



Becoming Sister Wives: The Story of an Unconventional Marriage

By Kody Brown, Meri Brown, Janelle Brown, Christine Brown, Robyn Brown

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In many ways, the Browns are like any other middle-American family. They eat, play, and pray together, squabble and hug, striving to raise happy, well-adjusted children while keeping their relationship loving and strong. The difference is, there are five adults in the openly polygamous Brown marriage—Kody and his four wives—who among them have seventeen children.

Since TLC first launched its popular reality program *Sister Wives*, the Browns have become one of the most famous families in the country. Now Kody, Meri, Janelle, Christine, and Robyn reveal in their own words exactly how their special relationship works—the love and faith that drew them together, the plusses and pitfalls of having sister wives, and the practical and emotional complications of a lifestyle viewed by many with distrust, prejudice, even fear. With the candor and frankness that have drawn millions to their show, they talk about what makes their fascinating family work, addressing the topics that intrigue outsiders: How do the four relationships differ? What effect does a polygamous upbringing have on their children? What are the challenges—emotional, social, or financial—involved in living this lifestyle? Is it possible for all four sister wives to feel special when sharing a husband—and what happens when jealousy arises? How has being on camera changed their lives? And what's it like to add a new wife to the family—or to be that new wife?

Filled with humor, warmth, surprising insights, and remarkable honesty, this is a singular story of plural marriage and all the struggles and joys that go with it. At heart, it's a love story—unconventional but immediately recognizable in the daily moments of trust, acceptance, forgiveness, passion, and commitment that go into making one big, happy, extraordinary family.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

The Brown family members—husband Kody, wives Meri, Janelle, Christine, and Robyn, and their seventeen children—are open polygamists and the stars of the popular TLC reality program *Sister Wives*.

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Becoming Sister Wives

Chapter One

MERI AND KODY



Meri

I spent the early years of my life living in California with my parents, both of whom were devout followers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When I was a baby, my mom had a friend who left the LDS church because she practiced plural marriage. When my mom learned about this, it piqued her interest, and she began studying the principle as well. Soon after, she suggested to my dad that the family move to Utah. He didn't know her religious reasons at the time, but he said sure, let's move—though it took them four and a half more years of research and studying the principle before they actually did. We finally moved to Utah when I was five years old.

It was my mother who urged my father to take his first plural wife. He did, and she joined the family when I was only five, but I still have fond memories of her. Unfortunately, it was a short marriage with no children, and she left two years later. When I was ten, my mom and dad once again brought a new wife into the family. I didn't think there was anything strange about it—in fact, I was excited. I was a shy kid and didn't make friends easily. When I found out that the woman my father was courting was from a large polygamous family, I was thrilled to have the chance to get to know a whole new group of people and be able to make more friends. Our family grew quickly. Eventually, my father took four wives in addition to my mother. In total, I have twenty-seven siblings!

I was in a slightly easier position than many of my siblings who came from my father's second, third, fourth, or fifth marriages. Since I was the child of my father's first marriage, his "legal" one, it was simple and natural for my father to be my father in public. Since polygamy isn't widely accepted, for the other kids, it could be more difficult to acknowledge their father publicly. To my father's credit, he "owned," that is, acted as a true father to, every one of my brothers and sisters.

Growing up, I always assumed I would live the polygamous lifestyle. It was the tradition in which I was raised. My biological parents and my mother's sister wives all seemed happy for the most part. Of course there were the normal ups and downs that happen in any family. I loved being part of a large family; it felt

normal and comfortable. My parents, however, never pushed me toward the principle. They wanted me to make my own decisions and come to plural marriage, if I chose, through my own route.

My parents' only rule about religion was that I had to go to church, but this isn't so different from millions of parents around the world. It was always made clear to me that whatever religion I embraced as an adult—whether our branch of fundamentalism, LDS, or something else—was entirely up to me.

Despite the fact that I was shy, I managed to make a number of friends outside our church group. I worked at a portrait studio and became friendly with many of my coworkers, which helped me to overcome my shyness. Perhaps because I interacted with so many people outside my faith when I was a teenager, for a time I really questioned whether or not I was going to live the principle of plural marriage. I was struggling to find my way and discover my own identity within our close-knit community and the requirements of our faith—and then I met Kody.

Kody

I was raised in the LDS faith. Both of my parents were devout Mormons. However, when I was fourteen years old, my mother pulled me aside and explained to me some of the doctrines of Mormonism that are a little more intense. One of these is that of celestial plural marriage. The moment my mother described the principle to me, I had a feeling that this was something I was going to follow. I had no idea how or when, I just knew.

Of course, being young and stubborn, I battled hard against this calling. In the LDS church there's absolutely no opportunity to explore plural marriage. It's simply not done. Plural marriage is one of the few things that sets the Mormon fundamentalist faith apart from followers of the LDS church. The religions are similar, but this one difference is astronomical. Embracing it meant leaving the faith of my childhood forever.

When I was nineteen, I was sent on my LDS mission to southern Texas. During the two years I spent proselytizing for the Mormon church, the doctrine of plural marriage was constantly on my mind. It spoke to me. It called to me. But I still had no idea what to do with this summons.

While I was away in the ministry in Texas, I got a letter from my mother telling me that my parents had been excommunicated from the LDS church and had joined a fundamentalist Mormon faith. I thought, Well, this is interesting. But I was still too hardheaded to see it as a sign that I should follow in their footsteps. My parents' excommunication from the Mormon church broke my heart. I was deeply concerned about their spiritual welfare, but God spoke peace to me. I continued my service in the mission field and finished my two-year calling.

By the time I returned from my mission, my father had taken a second wife. My mother had written me dozens of letters about how wonderful her sister wife was, so although I had never met my new mom, I was ready to accept her completely. She deserved my respect and my love, simply because my father had married her.

When I returned to Utah from Texas, I immediately experienced the remarkable warmth of the principle of plural marriage as my mother had explained it to me years before. The warmth and love I imagined would go hand in hand with a polygamous lifestyle were no longer an unattainable ideal. They were real and concrete and precisely as I had imagined they would be. My mother was away, but here was another woman who

loved my father and whom my father loved, and by extension, we grew to love each other as mother and son. It was an easy and wonderful evolution.

Even though my parents had converted to fundamentalism and I'd discovered for myself the warmth of the polygamous lifestyle, I was still uncertain about converting myself. I began associating with members of my parents' new church and attending their gatherings. I thought I knew what I wanted, but it took me a while to make a commitment. Then I met a girl named Meri, and that changed everything.

Meri

I first noticed Kody at church. Our church group is quite close-knit and has been together a long time, so any new face really stands out. He caught my eye, and I believe I caught his. Someone introduced us, but beyond a brief hello, I don't think we said a word to each other. I was eighteen, and I'd never been courted by a guy before. Shoot, I was so quiet that I'd probably never even been noticed by a guy before! So nothing of a romantic nature crossed my mind during that first meeting.

That summer I attended a camp for girls of our faith. One of my fellow campers, a girl named Christy, was here from out of state and had a photo of her brother who was attending our church in Utah. When she showed it to me, I immediately recognized Kody.

A few months after camp ended, Christy came back to Utah from her home in Wyoming to attend a wedding. She invited me over to the house where she was staying. I walked in the door and there was Kody, sitting on the couch! He said, "Hi, Meri! You're the Meri my sister is always talking about."

I was shocked that he knew my name. I was used to my friends getting all the guys while I went pretty much unnoticed. It was good to be seen for once and not to be overlooked for my shyness. I was a little taken with Kody right off the bat. He was definitely cute, and had a great attitude. He was talkative and engaged me in conversation, and made me feel comfortable around him. Neither courting nor dating were on my mind at that point. He was the brother of a good friend, and that was how we began our friendship.

The next day Kody and Christy came to meet me as I got off my shift at my job at a portrait studio in the mall. The three of us went to lunch and then to an evening get-together. I felt comfortable around them, as if I'd fallen into a new and safe friendship.

Over the next few days, I began discovering what a fun guy Kody was. He was always laughing and smiling. He had a good attitude and a positive outlook on life. He really was outgoing and positive. I was impressed with the strength of his convictions and the depth of his spirituality. After knowing him for just a few days, I found myself liking to be around him and spending time with him, and wondering what direction this new relationship would take. One night, while his sister was still in town, we went to the home of some friends of his family for a party. There were quite a few people there, but every once in a while I would catch Kody looking at me. When our eyes met, he'd give me a little smile. It made my heart race. Unfortunately, a few days later, Christy returned to Wyoming. Since she was the reason I'd been hanging out with Kody in the first place, I didn't really think that he and I would see each other as much as we had been.

Thankfully, I was wrong. The next week, Kody and I continued running into each other at church events. Eventually he asked my dad if it would be okay if the two of us went out to grab a bite to eat. I know it seems pretty old-fashioned that a young man would need my father's permission to go out with me, but our

faith has specific morals to uphold and protocols to follow. Therefore, out of respect for me and my dad, Kody wanted to request my father's permission for our association. Anyway, there was something flattering about a young man going to the trouble of getting my father's approval before taking me out.

My father was an excellent judge of character and warmed to Kody immediately. My dad had a good handle on people. He had no problem with Kody and me "hanging out," which soon became the description we jokingly used for our relationship. He knew me well enough to know that we would be appropriate with each other, and knew he had nothing to worry about in my new relationship. Now that we had my father's approval, Kody and I could get to know each other in earnest.

Maybe it was because of me or maybe it was purely because of his growing interest in our faith (I like to think it was a combination of the two), but Kody started spending more and more time associating with people from our church. I usually found myself somewhere nearby. Kody was, and always has been, a loud and enthusiastic presence. It is hard to miss him in a crowd. Back then, I was quickly learning that Kody is the guy everybody wants to know and be around.

At first when people noticed us hanging out together they would ask Kody if I was his sister. I had been a member of this church since I was five years old, but I was so quiet and shy that many people had simply not noticed me. Now that I was spending time with Kody, people began to take notice.

Before Kody arrived in our group, I had been a wallflower. Now I began coming out of my shell. It was nice, but it was strange. I was experiencing the people and places that had been most familiar to me in a whole new light. I was participating instead of standing on the sidelines. I was spending more and more time with him and starting to hope that our relationship would go beyond friendship.

But then, Kody broke my heart.

After we had known each other for a few weeks, when I could no longer deny that I was falling for him, Kody came over to my house. We were sitting on the couch, waiting for my mom to get home. Kody really enjoyed my mom's company and wanted to spend some time with her, which pleased me and gave me hope that things were becoming more serious between us. This hope was short-lived.

At the precise moment I'd expected him to make some sort of declaration to me, or at least hint at his feelings toward me, he said, "I can't get involved in any relationships with girls right now. I like our friendship, let's continue that."

I was devastated. But I fought not to let it show.

Kody

I'm a hopeless romantic and too easily infatuated. When I was growing up, I suffered all sorts of little heartbreaks. I had a careless dating style. I would dive into a relationship before considering my true feelings. Often I'd find myself holding a girl's hand, then I'd look over at her and think: Why am I holding her hand? I don't really like her.

During my two years in the ministry in Texas, I promised myself that I would never again kiss a woman until I knew for sure that I was in love. When I returned home from my mission and began seriously considering

converting from the LDS church to Mormon fundamentalism, my mother told me that I should take time away from girls, or at least from dating them. She knew that I needed to become less careless and discover what it was I truly wanted from a relationship and whom I truly loved. My mother sat me down and said, “The next time you find yourself infatuated with someone, why don’t you just try and be friends? Don’t rush into a romantic relationship right off the bat. Be friends and let something develop.”

That decided it. I told myself I was done with dating carelessly. I was done chasing girls. I urged myself to be patient and to learn how to be friends with the next girl I became interested in. Meri was my experiment in friends!

Meri was so cute and sweet when I met her that I had a hard time suppressing my hopelessly romantic nature. She had a remarkable purity about her. I had a sneaking suspicion that we were soul mates, but because of the promise I had made to myself, I rejected this notion. I was determined to be Meri’s friend until I knew her better and could confirm my suspicion that our destinies were intertwined. I was glad that Meri and I kept finding ourselves spending more and more time together.

I was excited to be associating with members of Meri’s faith. They had an intensity about religion that I found inspiring. Perhaps because their religion was somewhat countercultural and at odds with certain conventional doctrines, they took no aspect of their belief for granted. They examined their convictions carefully and enthusiastically. The members of this group were fully committed to their ideologies and discussed them at length, both debating and confirming the tenets of their religion. Every day I spent with this group seemed to turn into an impromptu revival with profound discussions of spirituality and religion that I’d been missing in the LDS church. Even though I loved my new group of friends and their congregation, I hadn’t yet determined whether I should join the faith.

Nevertheless, I kept surrounding myself with people from my parents’ new church. A few weeks after I told Meri that I wasn’t open to dating, I invited her up to my parents’ ranch in Wyoming for Thanksgiving. Meri and I were never far from each other’s side during that trip. Naturally, people began to ask if we were dating. It was pretty clear that we liked each other a whole lot more than just “friends.” I often caught Meri making eyes at me. I didn’t have to ask her how she felt about me—it was written all over her face. I couldn’t stop winking back at her from time to time. It was no longer possible for me to deny that I had strong feelings for Meri. She was sweet and innocent, and a wonderful listener. She validated my existence. We became inseparable.

At the same time, I thought this wasn’t fair to Meri or me. I didn’t want to lead her on, but I didn’t want to make a mistake either.

Thanksgiving weekend ended. I had planned to stay with my parents for a few days, so Meri drove back to Utah with some of our friends. This was the first time in weeks that we had been separated for so long. I thought about her constantly while we were apart.

The house was finally quiet, which is remarkable in my large family. All the guests had returned home, and my younger siblings were in bed. I was sitting at my mom’s kitchen table, eating ice cream with a fork. The kitchen was dark, but light from the living room spilled onto the floor. Again I thought it wasn’t fair to either of us to pretend we were just friends. We were obviously much more than that. I didn’t want to drag this out and hurt Meri or myself in the process.

I needed God to answer two questions: Should I join the church I was investigating, and should Meri and I get married? After all, I couldn’t marry her without converting, but I wanted to convert because of a spiritual

conviction, not because of my love for Meri. I finished my bowl of ice cream and I decided to fast and pray until I knew with deep conviction what path I should follow.

I went to the bunkhouse on my parents' property, which is where I slept. I got into bed and began my fast. After two days of fasting, I decided to drive back down to Utah. Meri's parents had invited me to stay in a guest room at their home. I hadn't eaten since Meri left Wyoming, and I was shocked by how great I felt. I was strong and energetic, as if I were being sustained by a greater power throughout my fast. I felt as if this remarkable strength that persisted without food or water was part of my answer.

When I got to the guest bedroom, I was overcome with an overwhelming feeling of peace, greater than anything I'd experienced before. That feeling, that unbelievable sense of tranquillity and calm, was exactly what I'd been searching for. I had made my decision and I was at peace with it. That very day, I told Meri's dad that I had decided to join his faith. He made the arrangements quickly. The next weekend I was baptized, and I committed myself to the principle of celestial plural marriage and to God the Almighty. Somehow, in the middle of all of this, I remembered to ask Meri's father for his permission to court his daughter. I guess my conversion really cast me in a favorable light, because he granted it immediately.

After the baptism, Meri and I went to Temple Square outside the LDS temple in Salt Lake City to meet up with friends. I had my answer about both my faith and about Meri. I knew that I wanted to marry her, and I just had a feeling that she would say yes if I asked. But as usual, I was moving too quickly and following my romantic impulses. We hadn't even started courting, but I was already kneeling at the altar.

That night in Temple Square I was wearing an old trench coat from my mission. I turned to Meri and said, "Your hands look cold." Then I took one of them in mine and I put our hands into the pocket of my coat. I didn't want to attract anyone's notice, but I wanted to hold her hand. I had finally become comfortable with our romance, because now I knew this was the woman I was going to marry.

Meri

Even though Kody had told me that he didn't want to date anyone, I still hoped that he would change his mind. When he finally approached my father about wanting to court me, I was thrilled. Kody and I had a wonderful courtship. The fact that we had spent so much time as friends, and knew each other so well, allowed us to develop a sweet, romantic relationship based upon friendship and mutual respect.

Kody and I decided to spend Christmas with his family at their ranch in Wyoming. It had been three years since he had spent Christmas there and I was looking forward to getting to know his family a little better. We had been courting for a month, but we had been hanging out for longer than that. It was impossible for us to hide the depth of our feelings for each other. Everyone knew we were in love.

At dinner, a few days before Christmas Eve, his family kept nagging us about our relationship. They all wanted to know, "When are you guys getting married?" They asked me over and over again.

Finally I shot back with, "Well, he hasn't even asked me yet," more to tease Kody than anything else—and maybe to light a little fire under him.

That night after dinner, when we were sitting in the bunkhouse, Kody asked in a nervous—but cute!—way, "I'm thinking maybe we ought to get married, you know, if you want to."

It was an awkward moment, not at all the romantic proposal girls dream of. Although I did want to marry him, I was hoping for a real proposal—and there was something else holding me back.

I wanted to take some time for introspection, to know from God if this was the right choice for me. During this time that I was taking to check my feelings and validate them with God, Kody and I went ring shopping. We found a ring we both really liked, but we kept looking just to be sure. Kody knew this was the ring for us, though, so while I thought we were still shopping, he secretly had his sister buy it for him.

On Christmas Eve, Kody officially asked me to marry him. He was really nervous. He sounded shy and embarrassed and not at all like his usual self when he asked me to marry him this time. He handed me the jewelry box without opening it or taking the ring out, almost as if he was delivering a package. I thought it was sweet how nervous and unpracticed he was.

“You’re supposed to take the ring out and present it to me, not just hand me the box,” I told him. But I was just giving him a hard time. I was thrilled that Kody had asked me to be his wife. I was completely in love with him. I knew he was my soul mate, and that we were destined for each other. We had a strong foundation of friendship to build on. I was so excited to finally be engaged to him, and looking forward to becoming his wife.

In true Kody Brown fashion, he had once again jumped way ahead of himself. He’d asked me to marry him before he’d received consent from my father. The next day, Kody called my dad. The two of them had developed a deep friendship based on faith, spirituality, and understanding, so my dad gave us permission at once.

Kody

I loved Meri. I was certain of it. But I was worried. In every one of my past infatuations, I had been able to explore the possibility of a chemical connection through a kiss. I hadn’t done this with Meri, however, simply because it was not appropriate by the standards of my new faith—and because I was waiting for the appropriate time. When we started our courtship, I promised myself I wouldn’t kiss her until we were engaged. This strict abstinence made our relationship and our commitment to each other more powerful and meaningful. This was no simple infatuation. It was love that had been established without the complications of physicality, which makes it spiritual above all else.

During the first week of our engagement, between Christmas and New Year’s, we met with the head of our church to get his approval so that we could get married. He gladly granted us his permission.

On New Year’s Eve there was a dance for the members of our church community. Meri looked fabulous in the peach dress she wore, which accentuated her curves in a way that I had avoided noticing before our engagement. I didn’t need any proof that I was attracted to her at this point. I knew it without a doubt and I was very excited about my decision to marry her. It seemed throughout the dance that we were the only people there. The voices and chatter of our friends and family seemed to be just a background hum as we got lost in each other. She was the most beautiful girl in the whole room; I couldn’t take my eyes off her the whole night. When I took Meri home and we were saying good night, I leaned in and kissed her. I hadn’t planned to do it, but I didn’t try to hold myself back. It was a sweet kiss that felt natural and right. It was the best start to the New Year I could have envisioned. That kiss told me that I had made the right decision to ask for Meri’s hand. Our chemistry was undeniable.

Meri and I set a wedding date for April 21, which gave us nearly four more months of courtship, and provided the time for us to even further deepen our relationship. This was an important and special time. After three subsequent marriages, I now understand what a luxury this courtship was. Since we had a monogamous engagement, there were no complications from the emotions and feelings of another wife. Meri and I were able to date as much and as freely as we wished. We were able to get to know each other unencumbered and unhindered.

Those four months were wonderful. Our friendship developed into a remarkable love affair. We shared everything with one another. We got to know each other on an intimate yet chaste level.

After that first kiss, we shared many more sweet kisses. It was clear to me that when Meri and I were finally married, there would be no awkwardness between us. Meri was my fiancée and we were very much in love. Our relationship was a typical love story, the kind you see in movies and on TV. She would smile from across a room and I would wink back at her. We must have aggravated our friends and families with how much in love we were. While we were outwardly infatuated with each other, deep down we were becoming the soul mates I suspected we would be from the moment we met.

During our courtship, we were completely carefree. We had minimum-wage jobs that we weren't committed to. We didn't have much money and were trying to prepare for our wedding and honeymoon, but it didn't bother us. We didn't know where we were going to live after the honeymoon. We didn't know what we were going to do, but it was exciting. We had each other, and that was all that mattered.

Meri

Kody and I were married on April 21, 1990. We had a very special private wedding ceremony and a traditional wedding reception. I wore a simple and elegant white dress that I had made by hand, and I had my heart set on Kody wearing a white tuxedo. I look back now at pictures from our wedding and laugh, but with the eighties having just ended, it was definitely the style of the day.

Kody and I chose to spend our wedding night at our new home. It felt special to us to be able to begin our intimate lives together in our own home, rather than in some hotel room. We were deeply and passionately in love with each other. There was no awkwardness between us, everything felt just as it should be. We had plans to leave on our honeymoon the next day, but unfortunately I got sick and that delayed our plans. Although being in this new relationship with Kody was absolutely amazing and wonderful, and we had a lot of fun together planning our wedding, I think my getting sick was just a result of the stress and pressure that comes along with planning a wedding. So for the next three days, we stayed at home. Kody started calling our home our honeymoon cottage. Finally, toward the end of the third day, I felt good enough to travel. There we were, four days after we were married, finally leaving on our honeymoon. We only got as far as Pocatello, Idaho, that night.

Our honeymoon was a typical Kody Brown-style trip—everything was spontaneous and unplanned. We were just so excited to be married and to be traveling with only each other for company. The next day, we made it to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, our official honeymoon destination. We spent a memorable few days there, sightseeing around the quaint little tourist town and exploring our new relationship. We had a magical and romantic experience together, a wonderful beginning to our new life.

After our honeymoon was over, Kody and I settled down in a town called American Fork, about half an hour

south of Salt Lake City. Our new life together was sweet and romantic. We spent as much time together as possible, just basking in the love shared between us. I was nineteen and Kody was twenty-two. We didn't have any set plans for the future yet. We didn't have school or careers tying us down. We just wanted our love affair to continue.

During that first year of marriage, we weren't always the most responsible young adults. At one point, we both held jobs that didn't really interest us. We needed to make a trip out of town to see his family in Wyoming, so we quit our jobs and decided to just get ones that we actually liked when we returned home. We loved spending time together more than anything, and before we had kids or other wives in the picture, we were able to live carefree. Maybe we were purely enjoying ourselves, or maybe we were taking our time figuring out what we wanted. I think it was healthy not to have rushed into anything, pretending that we were more mature and knowledgeable than we were.

One thing Kody and I both knew, and had committed to each other from the moment we got married, was that there would be other wives. Even in the early days of our marriage, we talked about a second wife. We knew it was going to happen, but we didn't know when or how. We would often have discussions about where we would meet our next wife, who she would be, and how we would bring her into the family. On occasion, when Kody and I would meet a woman, he and I would discuss whether she would be a good fit for our family. We knew it would happen eventually, but in the meantime, we were enjoying the time we had together, learning, sharing, and falling more in love each day.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kristine Toomey:

Do you have favorite book? For those who have, what is your favorite's book? Book is very important thing for us to be aware of everything in the world. Each book has different aim or perhaps goal; it means that reserve has different type. Some people really feel enjoy to spend their time and energy to read a book. They may be reading whatever they consider because their hobby is usually reading a book. Consider the person who don't like reading a book? Sometime, individual feel need book whenever they found difficult problem or exercise. Well, probably you will want this *Becoming Sister Wives: The Story of an Unconventional Marriage*.

Jeanne Newman:

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