



Book of the Week

***Before We Were Yours* by Lisa Wingate**

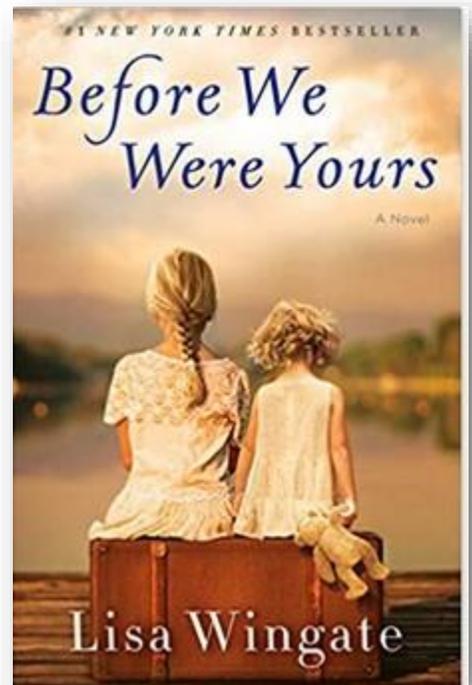
Book Review by Sue Minchew

Members of the Friends of the Library Board have decided to begin a Book of the Week series with board members reviewing some of their favorites. I have always loved books, but they have really sustained and entertained me during this pandemic. Thus, I was happy to write about one of my favorite recent reads.

Before We Were Yours by Lisa Wingate is a book that grabbed me and wouldn't let go, and it has stayed with me long after I finished reading it. The novel is based on a true-life scandal involving the Tennessee Children's Home Society Orphanage in Memphis run by Georgia Tann, who appears as herself in the book. Tann and her minions, with the support of police and politicians, actually abducted indigent children from their parents, placed them in the orphanage (in horrendous conditions), and sold them to wealthy parents.

Wingate utilizes two narrators and two different time frames, alternating between Avery Stafford in present day Aiken, South Carolina, and Rill Foss, a 12-year-old girl living on a shanty boat on the Mississippi River in 1939. When the novel opens, Avery, a successful prosecutor in Maryland, has come home to South Carolina to help her ill father, who is a wealthy senator. She is being groomed for his senate seat if he should be unable to continue in office. By chance, during one of her father's visit to an assistive living home, she meets an elderly woman who seems to know her. Intrigued, Avery begins to look into her family's past, uncovering secrets long buried.

Rill's story begins with a description of the idyllic life that she and her four younger siblings have with their parents traveling up and down the river. One stormy night when Rill's mother Queenie goes into a difficult labor, her father Briny has to transport Queenie across the river to a hospital in Memphis, leaving Rill in charge of her siblings. While her parents are away, a policeman and some other men arrive at the shanty boat and take the children to the Tennessee Children's Home Orphanage for "safe



keeping” until their parents can return. It does not take Rill long to realize that they have, in fact, been kidnapped to be adopted by wealthy parents.

As Avery discovers more about her family’s past, the two stories intersect.

The novel was one of the most engrossing that I have ever read. It was also one of the most shocking as I learned about the scandalous practice by the Tennessee Children’s Home Society in Memphis of literally trafficking children, kidnapping and selling children for adoption.

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