, Schmidt tends to quickly gloss over the more interesting historical incidents and spend a good deal of time on minutia. While the personal elements can certainly strengthen a narrative and "inside look," but in this case it seems unbalanced: too little story, too much repetitive inner monologue.

Melissa says

Possible spoilers, but this is non-fiction.

This was an interesting book. It offered a very different perspective from the other books on polygamy that I'd read.

Susan is a young girl growing up in a polygamous community in Mexico. She is very treasured by her family and when she has a dream at fourteen that reveals to her the identity of her future husband, it is readily accepted by all. So much in fact, that she marries him a year later. The man is Verlan, the brother of the prophet of their sect. He already has five wives, but so charms Susan that she believes it is God's will that she marry him. His brother tries to get her for himself but she eventually sees how insidious he really is and goes with Verlan instead.

The rest of the book deals with her hardships of being a multiple wife and just her struggles in living as well. Verlan is not able to properly care for his large family and often the family lacks food, decent lodging, and good clothes. Not helping this is the fact that a couple babies are born every year adding to the mouths to feed. Susan herself goes on to have 5 before she even reaches her mid-twenties.

This book had an interesting perspective because for the majority of the time Susan liked her religion and being a polygamous wife. Sure she didn't like sharing all the time but when it came down to it she did believe in the lifestyle. It wasn't until a bit later when she had had several kids already that she started to become disillusioned. A lot of that too I think stemmed from the hardships she was living and the poverty.

There is one thing that I kind of wondered about though. The subtitle of the book is *Trapped in Polygamy*, but really, compared to some of the other stories I've read, Susan was able to get out very easy once she made up her mind to do it. She was delayed by pregnancy a couple times but when she truly wanted out, there were no death threats, no trouble with local law, her husband finally accepted. It was a lot different than some of the women who have tried to escape those types of relationships in the United States. I'm not downplaying her struggles, but it amazes me that being in a different country even it still wasn't that hard for her to get out.

The book does end on a good note with her leaving. She also thoughtfully includes a chapter that lets us know where the rest of the sect is and how they ended up. It is interesting to note that a lot of Verlan's wives

ended up leaving. Once again, a fascinating subject and I'm sure I'll be hitting the books to find out more on the topic.

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418 pages plus a photo album

Heather says

His Favorite Wife: Trapped in Polygamy fascinated and repulsed me, a combination that makes for a compelling read. Knowing the book tells a true story drove the fascination/repulsion. I am interested in reading one of the other books the author lists in the epilogue to learn more.

About the book: Susan Ray Schmidt is a descriptive author. I was there with her in the colonies through her anguish and gratitude. I felt her love and anger and turmoil.

While I acknowledge that the book is but one perspective (hers), I think she is fair in her descriptions and leaves room for me as the reader to come to my own conclusions. I do not feel bullied or manipulated into that understanding. It seemed like Susan's descriptions showed me how life was rather than telling me what to think about it. I could draw my own conclusions. Not until the final chapter do I feel Susan added some of her own analysis and opinions of the life in which she had been immersed as she started to look back. Before that, because her descriptions were in the present, I liked reading what was in her mind at the time that led her to make whatever present decision was at hand, to get married, to bite her tongue or to say something, or to visit one person or another.

Rebecca McNutt says

Although I have no objection to people having a right to their own faith or lack of faith, I think polygamy is so constraining and mentally-tormenting to the women and sometimes the men who get trapped in it that it's more of a crime than a religious practice. This book tells the story of one such woman, living in a community so isolated that its corruption went unnoticed, one wife in a long line of many, spending her days in the mundane and meaningless... when she is finally able to break away from it, everything changes forever. *His Favorite Wife* is undoubtedly powerful and impressive, and certainly a book worth reading.

Jennifer says

I actually came across this book sitting on a table - picked it up to kill some time and couldn't put it down until I was done. As a Mormon I was intrigued by this group of people who have broken away from my faith, using the same scriptures, but who believe and interpret them very differently than I do (and by the way, spoiler alert - Mormon's are not polygamists, so if you think we are you need to educate yourselves. I also do not have horns or a tail, in case you were wondering). In a way this is a tragic love story and at the same time it is a story of faith, sacrifice, and the journey we all must go through to decide what we believe independent of our family and society. The story is so well written that it is hard for me to believe that Susan is a first time author who had very little formal education as a child. At age 15 Susan marries a leader in the Church

of the First Born, Verlan LaBaron a man some 26 years her senior with 5 other wives. The story takes you through her journey of sacrifice, abandonment, and religious conflict. I cannot even imagine the constant sacrifice and heartbreak that she and her sister-wives went through in an effort to reach eternal glory, only for her to find she had lost her faith in the Church itself. The story also discusses, although not in great detail, the fracturing of the Church as one brother, Ervil LeBaron, tries to take control of the Church and actually enacts "blood atonment" by killing those in opposition to him. Although publicly the story of Ervil is one people recognize, it was Susan's story that compelled me. I enjoyed her perspective on the scriptures, its references for or against polygamy, and why the people of her former faith believe as they do. I cannot judge these people, they are living in a way that they believe is necessary for eternal life with their Heavenly Father, and people will sacrifice much to return to heaven in glory. Having said that, the cruelty of the lifestyle, although unintended, and the tremendous neglect and abuse of the families is heartbreaking. I hope that as Susan states in the Epilogue, that she has truly found life after polygamy and that all of her 7 children have as well. It is a humbling book.

Ashley Hoopes says

This is the true story of a woman's experience of being the "favorite wife" of her fundamentalist mormon polygamist husband. It was pretty eye opening for me to see what it's like to live in a fundamentalist community with religious leaders who claim to be receiving personal revelation from God on a daily basis, especially when the bulk of their revelation has to do with which 14 year old God has commanded them to marry.

This darling girl was a true believer who would do whatever was asked of her by her Prophet and her religious leaders. She is very candid and exposes her true feelings of falling in love with the older, charismatic religious leader. She is smitten by all the attention and affection that she craves as a teenager.

Once she is married, life quickly changes and she sees the reality of what her life will be like-being one of many wives (more than she realized at the begining of her marriage), living in poverty, dealing with the jealousy and infighting of the other wives, while trying to make sense of the isolation and loneliness that she feels.

The pictures alone, of her with her babies, and all the other young wives with their many babies, are jaw dropping. She is a survivor and tells this amazing story with compassion and honesty. I highly recommend this book.

Patti says

The first 100 pages are extremely uncomfortable. Susan takes you back to the mindset of an innocent 14 year old girl and it reads like my junior high diary full of "Does he like me? Do I like him?" The main difference is, though, that the boys that are flirting and winking at Susan are actually grown men, old enough to be her father, and are doing it in the company of their current wives.

It is amazing to read about these women who are continually neglected and left to fend for themselves in, fighting over time with their wayward husbands and treating them like royalty. Their stories drew me in. Susan was bravely transparent when describing the emotions involved with being a plural life. It would be

insane watching your husband date another woman while you could barely make ends meet!

When Susan was finally ready to think for herself and question her situation, I felt so proud and relieved for her. It takes a lot to go from where she started and reach the conclusions she came to. 25 years old and 6 kids? I can't imagine.

Ange says

My sister in law recommended this book to me and I am glad that I read it. It's the best book I have read that REALLY gives you a feel for what it would be like to live in a community that practices polygamy, or to be in a polygamous marriage. The author's story is fascinating, filled with the kind of drama that only real life can produce. I was interested to know where the author is at in regards to religion now. From what I can gather on her website, it appears she might be Christian but not LDS (I'm guessing though) and no longer believes in any of the fundamentalist LDS doctrine as well. An interesting account that certainly makes me sympathetic to those who live within this kind of culture.

Wesley says

Very interesting story of a young woman growing up in a Mexican fundamentalist Mormon community. I found Susan Ray to be a fantastic narrator; not the best writer but not awful either. She slowly unwinds the history of the LeBaron clan's attempts to convert the masses and the eventual inner turmoil/philosophical differences that grew from them. Susan Ray's story plays out like an ill-conceived soap opera - romance, murder, polygamy, extreme poverty and contrasting wealth, exotic locations, several piano interludes and a disturbing amount of statutory rape. But it's not a soap opera, it really happened.

(view spoiler)
