

Before We Were Yours

Book Club Kit

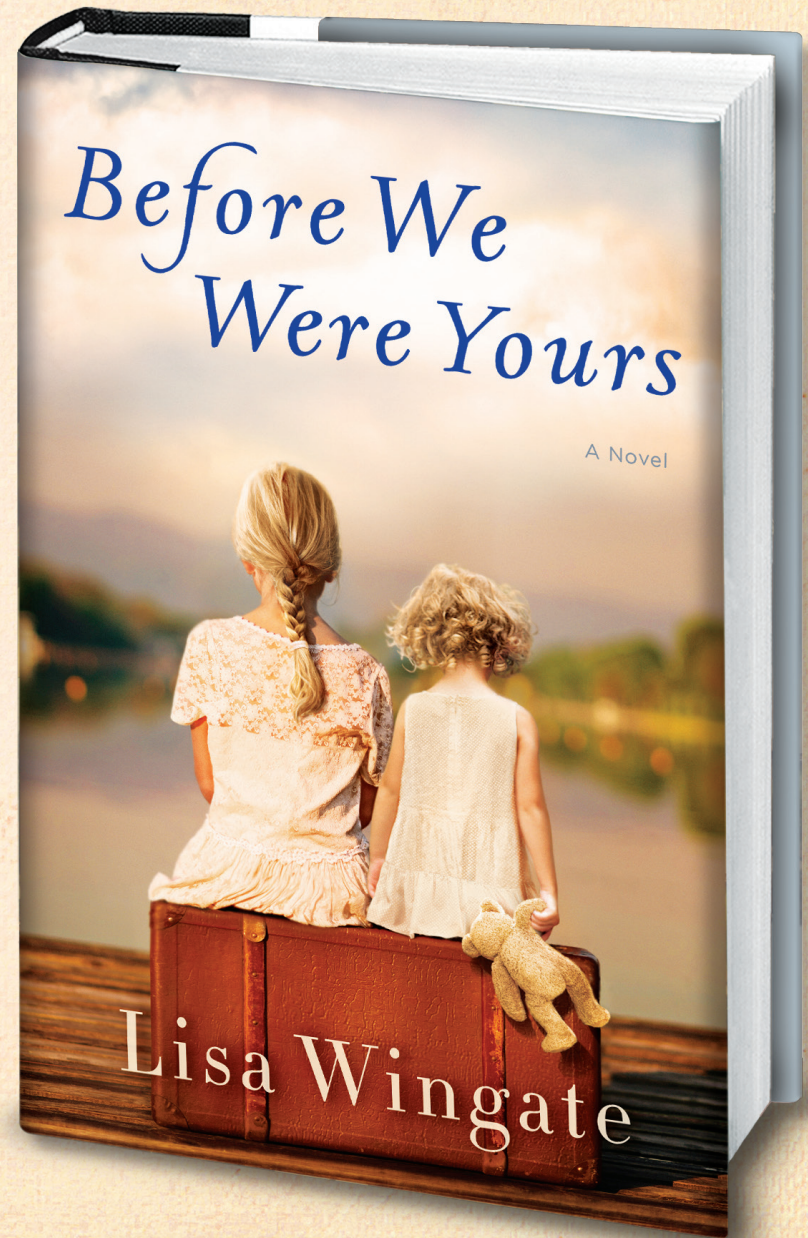


“**LISA WINGATE** takes an almost unthinkable chapter in our nation’s history and weaves a tale of enduring power. That Georgia Tann and her Memphis Tennessee Children’s Home Society could actually exist, unraveling the lives of countless children, stealing their pasts and changing their futures, will give you chills. But the real feat of this stirring novel is how deeply Wingate plunges us into the heart and mind of twelve-year-old river-gypsy, Rill Foss. Rill’s utterly singular voice will stay with you long after the last page is turned, as will Wingate’s courage to follow her anywhere . . .

VIVID AND AFFECTING.”

—**PAULA MCLAIN**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Paris Wife* and *Circling the Sun*

LISAWINGATE.COM



A riveting novel based on one of America's most notorious real-life adoption scandals.



Before We Were Yours

A NOTE FROM LISA WINGATE

The Foss children and the *Arcadia* were formed from the dust of imagination and the muddy waters of the Mississippi River. Though Rill and her siblings exist only in these pages, their experiences mirror those reported by children who were taken from their families from the 1920s through 1950.

The true story of Georgia Tann and the Memphis branch of the Tennessee Children's Home Society is a bizarre and sad paradox. There is little doubt that the organization rescued many children from deplorable, dangerous circumstances, or simply accepted children who were unwanted and placed them in loving homes. There is also little doubt that countless children were taken from loving parents without cause or due process and never seen again by their desperately grieving biological families. Survivor accounts bear out that empty-armed birth mothers pined for their missing children for decades and that many of those children were placed in holding facilities where they were neglected, molested, abused, and treated as objects.

Single mothers, indigent parents, women in mental wards, and those seeking help through welfare services and maternity clinics were particular targets. Birth mothers were duped into signing paperwork while under postpartum sedation, were told that turning over temporary custody was necessary to secure medical treatment for their children, or were often simply informed that their babies had died. Children who lived through stints in the home's custody—those who were old enough to have memories of

their prior lives—reported having been whisked from front porches, from roadsides while walking to school, and, yes, from houseboats on the river. Essentially, if you were poor and you lived, stayed, or stopped over in the proximity of Memphis, your children were at risk.

Blonds like the Foss siblings were particularly popular in Georgia Tann's system and were often targeted by “spotters” who worked in medical facilities and public aid clinics. Average residents of the city, while unaware of her methods, were not unaware of her work. For years, citizens watched for newspaper advertisements bearing photos of adorable babies and children, underscored by captions like “Yours For the Asking,” “Want a Real, Live Christmas Present?” and “George Wants to Play Catch, But He Needs a Daddy.” Georgia Tann was heralded as the “Mother of Modern Adoption” and was even consulted by Eleanor Roosevelt on matters of child welfare.

To the general public, Tann was simply a matronly, well-meaning woman who devoted her life to rescuing children in need. Her celebration of children adopted by wealthy, well-known families helped to popularize the idea of adoption in general and dispel the widespread belief that orphaned children were undesirable and inherently damaged. Georgia's high-profile list included political figures such as New York governor Herbert Lehman and Hollywood celebrities such as Joan Crawford and June Allyson and her husband, Dick Powell. Former staff members of Tann's orphanage in Memphis whispered of as many as seven babies at a time being spirited



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A NOTE FROM LISA WINGATE

away under cover of darkness for transportation to “foster homes” in California, New York, and other states. In reality, these children were often being shipped off to profitable out-of-state adoptions in which Tann pocketed the lion’s share of the exorbitant delivery fees. When interviewed about her methods, Georgia unabashedly extolled the virtues of removing children from lowly parents who could not possibly raise them properly and placing them with people of “high type.”

From a modern perspective, it’s hard to imagine how Georgia Tann and her network managed to operate largely unchecked for decades or where she found workers willing to turn a blind eye to the inhumane treatment of children in the organization’s group homes and in unlicensed boarding facilities, like the one where Rill and her siblings land, yet it happened. At one point, the U.S. Children’s Bureau sent an investigator to Memphis to probe the city’s soaring infant mortality rate. In a four-month period in 1945, a dysentery epidemic had caused the deaths of forty to fifty children under the care of Georgia’s facility, despite the efforts of a doctor who volunteered medical services there. Georgia, however, insisted that only two children had been lost. Under pressure, the state legislature passed a law mandating the licensing of every children’s boarding home in Tennessee. The newly passed legislation included a subsection providing an exemption for all boarding homes employed by Georgia Tann’s agency.

As you close these pages, perhaps you’re wondering, *How much of this is story is true?* That question is, in some ways, difficult to answer. If you’d

like to dig more deeply into the real-life history of baby farms, orphanages, changes in adoption, Georgia Tann, and the scandal surrounding the Tennessee Children’s Home Society in Memphis, you’ll find excellent information in *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* by Viviana A. Zelizer (1985), *Babies for Sale: The Tennessee Children’s Home Adoption Scandal* by Linda Tollett Austin (1993), *Alone in the World: Orphans and Orphanages in America* by Catherine Reef (2005), and *The Baby Thief: The Untold Story of Georgia Tann, the Baby Seller Who Corrupted Adoption* by Barbara Bisantz Raymond (2007), which also contains interviews with several of Georgia Tann’s victims. For a view of the scandal as it broke, see the original *Report to Governor Gordon Browning on Shelby County Branch, Tennessee Children’s Home Society* (1951), which is available through the public library system. There are also many newspaper and magazine articles available about the scandal as it happened and about the reunions of birth families in later years, as well as coverage in episodes of *60 Minutes*, *Unsolved Mysteries*, and *Investigation Discovery’s Deadly Women*. All of these sources were invaluable to me as research materials.

While Mrs. Murphy and her home in the story are fictional, Rill’s experiences there were inspired by those reported by survivors. There were also many who, due to abuse, neglect, illness, or inadequate medical attention, did not live to tell their stories. They are the silent victims of an unregulated system fueled by greed and financial opportunity.



Before We Were Yours

A NOTE FROM LISA WINGATE

Estimates as to the number of children who may have simply vanished under Georgia Tann's management range as high as five hundred. Thousands more disappeared into adoptions for profit in which names, birth dates, and birth records were altered to prevent biological families from finding their children.

One would assume, given these awful statistics, that Georgia Tann's reign would have eventually ended amid a firestorm of public revelations, police inquiries, and legal action. If *Before We Were Yours* were entirely fictional, that's how I would have written its end, with scenes of swift and certain justice. Sadly, this was not the case. Georgia's many years in the adoption business did not draw to a close until 1950. At a press conference that September, Governor Gordon Browning skirted the heartbreaking human tragedy of it all and instead discussed the money—Miss Tann, he reported, had benefited illegally to the tune of \$1 million (equivalent to roughly \$10 million today) while employed by the Tennessee Children's Home Society. Despite the revelation of her crimes, Tann was, by then, beyond the reach of legal action. Within days of the press conference, she succumbed to uterine cancer and died at home in her own bed. A newspaper exposé ran opposite her obituary on the front page of the local paper. Her children's home was closed and an investigator appointed, but he soon found himself stymied by powerful people with secrets, reputations, and, in some cases, adoptions to preserve.

While the closing of the home gave grieving birth families reason to

hope, that hope was quickly snatched from them. Legislators and political power brokers passed laws legalizing even the most questionable of her adoptions and sealing the records. Of the twenty-two wards remaining in Tann's care at the time of her death, only two—who had already been rejected by their adopted families—were returned to their birth parents. Thousands of birth families would never know what became of their children. The general public sentiment was that, having been given over from poverty to privilege, the children were better off where they were, no matter the circumstances of their adoptions.

While some adoptees, separated siblings, and birth families were able to find one another through pieced-together memories, documents spirited from courthouse files, and the assistance of private investigators, Georgia Tann's records would not finally be opened to her victims until 1995. For many birth parents and adoptees, who grieved their losses throughout their lifetimes, that was simply too late. For others, it was the beginning of long-delayed family reunions and the opportunity to finally tell their own stories.

If there is one overarching lesson to be learned from the Foss children and from the true-life story of the Tennessee Children's Home Society, it is that babies and children, no matter what corner of the world they hail from, are not commodities, or objects, or *blank slates*, as Georgia Tann so often represented her wards; they are human beings with histories, and needs, and hopes, and dreams of their own.



Before We Were Yours

HISTORICAL IMAGES

They'd Like to Be Your Christmas Gift



—Pres-Sentinel Photo
"Course, we aren't babies, but just the same we want a mother and daddy, too," say these youngsters, Polly, 2, John, 3, and Mary, 4, left to right above, who are among the 15 children and babies to

Siblings offered in a "Christmas Baby" ad. The Christmas Baby giveaway was a popular fixture in Memphis papers for years.



The Poplar Street mansion that housed the headquarters of The Tennessee Children's Home Society, Memphis Branch.



Georgia Tann posing with Baby Lucy, who is being cleaned up for adoption.



Before We Were Yours

HISTORICAL IMAGES



Georgia Tann posing in the reception parlor of the Poplar Street Mansion that served as her main orphanage and the headquarters for her child brokering business.

A TCHS ward offered as "Yours for the Asking!" in the Memphis paper. Such ads became so commonplace that some citizens of Memphis looked forward to the photos of the cute orphans with catchy titles and stories.

Yours for the Asking!
 George Wants to Play Catch But He Needs
 A Daddy to Complete Team
12/5/34

"Catch this ball, Daddy!"
 How would YOU like to have this handsome five-year-old play "catch" with you?
 How would you like his chubby arms to slip around your neck and give you a bearlike hug?
 His name is George and he may be yours for the asking. If you hurry along your request to the Christmas Baby Editor of The Press-Scimitar, in co-operation with Miss Georgia Tann of the Tennessee Children's Home Society, The Press-Scimitar will place 50 babies for

Wants Home

—Press-Scimitar Photo
 A solemn little trick with big, brown eyes, Madge is anxious for a new home and a mother and daddy.
 Madge is five years old and "awful lonesome," she told the photographer when he snapped her picture. And if you can help Madge out in this matter of getting a new set of parents and a chance to go to school, Miss Georgia Tann, executive secretary of Tennessee Children's Home Society, wants to hear from you. The little girl is a ward of the society.

A young Tennessee Children's Home Society ward advertised in the newspaper.



Before We Were Yours

FOOD IDEAS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB EVENT

SOUTHERN FRIED CATFISH

Serves: 4

- Eight 5- to 6-ounce catfish fillets, skin removed
- Salt
- Crab boil seasoning
- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup cornmeal
- Oil, for frying

DIRECTIONS

1. Heat a fryer or a deep pot halfway filled with oil to 350°F.
2. Sprinkle both sides of each catfish with salt and crab boil seasoning.
3. In a separate bowl, combine the flour and the cornmeal.
4. Dredge the catfish in the flour mixture and place in fryer.
5. Deep fry for approximately 7 to 8 minutes until done.
6. Drain on paper towels

Credit: FoodNetwork.com



“A POWERFUL TALE OF FAMILY, OF SISTERS, OF SECRETS KEPT AND SECRETS SHARED.

I absolutely loved this book. I’m still basking in the afterglow, in shock at the true-crime elements, in awe at the journey of these characters who seem to have immortal souls.”

—**JAMIE FORD**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* and *Songs of Willow Frost*



Before We Were Yours

FOOD IDEAS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB EVENT

BUTTERMILK BISCUITS

Serves: makes 10 biscuits

- 2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour, plus more or dusting the board (if you can get White Lily flour, your biscuits will be even better)
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- 1 tablespoon baking powder (use one without aluminum)
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt or 1 teaspoon salt
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, very cold
- 1 cup buttermilk (approximately)



DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat your oven to 450°F.
2. Combine the dry ingredients in a bowl, or in the bowl of a food processor.
3. Cut the butter into chunks and cut into the flour until it resembles coarse meal.
4. If using a food processor, just pulse a few times until this consistency is achieved.
5. Add the buttermilk and mix JUST until combined.
6. If it appears on the dry side, add a bit more buttermilk. It should be very wet.
7. Turn the dough out onto a floured board.
8. Gently, gently PAT (do NOT roll with a rolling pin) the dough out until it's about ½ inch thick. Fold the dough about 5 times, gently press the dough down to a 1 inch thick.
9. Use a round cutter to cut into rounds.
10. You can gently knead the scraps together and make a few more, but they will not be anywhere near as good as the first ones.
11. Place the biscuits on a cookie sheet—if you like soft sides, put them touching each other.
12. If you like “crusty” sides, put them about 1 inch apart- these will not rise as high as the biscuits put close together.
13. Bake for about 10-12 minutes—the biscuits will be a beautiful light golden brown on top and bottom.

Credit: Food.com



Before We Were Yours

FOOD IDEAS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB EVENT

OLD TIME BUTTERMILK PIE

Serves: one pie serves 8 pieces

- 9-inch unbaked pie shell
- ½ cup butter
- 2 cups sugar
- 2 rounded Tbsp flour
- 4 eggs, beaten
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- Dash nutmeg (optional)

DIRECTIONS

1. Soften butter, add sugar, cream together well.
2. Add flour and eggs, beat well. Stir in buttermilk, vanilla, and nutmeg.
3. Pour into unbaked pie shell.
4. Bake at 350°F for 45 to 50 minutes.
5. Cool completely before serving.
6. This pie is also wonderful with a handful of chocolate chips, a handful of chopped nuts, and a handful of coconut added to the pie shell before you pour the filling in.



“AN UNFORGETTABLE READ. This captivating novel will quite likely break your heart but because it’s Lisa Wingate at the helm, you will not be left broken. She is a master storyteller and never fails to get to the heart of what makes us hold onto hope.” —**SUSAN MEISSNER**, author of *Secrets of a Charmed Life*



Before We Were Yours

FOOD IDEAS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB EVENT



SOUTHERN STYLE SWEET ICED TEA

Serves: 12-15

- 6 regular tea bags
- 1/8 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 cups boiling water
- 1 1/2 -2 cups sugar
- 6 cups cold water

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large glass measuring cup, place the tea bags and add the baking soda.
2. Pour the boiling water over the tea bags.
3. Cover and steep for 15 minutes.
4. Take out the tea bags and do not squeeze them.
5. Pour the tea mixture into a 2-quart pitcher; add the sugar.
6. Stir until the sugar is dissolved.
7. Add in the cold water.
8. Let cool; chill in the refrigerator and serve over ice.

Credit: Food.com

OLD FASHIONED HOMEMADE FRESH LEMONADE

Serves: 6

- 1/2 cup of boiling water
- 1 1/2 cups of granulated sugar
- 1 1/2 cups of freshly squeezed lemon juice (about 8 lemons)
- Zest of one lemon
- 5 cups of cold water
- Additional sliced lemon for garnish (optional)



DIRECTIONS

1. Make a simple syrup by bringing 1/2 cup of water and the sugar to a boil.
2. Boil for 3 minutes, stirring regularly and heating until mixture becomes clear and slightly thickened.
3. Set mixture aside to cool.
4. Zest one of the lemons; set aside.
5. Squeeze the juice from about 8 lemons or until you have 1 1/2 cups of lemon juice.
6. Add the juice to a 2-quart pitcher along with the zest and cold water.
7. Whisk in the cooled simple syrup and refrigerate overnight or for at least 8 hours.
8. Serve in tall glasses over ice and garnish with lemon slices, if desired.

Credit: DeepSouthDish.com



Before We Were Yours

Q&A WITH LISA WINGATE

Before We Were Yours is based on a shocking piece of history. How did you come up with the idea?

For me, every piece of fiction begins with a spark. From there, the story travels on the winds of research and imagination. *Before We Were Yours* had the most unexpected kind of beginning.

I was up in the wee hours one winter night working and had the TV playing in the background. A rerun of the *Investigation Discovery: Dangerous Women* cycled through at about two in the morning. I looked up and saw images of an old mansion. The front room was filled with bassinets and babies. There were crying babies, laughing babies, babies who were red-cheeked and sweaty-faced and sickly looking. I tuned in and immediately became fascinated by the bizarre, tragic, and startling history of Georgia Tann and her Memphis branch of the Tennessee Children's Home Society. One of the most shocking things about the story was how recent it was. Georgia Tann and her children's home operated from the 1920s through 1950. I couldn't stop wondering about the children who had been victimized by Georgia's system, who had been brokered in adoptions for profit.

What became of them? Where are they now?

After digging into the story, I was shocked by the scope of Georgia's network

and the tragic consequences of her cruelty and greed. An estimated five-thousand babies and children passed through her hands. They were, quite simply, offered as products. Prospective parents could choose hair color, eye color, age, gender, religious background, genetic predisposition for talents such as art and music. Tann ran frequent newspaper ads, offering children as "Christmas presents" and "Yours for the asking!". It was just mindboggling and horrifying.

How long have you been at work on this book? Did the book involve special research?

About two years. Rill and her siblings in the novel and their shanty boat life on the Mississippi river began taking shape as I combed through accounts of birth parents who'd searched for their stolen children for decades and adoptees who'd searched for their birth families. Many of the children Tann offered were like the Foss Children. They were not orphans or unwanted children, but had been stolen from front porches, back yards, and hospital maternity wards. For years, adoptees and birth families searched for one another. They fought for the right to see their records, but they were not successful until 1996. For many birth parents and family members, who'd grieved their lost little ones a lifetime, that was simply too late.

My hope was to, in some way, tell their stories.



Before We Were Yours

Q&A WITH LISA WINGATE

What do you think readers will most love about your new book?

So much of what each of us experiences while reading a story doesn't come from what's on the pages but what's inside us. For some readers, *Before We Were Yours* will be a story of sisters, for others a story of family, for others a story of good versus evil, for others a story of personal triumph in the face of overwhelming obstacles.

I can tell you what I personally love most about *Before We Were Yours*. For me, it is a story of human connections, of the power, the importance, the necessity of those connections. In a world that grows more technology-interactive and less human-interactive by the day, it's easy to lose sight of what gives life its sweetest flavor. A chat with an old friend. A sunset watched from the porch together. An hour just lying in bed reading or talking. A walk side-by-side. A phone call. A hug. A note. In the end, both the modern-day and historical characters in *Before We Were Yours* are willing to risk everything else for one all-important thing—a place to be authentic and people to be authentic with. That's what I love most about the book.

I look forward to hearing what readers love most!

Stories and books are meant to be shared. What do you think makes one worth sharing?

As human beings, we're hardwired for sharing stories. We've been at it since before there were written alphabets, and words, and printing

presses, and yes, even e-readers with HD retina displays (imagine!). In generations past, families, friends, and tribe members sat together around cooking fires and told stories that entertained, that brought laughter, that encouraged bravery in battle, that reinforced moral lessons, and taught the young people who they were and where they came from. Guests who showed up for supper gave a tale and left with a tale to take along on the journey. Stories, by their very nature, are somehow incomplete until we've added our thoughts to them and passed them on to someone new. What makes a story worth sharing? Why, the way in which it intersects with your own story, with your life, your experiences, your thoughts and emotions, of course! Nothing in the world can drill down to the heart of us the way stories do. When we share them and share our thoughts about them, we're connecting with one another at the deepest level.

Have you always known you wanted to be a writer or was it an idea that came along later in life?

I've loved to write for as long as I can remember. My older brother was a good writer, and when you're the youngest in the family, you want to do what the older kids do. When he won a school award for his poem, "The Bee Went Under the Sea", I was so impressed by his literary brilliance (and the blue ribbon) that I immediately went to my bedroom and created my first book, *The Story of a Dog Named Frisky*. Frisky's tale was



Before We Were Yours

Q&A WITH LISA WINGATE

cleverly illustrated and published on manila paper in multiple editions which sold very well in the grandparent market.

Before We Were Yours tells a story within a story. Are dual timeframe stories a challenge to write?

Yes, dual timeframe stories present special challenges, but for me, there's something especially profound about discovering a historical story that's tied to a story in modern day. I think the appeal of this kind of story, in which we're watching as a current-day character discovers the life of someone from the past, is that the story offers the thrill of discovery in a unique way. The historical story becomes broader, richer, and in a sense more real because we see how the threads of past lives reach into modern day. I think most of us wonder about the rumors, tall tales and oft-repeated anecdotes in our families. How much is true? What really happened? Who were the people who came before us? What secrets did they have? We can't help but imagine what might be hidden in our own family histories and how it might have affected today's generations. Stories in dual time frames are about discovering those connections and unearthing the long-buried secrets.

As a writer, it's an interesting dance, balancing dual time frames and a story within a story. It falls in the category of double-the-work and double-the-risk, but also double-the-fascination and double-the-reward.

There's twice as much research, but in doubling the research, you also discover twice as many interesting historical facts, unanswered questions, and nearly-forgotten bits of history. Those fascinators weave new threads into the story loom. For me, the biggest challenge ensuring that both stories are fully satisfying, and that the historical story serves a purpose in modern-day characters' lives.



Before We Were Yours

MUSIC PLAYLIST INSPIRED BY THE NOVEL

Before We Were Yours Playlist:

- "Summertime" by Billie Holiday
- "It Don't Mean a Thing" by Duke Ellington
- "I Got Rhythm" by George Gershwin
- "Aura Lea (Love Me Tender)" by Elvis Presley (mentioned in the book)
- "Proud Mary" by Creedence Clearwater Revival
- "Whiskey River" by Willie Nelson
- "Lazy River" by Louise Armstrong
- "Ol' Man River" by The Beach Boys or Paul Robeson or Frank Sinatra
- "Puttin' On the Ritz" by Frank Sinatra
- "Isn't It Romantic" by Ella Fitzgerald

"LISA WINGATE'S HEART-RACING TALE

of a family ripped apart by the Tennessee Children's Home Society scandal, rang so true I couldn't sleep until I knew their fate. Days later, I'm still haunted by the diabolical plot to steal and sell the most vulnerable children to high bidders, sanctioned by high-ranking officials who looked the other way."

—**JULIE KIBLER**, bestselling author of *Calling Me Home*



Before We Were Yours

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Before We Were Yours* alternates between the historical story of the Foss Children and the modern-day story of Avery Stafford. Did you have a favorite between these story lines? Which one and why?
2. Many families have been touched in some way by adoption and foster care. Is adoption or foster care in your family history? If so, how did that affect your thoughts about the journey of the Foss children and about Avery's excavation of her family history?
3. When the sisters were originally reunited, they decided to keep their history to themselves rather than telling their families. Do you agree or disagree with this decision? What do you think the implications would have been if they had gone public? Do you think family secrets should remain secret, particularly after the people who kept those secrets have passed away? Or do family secrets belong to the next generation, as well? Have you ever discovered a secret in your family history? If so, what was it (if you care to share it, that is)?
4. "There was a little girl who had a little curl . . ." is a touchstone between Avery and her Grandma Judy. Is there a song or saying that reminds you of someone special in your childhood? Where does your mind travel when you hear it or repeat it?
5. Avery laments that the busy schedule expected of a Stafford has prevented her from spending time on Edisto Island with her sisters or Elliot. "Who chooses the schedules we keep? We do, I guess," she tells herself but excuses this with, "the good life demands a lot of maintenance." In our modern age are we too busy? Too preoccupied with accumulating things to actually enjoy what we have? Too dialed into media and social media? What are your thoughts on this? What would you like to change about your own schedule? Anything? What might you gain if you did?
6. While Rill sees her life on the Arcadia through the idyllic eyes of childhood, May in her old age seems to acknowledge that she wouldn't have traded the life she lived for a different one. Do you think she wonders whether Queenie and Briny's unconventional existence on the Arcadia could have been sustainable as times changed or more children were added to the family? Were Queenie and Briny responsible or careless in their choices?
7. May says, "A woman's past need not predict her future. She can dance to her own music if she chooses." How has your past made you who you are? What do you want to leave behind? Anything? What is the true "music" of your own soul? Are you in step with it or out of step? What helps you hear your own music and find balance in your life?



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

8. When fear of being caught threatens to prevent her from escaping Miss Murphy's house, Rill tells herself, "I shush my mind because your mind can ruin you if you let it." Does your mind ever ruin you? In what way? On what issues? May comments, "We're always trying to persuade ourselves of things." Are women particularly guilty of this? What do we tell ourselves that we shouldn't?
9. Child trafficking, abuse, and economic disadvantage still imperil the lives and futures of children today. What can we as ordinary citizens do to prevent children from being robbed of safe, happy childhoods? What can society do to prevent people like Georgia Tann from taking advantage of the most helpless and vulnerable among us?
10. Did you search for more information about Georgia Tann and the Tennessee Children's Home Society after reading *Before We Were Yours*? What did you learn? Based on what you learned, what do you think motivated Georgia Tann? Why were so many people willing to be complicit in her schemes when they knew children were suffering? Was Georgia's network a creature of the political corruption and societal attitudes of its time or could something like this happen today?
11. Avery feels the pressure of being in a high-profile political family. Do you think famous families are held to a higher standard than others? Should they be? Has this changed in recent years or is it just harder to keep secrets in today's media-crazed world?
12. How did Avery grow as a result of her discoveries about the family's past? How did it change her view of herself and her family's expectations for her? Did your family have expectations for you that you didn't agree with? Who in Avery's family might struggle most to accept her decision to change her life plans?
13. Do you think there will be a happily-ever-after ending for Avery and Trent? In your view, what might that look like?
14. How would you describe Rill as she struggles through the abduction, the orphanage, and her decision to return to her adoptive family? Did you admire her? What changes did you see in her as a result of the experience? How is she different when she gets to the Sevier's house?



Before We Were Yours

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

15. Avery struggles to come to terms with Grandma Judy's dementia. Her family wrestles with difficult choices about Grandma Judy's care. Has memory loss and elder care affected your family? In what way? What issues did it cause and how did you deal with them? Have you imagined what it would be like to be a victim of memory loss?
16. The Seviars seem to have adopted the Foss girls with good intentions. Do you think they were aware of or at all suspicious of Georgia Tann's methods? Should they have been?
17. What symbolism do you see in the picture of the sisters on the wall? How do you think the sisters felt during their Sisters Days? Do you have sisters you are close to or sister-friends you spend time with? What does that bond mean to you?
18. Did you wish all seven of the Foss siblings could have found one another in the end? In your opinion, would that have been realistic or unrealistic? Why do you think the author chose not to bring all of the siblings back together?
19. This novel has garnered worldwide interest in the publishing industry and is being translated for publication in at least fourteen countries. Why do you think the story drew international attention? What themes in it are universal?
20. Was the cover a factor in your bookclub's decision to read *Before We Were Yours*? What reaction did you have to the cover and title?
21. Will you be passing the book on to someone else? Will it remain on your bookshelf? Will you give a copy to someone you know?