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Witness in polygamist trial: Sex awkward but not forced

By Nicholas Riccardi
Los Angeles Times

ST. GEORGE, Utah — A member of a polygamous sect who entered into an arranged marriage with his 14-year-old cousin testified Wednesday that he never forced himself on his wife.

Allen Steed took the stand in defense of Warren Jeffs, 51, the leader of the Fundamentalist Church of Latter Day Saints (FLDS) who is facing two counts of being an accomplice to rape. Prosecutors claim Jeffs used his iron-fisted influence to force the marriage, and later sex, in 2001.

The alleged victim, now 21, testified last week that Jeffs forced her to marry Steed and that her husband ordered her to have sex. When she complained to Jeffs that Steed was "touching her" in ways she did not like and asked that the marriage be dissolved, she said, the self-styled prophet refused.

Steed, now 26, has not been charged with a crime. On Wednesday, he testified that his wife had initiated their first sexual intercourse. "She rolled up close to me and asked me to scratch her back. ... I felt like she was ready to go forward," Steed said.

"I would have liked to have thought I was [in charge of the relationship]," he said, "but I never was."

The charges against Jeffs are a tactic employed in Utah to prosecute underage marriage. If convicted, he would face up to life in prison.

Steed, 19 when church leaders told him to marry his cousin, acknowledged Wednesday that he had been a clumsy suitor. Socializing between the sexes before marriage is prohibited in FLDS society.

"I'm sure it wasn't easy ... knowing now how I was then," Steed said softly.

Visibly uncomfortable, Steed had to stand to be heard and occasionally dabbed at tears. "I've never been really good at communication," he said.

Steed acknowledged that his cousin was standoffish to him and had made clear at times that she didn't desire the marriage. But other times she was affectionate, he said.

"Was there ever a time you had relations with [your cousin] where you believed you were forcing yourself?" defense attorney Wally Bugden asked.

"No," Steed said.

The two remained married until 2004, when the accuser left Steed for another FLDS member and fled the church. Jeffs then dissolved the marriage.

Steed said he understood his testimony could be used against him if he were to be charged but was willing to speak anyway. Under cross-examination, Steed said he did not believe the government's laws apply to him.

Steed said, however, that he would never lie for Jeffs. "It'd be against God's law," he said.

The defense ended its case after Steed's testimony, and prosecutors called a sole rebuttal witness. Jane Blackmoore is a midwife who attended to the accuser when she had a miscarriage in 2002.

Blackmoore testified that the accuser said her husband was abusive. "She felt like she had been forced," Blackmoore said. "She didn't use the word 'sex' but said, 'My husband doesn't take no for an answer.' "

Material from The Associated Press is included in this report.

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