

No Mama, I Didn't Die

Devereaux Bruch



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Adoption is an honorable act, but it can be heart wrenching when the infant is surrendered under coercion or false pretenses. For the adopted parents, adoption creates instant parenthood; for the birth parents, it takes enormous courage and love to surrender a baby. Birth mothers often suffer pangs of guilt and sadness as the years tick by. They imagine how their relinquished child is faring . . .

This is the story of an adoption in the Deep South of a baby girl, just under five pounds, who was stolen from her mother eight hours after birth. Prior to the Great Depression, from 1925 and through to 1950, a woman named Georgia Tann operated the Tennessee Children's Home Society in Memphis. She began her career by legitimately placing babies in adoptive home in Tennessee for a fee of \$7.50. Quite soon, however, she realized she could ship babies on a night flight with a nurse to affluent families all over the country. She cared only about their ability to pay, not if they were suitable parents. Her fees ranged from \$1,500 to \$2,000 per baby, plus expenses. During this period, the average annual income in the United States was just \$1,200 - \$2,000.

Georgia Tann's modus operandi was to shelter unwed, pregnant girls to seek out babies of the poor and promise their families care and schooling. While women were in the throes of childbirth and under sedation, Georgia Tann would have them sign surrender papers. These new mothers thought they were signing permission for her to care for the baby until they could do so themselves, but they were later told their babies had died or were stillborn. Georgia Tann was able to continue this criminal operation with the protection and help of city officials, judges, police, etc., to whom she gave kickbacks. She accumulated great wealth, but purporting herself as 'just average', lunching daily from a paper bag at her desk.

During Georgia Tann's tenure, she placed over 5,000 babies, most illegally. To the parents who chose to adopt me, my heart is full of gratitude for the wonderful life I was given.

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Nellie Kim:

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