

Experience

I married my twin sister's husband

Mention polygamy and people assume it's all about sex, designed to suit men more than women.

I'm aware that my life, and my religion, can sound bizarre to outsiders. I grew up in a polygamist family in Utah. My father was an orthodox Mormon; plural marriage is encouraged. As well as my birth mother, he had two other wives living nearby in separate houses.

It wasn't until I was 10 that I realised how many people disapproved of the way we lived; once someone even spray-painted "Polygamist Bitches" on our drive.

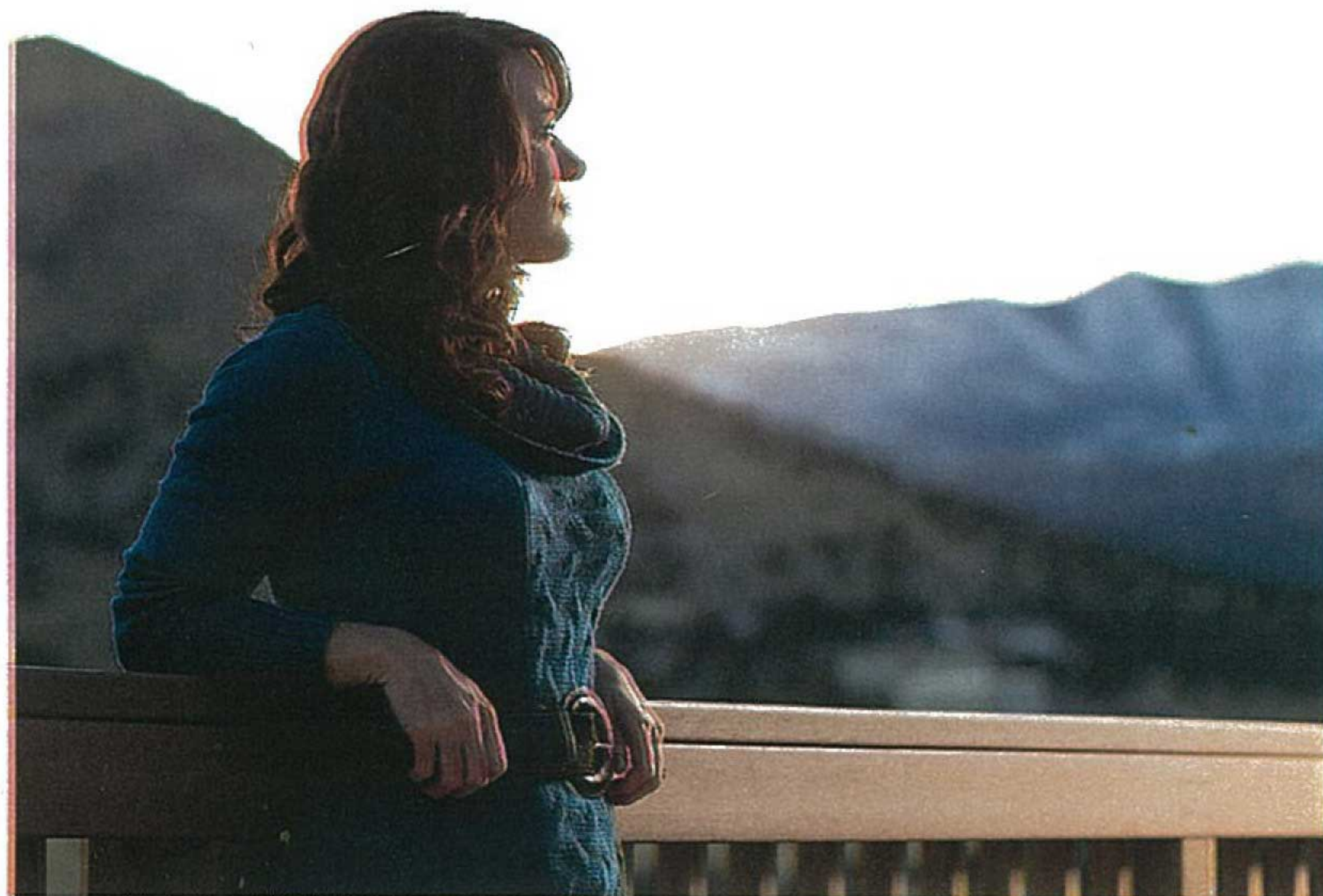
I didn't understand why - as siblings we were confident and popular at school. Our family was happy; my mother and my father's other wives were good friends. It was all I knew and I couldn't see why it provoked such hostility and anger.

There were 40 children in my family, but my best friend was my twin sister, Vicki. We shared everything and had always been close.

When I was 18, I met my first husband and for the first few years we were happy. By now, Vicki and our cousin Alina had both married the same man, Joe. I'd known him since I was a teenager; in fact Vicki and I had both had crushes on him. While their marriage appeared to flourish, mine floundered and at 30 years old, I found myself alone with five children - convinced no man would want me again.

One night I was visiting Vicki and as we sat talking, Joe arrived home. I looked at him and felt this incredible jolt of energy. I was confused by my reaction - since my high-school crush, I'd never felt anything.

Joe and Vicki would often phone to make sure I was OK. During one call, Joe asked: "Are we going to



talk about what happened between us? I know you must have felt something, too." I brushed it aside, still feeling raw from my break-up.

Over the months, I began to confide in him and our feelings grew. He asked me if I wanted to become his third wife and I accepted.

Admittedly, it was impossible not to feel jealous while we were dating. Joe and I would return home from a romantic evening, only for him to spend the night with another woman. Vicki struggled, too, seeing

her husband falling in love with me. I know she was envious we were in that thrilling "honeymoon" stage of our relationship, whereas I felt intimidated by how well she, Alina and Joe already knew each other.

"I'm never going to have that history with you," I told Joe.

"We'll make our own history," he reassured me.

Three months later, Joe and I married and I settled into new family life. Vicki, Alina and I share everything, from childcare to time

with our husband. We take turns riding in the front of the car and sitting closest to him on the couch.

People are always fascinated by our sleeping arrangements but, contrary to rumours, we don't share one giant bed. We have separate rooms and Joe alternates between them. Our sex lives are private, the one area we never share or discuss with each other. It's too easy for comparisons to be made and insecurities to creep in.

If one of us has a birthday, special event, or needs more of Joe's time, we shuffle the roster. In the early days it got a bit confusing but now we keep the schedule in our BlackBerrys.

We're very loving, affectionate people but we always have to be considerate. No matter how long you've been together, it always feels strange to walk into a room and see your husband hugging another woman. At first I was suspicious that Vicki was competing for Joe's attention. It took a while for me to truly believe she was prepared to share her husband with me.

Joe and I have now been married for 11 years, and have had four children together. Vicki and Alina are just about to celebrate their 22nd anniversary. We're very happy, but we've had to work hard. The success of our plural marriage hinges on being open and honest. I still feel jealousy but rather than letting little niggles build up, we air them at a weekly meeting.

Some people find it uncomfortable that we share the same husband, but I don't see the problem. Our relationship is full of love and trust, and I get to spend my life with my two best friends. I feel very lucky.

Val Darger

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CHAD HURST FOR THE GUARDIAN

AS TOLD TO JACQUI PATERSON