

Q: Where did you first get the idea to write *The Chosen One*?

A: Many years ago I heard of a young woman who ran from her polygamist community. She was dragged home, beaten and yet she ran again. I knew at that moment—at least a decade ago—that I would write this novel.

One of my goals in writing the book was to show the difference between polygamist groups and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints of which I am a member. Some people *still* think that most men in Utah have more than one wife. Polygamists are *not* Latter-day Saints. I wanted to show that in my book.

Q: Around the time you were starting to write the book, your daughter brought home a young man whose polygamous father was in jail. In what ways did this boy's continued presence in your life affect the direction of the book?

A: When Chris came into our lives I was, indeed, just beginning the novel. I asked him a few questions, but Chris' life was, in many ways, very different from Kyra's. He didn't live on a compound (though his family *did* live out in the desert away from people), he was allowed to choose how he believed when he got older, and while life proved to be pretty tough for him, he didn't have to fight quite as hard for "freedom" as Kyra does.

Q: How did you go about researching polygamous cults? Did any of the strong, yet violent scenes, such as the punishment of baby Mariah, Kyra's beating, and Kyra's and Patrick's run from the "God Squad" come from any real-life stories?

A: I did a *huge* amount of research before and during the writing. There are many different kinds of polygamist groups around the world. So while this book is grounded in fact, it is still fiction. Patrick's story is made up, but another writer who was doing research for a book about polygamy told me about disciplining children by dunking them in ice water. I've also heard of crying babies being squirted in the face with water until they learn to not cry at all. As indicated by the news report about the young girl who was beaten when she ran from her polygamist community, the beatings do take place.

As far as research: I looked up everything I could online. This was a few years back, before the Warren Jeffs arrest. And it was kind of weird, because when I knew I was ready to start writing, it suddenly seemed that TV was full of stories of polygamists. I watched several nationwide news programs, read many newspaper articles, and read both positive and negative accounts of polygamy.

KEEP ON READING!

- ESCAPE by Carolyn Jessop with Laura Palmer
- STOLEN INNOCENCE by Elissa Wall with Lisa Pulitzer
- CIRCLE OF BLOOD by Alane Ferguson
- IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE by Dorothy Allred Solomon
- www.theHOPEorg.org
- AttorneyGeneral.Utah.gov/polygamy.html

THE CHOSEN ONE

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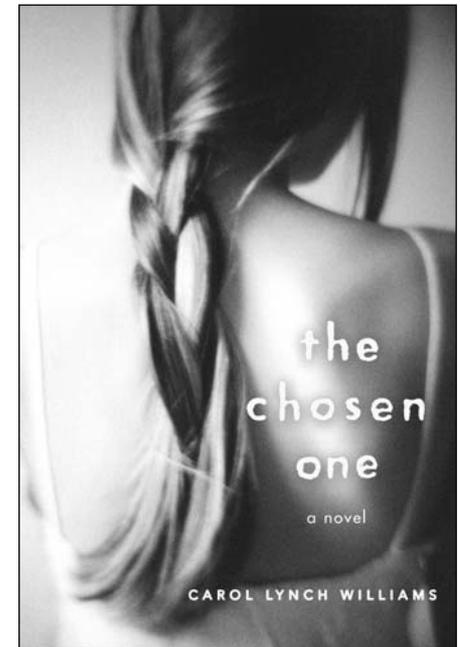
5 1/2" x 8 1/4" • 224 pages

Discussion Guide Created by Michelle F. Bayuk

The Chosen One

A Novel

Carol Lynch Williams



"The Chosen One makes the heart race, the teeth grind, and the brow bead up in sweat... I could choose no other book or newspaper until I had finished the final page."

— GREGORY MAGUIRE, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Wicked* and *A Lion Among Men*

"A powerful and heartbreaking novel of love and hope. One girl's poignant journey as she struggles to find herself and, ultimately, the truth."

— Meg Cabot, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Princess Diaries* and *Airhead*



Reader's Guide Synopsis

Thirteen year-old Kyra has grown up in an isolated polygamous community without questioning her father's multiple wives and her 20 brothers and sisters, with two more on the way. Or at least without questioning them much—if you don't count her secret visits to the Ironton County Mobile Library on Wheels to read forbidden books, or her occasional meetings with Joshua, the boy she hopes to choose for herself instead of marrying a man who is chosen for her. But when the Prophet decrees that Kyra must marry her 60-year-old uncle, and her parents are powerless against him, Kyra must confront the increasingly violent lengths to which the Prophet and his followers are prepared to go to enforce his will over the entire community.



Photo credit: Laura Lamando

CAROL LYNCH WILLIAMS, a four-time winner of the Utah Original Writing Competition and winner of Nebraska's Golden Sower Award, grew up in Orlando, Florida, but now lives in Utah with her husband and seven children. She is the author of several critically acclaimed books for children and young adults.

Discussion Questions:

THE CHOSEN ONE

1. In some ways, a polygamist family is very different from most American families, yet in other ways, very similar. How is Kyra's family different from your family? How are they the same? Were you surprised by these similarities?
2. Discuss the differences and similarities between a religion and a cult. What specific events in the book identify *The Chosen* as a cult?
3. What is the role of power—and the lack of power—among *The Chosen*? How do these differ for men? Women? Children? Teens? How are the adults in Kyra's life victims, and how are they aggressors?
4. There are stories of escapes and attempted escapes from both before and after the current "Prophet" comes to power. Indeed, one of Kyra's mothers indicates that she attempted to run away. Others, like Kyra's own parents, never seem to seriously consider leaving. Why do you think people would choose to stay in this community?
5. When Joshua says, "The girls are for all the older men," what are the practical implications? Why are boys allowed—or forced—to leave? Why are the girls who attempt to escape chased down and brought back?
6. When Kyra, her sisters, and mothers travel to town, they are subjected to curious and rude stares and whispers. Have you ever felt the way Kyra feels during this trip? How does this trip affect Kyra's view of herself, her family, and *The Chosen*?
7. Patrick, the librarian, knows he takes a risk in bringing books to Kyra. Do you think he fully understands those risks? Do you think he realizes his life might be in danger when he decides to help Kyra escape from the Compound in the mobile library?
8. How does Patrick provide both the practical means and some of the emotional strength Kyra needs in order to make her escape? In what ways does Kyra's family enable her to make her final escape? How does the knowledge that her family will be punished for her leaving both hinder and help her escape?
9. What do you think of Kyra's decision to leave? While she obviously finds herself in an extreme situation, does her dilemma remind you of any difficult or complex choice you have had to make? How did you ultimately decide?
10. What do you think life will be like for Kyra outside *The Chosen*—both in the beginning and years later? Do you think she finds Joshua? Does she go to college? Does she ever see her family again? What sort of future do you imagine for her?