

# Leaving Bountiful

A DOCUMENTARY FILM



*She has painstakingly restored every square inch of the beautiful farmhouse. Now, with the strike of match, she sets it ablaze. "Fire to cleanse and purify, just like it says in the bible." Debbie Palmer has six children, and with the strike of that match, she begins the fight for their freedom. Freedom of choice. Freedom from abuse. She is leaving Bountiful, the polygamous colony in the interior of BC. Behind her, the only life she has ever known goes up in smoke. From the ashes, she must build a whole new world.*

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**Leaving Bountiful** is the story of a woman, raised from a tiny child inside a perverted value system, who still somehow finds the courage - and the clarity - to break free. It is the story of systemic sexual abuse and the subjugation of basic human rights, tolerated by Canadian and American authorities because it is cloaked in the guise of religious freedom.

Bountiful is the name of a community of approximately 1000 people just outside Creston, British Columbia, established in the late 50's by the Fundamentalist Church of Latter Day Saints. It is a breakaway Mormon sect, founded on the belief that in polygamy lies everlasting life: the more wives a man has in this life, the higher up the celestial ladder he climbs in the next. Bountiful is a kind of branch plant of Colorado City, the major Fundamentalist Mormon community that straddles the Utah-Arizona border.

Debbie's parents moved to Bountiful when she was two years old. At age 15, she is given in marriage to 57-year-old Ray Blackmore. Debbie's proud to marry Ray, even though she will be his sixth wife. As a young girl raised in polygamy, there can be no greater honour than marrying a leader. But after only two years of marriage, Ray Blackmore dies of leukemia.

*Leaving Bountiful is the story of a powerful woman's flight from a society which rewards conformity and punishes individualism.*

For two decades his son, Winston Blackmore, rules Bountiful. He is husband to an estimated thirty women, and father to some eighty children. The twisted family trees of polygamy make it difficult to keep track of relationships. But keep track of this one: Debbie Palmer was once one of Winston Blackmore's step-mothers. Now she's his adversary.

As spiritual leader of Bountiful, Blackmore had complete control over every aspect of life. Blackmore was church bishop, superintendent of the school, ran the businesses, edited the newspaper, and was even allowed by local child welfare authorities to share control of reporting of abuse allegations.

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The sect leaders “give” Debbie in marriage three times. When Debbie believes her third husband is sexually interested in her 13-year-old daughter, Memory Dawn, she snaps. She takes an action almost unheard of in Bountiful. She files an official complaint with the RCMP.

Since every aspect of life in Bountiful is controlled by the church, without the church, without a new marriage, Debbie has no resources with which to raise her children. She has no idea how she’ll support them, or even how she’ll convince them that **Leaving Bountiful** doesn’t mean they themselves will be damned. Feeling absolutely trapped, Debbie sets her house on fire, and flees.

“And out of the ashes, rises the phoenix.” Debbie Palmer not only survives **Leaving Bountiful**, she becomes a crusader against what she calls the “illegal cross-border trade in Canadian and American female children for sexual and breeding purposes.” Authorities in British Columbia and Utah HAVE investigated charges that teenage girls have been brought across the border to be given in polygamous marriage to much older men.

At home in Prince Albert, Debbie works as a full time advocate while pursuing a degree in social work. She is also reeducating her own children. Initially the older ones were horror-struck to be **Leaving Bountiful**, because they had been taught to believe the world outside was wicked. So she knows you just can’t swoop down and take women and children from a lifestyle they’ve been conditioned to believe is ordained by God.

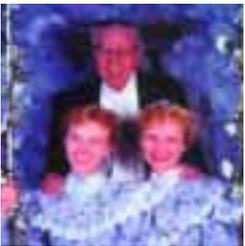
*“If slavery for economic purposes was outlawed over a hundred fifty years ago – why is slavery for religious purposes still okay? Because to young girls given in marriage, that’s what polygamy is. Slavery.”*

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When she lit that match more than a decade ago, Debbie Palmer had no idea just how long the fire would burn. The cleansing fire that consumed her house now consumes her.



**Leaving Bountiful** is the story of a powerful woman's flight from a society which rewards conformity and punishes individualism. It is a story told very visually, and intimately. The audience travels alongside Debbie Palmer through a childhood with several mothers and dozens of siblings to her first marriage at 15, through her terrible marriages and deepening depression to the fire that propelled her from Bountiful, and finally from her escape to her return to Bountiful on a lifelong journey to save the children - the ones still inside the group, her own children, and herself.



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## Biographies

### **HELEN SLINGER & MAUREEN PALMER;**

Producers, *Leaving Bountiful*

Helen Slinger wrote and directed *Leaving Bountiful*.

Maureen Palmer story edited and is executive producer of *Leaving Bountiful*.

**Helen Slinger** is a West Coast journalist whose documentary film directing credits include: *Shadow Warrior*, the biography of Greenpeace International founder, David McTaggart. With McTaggart, she wrote his memoirs – published by Orion Books in the UK. Documentary writing credits include: *Citizen Shame*, about child poverty in Canada; *Stranger in Our Home*, about internet predators; *Walls of Silence*, about child abuse inside Jericho School; *Rebel With a Cause*, Doris Anderson's biography; *One More Time*, Anne Murray's biography; *Tales from the Tickle-trunk*, about Mr.Dress-Up. Slinger is nominated this year for a Gemini for her writing in *On Wings & Dreams*, about the competition between Canada's major airlines. *Shadow Warrior* has just won a pair of Bronze Plaques and the Edgar Dale Award for Best of Informational Screenwriting at the Columbus International Film and Television Festival. *Tales from the Tickle-trunk* won a Silver Chris Award from the Columbus Festival. Slinger's worked as senior producer on several current affairs series that have been produced in Vancouver, and is a former executive producer of news & current affairs for CBC British Columbia.

**Maureen Palmer** currently works for Great North Pacific Media in Vancouver, a division of Alliance Atlantis. Recently, she's been responsible for the creative and editorial content of two series for The Learning Channel (TLC), as well as several documentaries for Discovery US, Women's Entertainment Television in New York and National Geographic. Before that Palmer served as current affairs producer at CBC TV in Edmonton, and as senior producer of current affairs at the CBC in Vancouver. Directing credits include: *Boys Will Be Boys*, an exploration of sexual harassment in junior high; *Nowhere to Hide*, about the pressures of development in Jasper National Park on one bear and her three cubs; *Tom Williams, a Product of Our Times*, the story of the Victoria whiz kid who crashed and burned at Apple Computer. Awards include; Bronze and Silver medals from the New York Television Festivals, the B'nai Brith League of Human Rights award for best documentary, the Webster award for best TV feature, the Montana International Wildlife Mountain Film Festival, Best documentary, Canadian Association of Journalists, best documentary.

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## STEVE RENDALL

Director of Photography

Steve Rendall was a cameraman for CBC Television for two decades, most recently assigned to *The National* Vancouver bureau. During his years at the CBC, Rendall filmed many of the biggest stories of the last decade, from the San Francisco earthquake to the Los Angeles riots, for which he won a Gemini. He was the Director of the Photography for the award-winning *Shadow Warrior*. He is married with two children.

## TIM WANLIN

Editor

Tim Wanlin moved to Vancouver from Kelowna in 1986 and worked for two years at Knowledge Network before becoming a freelance editor, focusing on documentary. Since that time Wanlin has edited over 30 one hour films and several series. His work has aired on Canadian and American networks. In 2002 Wanlin was nominated for a Vancouver Leo Award for best picture editing - documentary for *The Life & Times of Tim Horton*. He enjoys candle lit dinners, long walks on the beach, Mahler and poetry.

## FABIAN DAWSON

Associate Producer

Fabian Dawson is the News Editor of The Province newspaper in Vancouver. An investigative journalist, Dawson worked in Asia before emigrating to Canada in 1990. His work has appeared in major Canadian dailies, Asian newspapers and magazines, and ranges from busting baby-for-sale rackets in Thailand, exposing Chinese spies in Canada to tracking the masterminds responsible for the murder of a new Canadian bride in India. Dawson was also invited by the Canadian government to testify in secret hearings on organized crime. Married with two children, Dawson has helped produce three documentaries and is currently working on another while writing a book. Dawson has been cited for his work numerous times, including in the Canadian Parliament and was nominated as a finalist in two categories in the 2002 Jack Webster Journalism Awards.

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## *Credits*

Written and Directed by: **Helen Slinger**

Executive Producer: **Maureen Palmer**

Producers: **Maureen Palmer and Helen Slinger**

Associate Producer: **Fabian Dawson**

Story Editor: **Maureen Palmer**

Director of Photography: **Steve Rendall**

Editor: **Tim Wanlin**

Composers: **Michael Friedman**  
**Charles Huntley**

Narrated by: **Ann Mortifee**

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## Stills

On this CD is a folder containing high-resolution images.

Files are 300 pixels per inch tiffs, either in CMYK or Greyscale



LB-001.tiff  
A picture of Debbie



LB-002.tiff  
Debbie with her parents  
(Debbie top right)



LB-003.tiff  
Debbie and first  
husband



LB-004.tiff  
Bountiful girls  
(Debbie right rear)



LB-005.tiff  
Debbie and kids after  
leaving Bountiful



LB-006.tiff  
The prophet with two  
new wives both sisters



LB-007.tiff  
Debbie  
bottom right (with baby)



LB-008.tiff  
Debbie



LB-009.tiff  
Family Portrait



LB-010.tiff  
Family Portrait

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## *Video Stills*

On this CD is a folder containing full screen video captures images.

Files are 72dpi, 640 x 480 pixels tiffs, in RGB



LBV-001.tif  
Family Picture on fire



LBV-002.tif  
Family Picture on fire



LBV-003.tif  
Driving Away



LBV-004.tif  
Bountiful



LBV-005.tif  
Bountiful Birthing Centre



LB-006.tif  
Winston Blackmore's  
home



LBV-007.tif  
Winston Blackmore  
(leader of Bountiful)



LBV-008.tif  
Debbie and Memory in  
Cardston Alberta



LBV-009.tif  
Utah press conference



LBV-011.tif  
Cardston Temple Alberta



LBV-012.tif  
Debbie today