

MARCH 23, 2009

# People

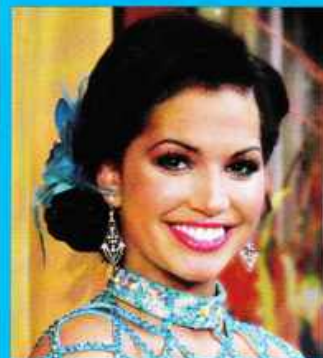
**TEXAS POLYGAMY SECT**

## THE CHILDREN OF THE CULT

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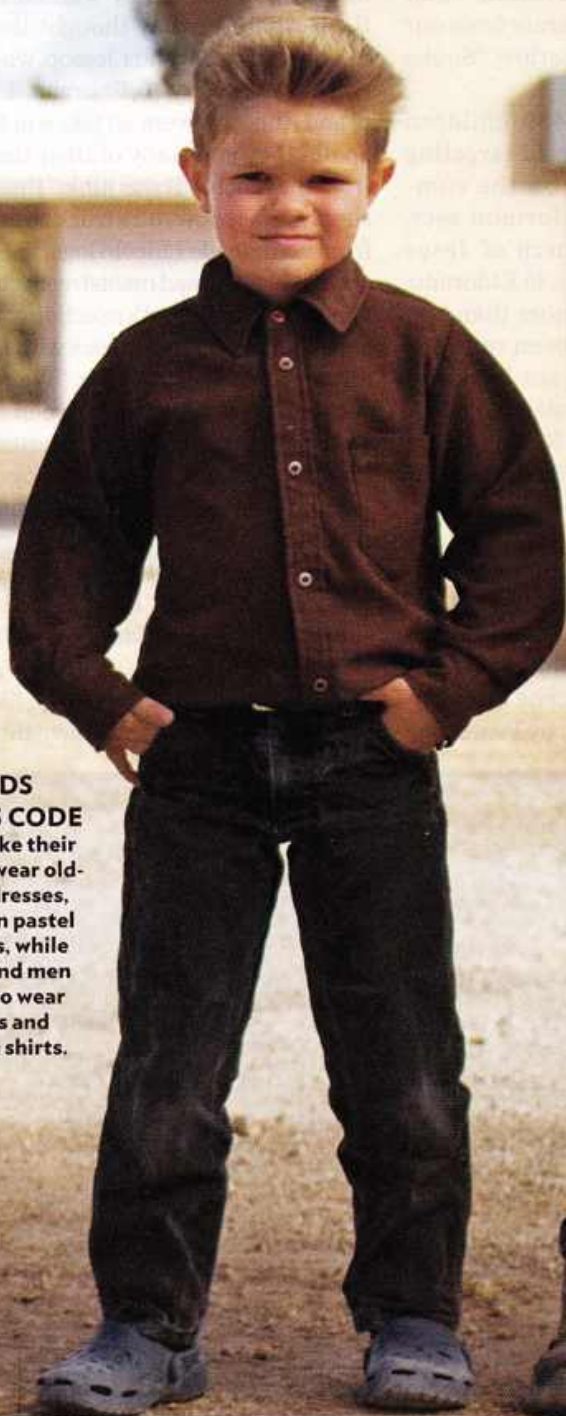
# THIS IS HO



# ME

Nearly a year after a raid on a Texas polygamist compound, many of the 439 children removed from the ranch are back with their families. Are the kids okay? And where are the children who didn't go back?

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID BURNETT



**FLDS  
DRESS CODE**  
Girls, like their moms, wear old-style dresses, often in pastel shades, while boys and men tend to wear jeans and denim shirts.

When little Gloria Barlow feels happy, she makes a purring sound, “like she doesn’t even know how to express it,” says her mom, Nancy. But other times the 3-year-old screams for no apparent reason. “After the raid they kept her separate from our other children,” explains Barlow. “So she learned how to scream.”

Gloria is one of the 439 children seized in an April 2008 raid targeting suspected sexual abuse on the compound of a breakaway Mormon sect, the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, in Eldorado, Texas. She is also one of more than 200 children who have since been reunited with their families and are back living on the 1,700-acre property, known as the Yearning for Zion Ranch. FLDS church officials granted PEOPLE access to three of those families—the Barlows, Jessops and Dockstaders—in an effort, they said, to strip away the mystery surrounding the sect and to show how the raid changed their lives. “It’s been like a natural disaster,” says Gloria’s father, Bob Barlow. “Like a hurricane hit us.”

The parents interviewed by PEOPLE say

the raid on the polygamist sect left their children frightened and confused. During the children’s two months in state custody, when they lived in group foster homes throughout Texas, they were exposed to marvels they couldn’t have fathomed in their insular, no-frills world: bicycles, TV shows, baseball games. Accustomed to getting up at 5 a.m., dressing in concealing clothes and spending long days in school and working, the children got to wear shorts, watch cartoons and romp around in playgrounds. “They wanted to show them whatever they thought they were missing,” says Zavenda Jessop, whose four children—Zachery, 10, Ephraim, 8, Russell, 6, and Anne, 4—were all taken in the raid. So did they enjoy any of their time away from the ranch? “It was junk,” Russell says simply, as he shows off a truck he fashioned from homemade Lincoln logs.

Her kids also read mainstream children’s books, despite the sect’s rejection of fictional characters. “They came back with *Dr. Seuss* memorized!” says Zavenda. “We’re seeing sides of them we’ve never seen before.” Her youngest, she says, has started asking for her bottle again, while her boys “have a lot more conflicts. They are way more insecure, and it’s more of an effort to get them to bed.” Other parents object to the clothes their children wore. “They dressed them in shorts!” says Nancy Barlow, who had four children—Matthew, 10, LaNan, 7, Versaree, 5, and Gloria—taken away. “My children know better than to have their arms

#### LUNCH

Zavenda Jessop and her children eat stew and homemade rolls. She calls store-bought rolls “laundry bread,” with all the healthy parts “washed away.”



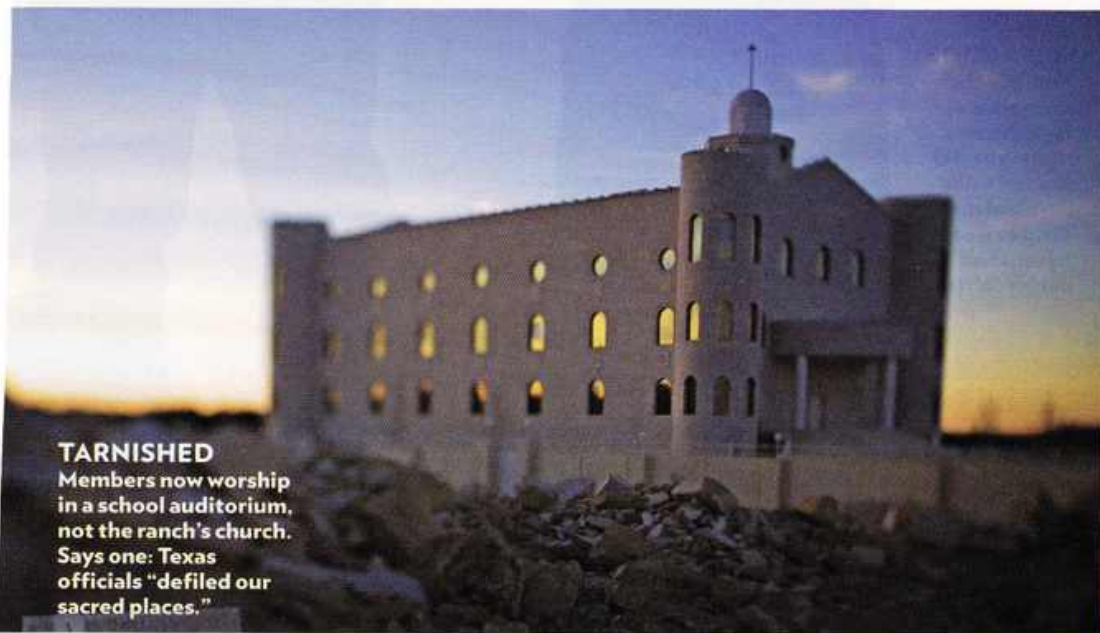
#### FAMILY TIME

Nancy Dockstader braids daughter Amy’s hair. Mainly, says Bob Barlow, “people here are involved with their own families.”



#### TARNISHED

Members now worship in a school auditorium, not the ranch’s church. Says one: Texas officials “defiled our sacred places.”





**PITCHING IN**  
David Jeffs helps milk the cows. Sect elders believe that, once taught, children find chores fun.



“  
If you want to know about  
somebody's religion and culture,  
come and learn about it. But  
don't do a raid” —BOB BARLOW



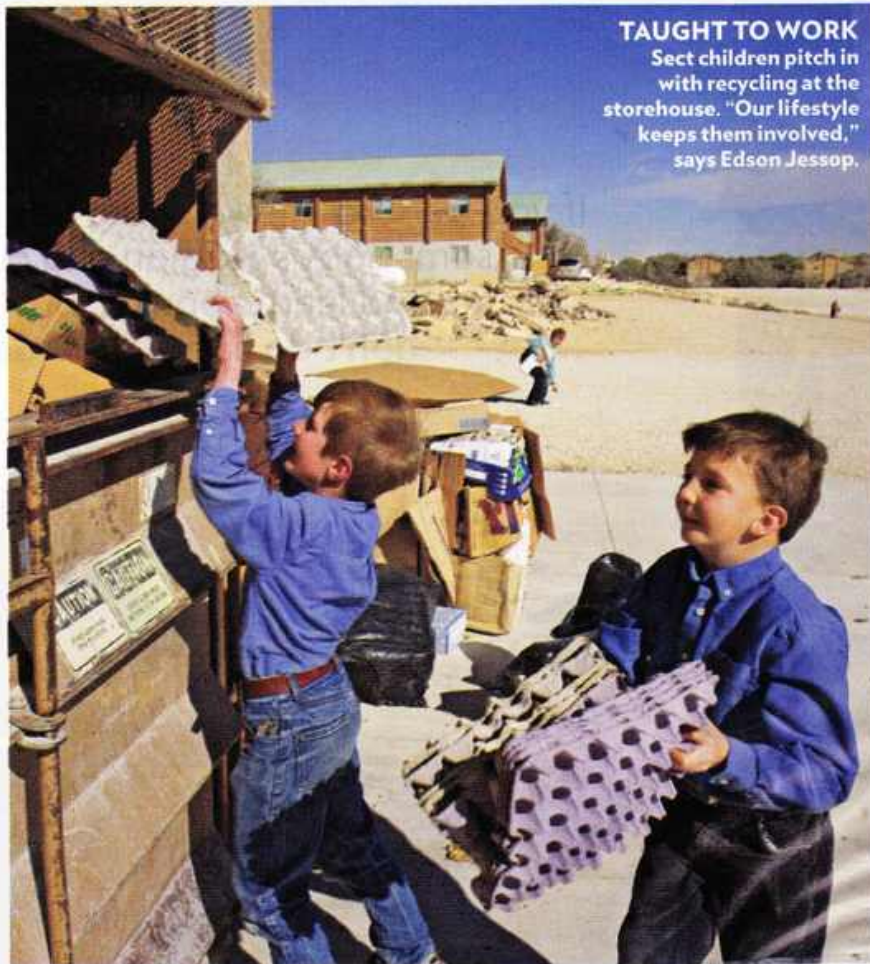
### SCHOOLHOUSE

Students, segregated by sex after the third grade, study subjects like math and science from 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

and legs shown." Her kids also "had so many toys thrown at them. Toys tend to teach children to be selfish. We make it real and useful to them. Gloria loves to do the dishes. If you cultivate that, then they're happy."

The children do indeed seem happy—and resettled—during PEOPLE's visit. "Sure, they dug video games," says one official closely involved with the raid, "but now they're all back at the ranch pulling lettuce." Still, life on the property "is tremendously different," insists James Dockstader, whose teenage sons Alan, Christopher and Jason, and daughter Amy, 10, were taken. He says cherished family possessions, like photos, were confiscated and have yet to be returned. "I don't think you can tell, but we're just traumatized," he says. "Nothing's the same."

There is no doubt that the raid, triggered by an allegation of sexual abuse investigators could not substantiate, uprooted hundreds of people who were not charged with any crimes. Do authorities think it was worth it? "We believe we did the right thing," says Texas's Department of Family and Protective Services spokesman Patrick Crimmins. "We had what we thought was a credible allegation of abuse. And when we got there, we realized we needed to do a complete investigation." That led DFPS to deem 12



### TAUGHT TO WORK

Sect children pitch in with recycling at the storehouse. "Our lifestyle keeps them involved," says Edson Jessop.

“ I’ve attended to every feeding and every diaper change and every bedtime and every bath time, and they call me negligent? [Another raid] better not happen. I hope they’re smarter than that” —ZAVENDA JESSOP



**BOUND BY FAITH**

Zavenda Jessop (far left) and other mothers at the ranch. “We’ve been totally invaded,” says Nancy Barlow (bottom left). “But we’re normal people living normal lives.”

I know they did a lot of fun projects [when they were in foster care]. But I think it's going to take the children a lifetime to get over what happened. I feel like they will adjust, but it's forever in their minds. It's forever a distrust. It was a shocking experience" —NANCY BARLOW



**TIME TO BE KIDS** Youngsters slide down a hill made of gravel used in construction. The compound "is an ideal place to raise children," says one mother. "It's all wholesome goodness."





children—who they say were married between the ages of 12 and 15—victims of sexual abuse. Another 262 children were declared “subject to neglect” because their parents did nothing to take them out of situations that could have led to sexual abuse. On top of that, 12 FLDS men were indicted on a range of charges, such as sexual assault of a child and conducting unlawful marriages. Those trials are set to begin in October.

Yet Texas officials have since cleared all but two of the children to return to the ranch. Why? “The risk has been negated,” says Darrell Azar, DFPS’s communications manager. In some cases that means the allegedly abusive male is no longer part of the household. And 63 girls between ages 10 and 17, those deemed most vulnerable, completed “therapeutic education” classes designed to “educate them about sex assault laws and what constitutes marriage,” says an official involved in the raid. Their mothers also completed parenting classes.

One-third of the original FLDS families who have been cleared to return to the ranch—or some 200 women and children—have chosen not to come back. Where are they? “In different cities and states, doing what they can to live,” says Edson Jessop, who, accord-

ing to another sect member, “has other families” besides his wife, Zavenda, and their children. Might some of the missing families have since left the sect? “I haven’t heard of any,” says Bob Barlow. (Officials declined to comment on the families who haven’t returned.)

Those who have come back say their faith in the FLDS remains unshaken, despite the profound impact of the raid. Gloria Barlow’s sister Versaree, for instance, may have been able to learn her ABCs while she was away. But her other sister LeNan picked up things her parents find shocking. “She told me, ‘There was this lady at the shelter who was expecting, and she wasn’t even married!’” says her mother, noting that sect members aren’t even allowed to hold hands until they are married. “We don’t want her to even think about stuff like that.” Life at the compound today may be different—far fewer children, more apprehension—but the families there say they wouldn’t want to live anywhere else. “This is home,” says Nancy. “This is the place where we can trust each other. It’s everywhere else that’s unreal.”

By Alex Tresniowski. Darla Atlas in Eldorado, Anne Lang in Austin and Cary Cardwell in San Antonio

#### BACK AT HOME

During her time away from daughter Anne, 4, “all I did was cry,” says her mother, Zavenda.

