



The Baby Thief: The Untold Story of Georgia Tann, the Baby Seller Who Corrupted Adoption

Barbara Bisanz Raymond

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The story, first told by Barbara Raymond in a magazine article that inspired a *60 Minutes* feature, was shocking. Georgia Tann, nationally lauded for arranging adoptions out of her children's home in Memphis, Tennessee, was actually a baby seller who terrorized poor, often unwed mothers by stealing their children and selling them to wealthy clients like actors Joan Crawford and Dick Powell. Parents would keep toddlers indoors, and the mother superior of a local orphanage hid babies in attics, but, protected by political boss Ed Crump, Tann sold over 5,000 children, and did much worse. So many died through neglect that Memphis's infant mortality rate soared to the highest in the country. Tann abused some of her charges, and placed others with pedophiles. During her twenty-six years of operation from 1924 to 1950, Tann also virtually invented modern American adoption, popularizing it, commercializing it, and corrupting it with secrecy. To cover her crimes, Tann falsified adoptees' birth certificates, sealing their true ones and issuing new ones that portrayed adoptive parents as birth parents. This practice was approved by legislators across the country who believed it would spare adoptees the onus of illegitimacy.

An adoptive mother and award-winning journalist who interviewed hundreds of Georgia Tann victims, Barbara Raymond has written a riveting account of a little known and dark chapter in American history. Its themes continue to reverberate, with most states still denying adult adoptees their original birth certificates and harboring other remnants of Tann's corrupt practices.



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