



“Everybody thinks it’s right to give the child away”

Unwed Mothers at Booth Memorial Hospital, 1961-63

Kim Heikkila

On Wednesday, January 4, 1961, a young woman, just turned 21, stood shivering on the steps of a stately brick mansion on Como Avenue in St. Paul. Five feet ten inches, with a fair complexion and dark brown hair and eyes, she had been a journalism student at the University of Minnesota. Though smart and capable, she had made much of the social life that her model good-looks

afforded her at the university. The former high school wallflower had blossomed on campus, becoming a sought-after date. On this day, however, she might have regretted her recent popularity as she hunched her shoulders against the cold, suitcase in hand, silent mother at her side. A

billowy winter coat almost hid her swollen belly as she awaited entry to the Salvation Army’s Booth Memorial Hospital, a home and hospital for unwed mothers.

Sharon Lee Moore, the young woman who entered Booth that day in 1961, was my mother. She was

Sharon Lee Moore's high school graduation photo, Spring Lake Park High School, 1957; Salvation Army's Booth Memorial Hospital, 1471 Como Avenue, St. Paul, 1920.

nearly nine months along by the time she turned herself over to the Salvation Army staff and social workers who would usher her through the final days of her pregnancy. She delivered her baby, a girl, on January 16; then surrendered her for adoption so that, as she would write many years later, the child would not “start life as an ‘illegitimate’ little person doomed to failure because of me.”¹ She named her baby Lynette, counted her fingers and toes, and then let her go. Several days later, she left Booth empty-armed and heavy-hearted. For the next 33 years—through marriage to my father, my birth on Mother’s Day 1968 and that of my brother in 1970, and a 20-year career in marketing at Carlson Companies—she carried her burden in silence. Then, in 1994, “Lynette” found her birth mother, releasing our mother from her secret.

Sharon Moore’s stay at Booth came at the peak of the maternity home movement and adoption surrender practice in the United States. Maternity homes had emerged in the late nineteenth century as a means of containing women’s illicit sexual behavior. After World War II, the maternity homes overflowed with single white girls “in trouble”—the result of changing psychoanalytical explanations of unwed pregnancies; a growing gap between actual sexual behavior and conservative social mores; a baby boom that wasn’t confined to married couples; and an increasing demand for adoptable white babies. Booth, one of three maternity homes in the Twin Cities in 1961, operated at 102.1 percent of its



Sharon Moore (left) was runner up at the Miss Engineering Day pageant, University of Minnesota; undated, but between 1958 and 1960.

46-bed capacity, the second-highest occupancy rate in its history. My sister was one of 466 “illegitimate” children born at Booth that year. She was also one of the 70 to 80 percent of babies born in Salvation Army maternity homes nationwide who went home in the arms of strangers.²

The Salvation Army claimed that the release of newborns for adop-

tion occurred “in harmony with their mothers’ wishes.” On the most superficial level, this seemed to be true of my mother’s situation. The Anoka County caseworker assigned to her had written that it was “Sharon’s own decision to place the child,” and my mother herself would later write that she had sought out Booth’s services and decided to release her baby for adoption. When she told me the story, she did so with little embellishment—I got pregnant. I went to Booth. I gave my baby up for adoption—and I accepted it in much the same vein. We had been more focused on my sister’s arrival in the present than on her disappearance

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Some One Cared



OPPORTUNITY FOR SELF EXPRESSION



UNDERSTANDING PREGNANCY & BIRTH



SPIRITUAL RENEWAL



ACCREDITED SCHOOL PROGRAM PROVIDED BY THE ST. PAUL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



RELAXING



CHECK UP TIME



A GOOD BEGINNING

I am very grateful for having a friend such as Booth Memorial Hospital. The work you people do is so tremendous that I cannot find words to express it..... May it continue throughout the ages. You have lifted me from the depth of despair into a new awareness of my abilities and into a life of peace with and within myself. Thank you unendingly.

May God bless you for your love and concern for me and others who share this problem.

*Many Thanks
Linda*

* THIS IS A TESTIMONIAL TO THE BOOTH MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

from my mother's past. Only later, upon reading Ann Fessler's *The Girls Who Went Away: The Hidden History of Women Who Surrendered Children for Adoption in the Decades Before Roe v. Wade*, did I come to understand how complex and difficult her decision must have been. Based on oral history interviews with dozens of birth mothers, Fessler's book reveals the pressures—cultural, professional, and familial—under which they relinquished their children.³

After my mother died, in 2009, I realized that I had squandered the opportunity to ask her more about her adoption decision. Instead, I began researching the history of Booth Memorial Hospital and its onetime residents in hopes that learning more about them would help me know my mother better. In the process, I found a unique source: interviews conducted by University of Minnesota social work professor

"Some One Cared" tri-fold brochure for Booth Memorial Hospital, undated but from late 1950s or early 1960s; indicates various services and activities provided by Booth and contains a testimonial from "Linda," a grateful unwed mother served by Booth.

Gisela Konopka and her assistant, Vernie-Mae Czaky, with 33 "Booth girls" in October 1963. These interviews feature the voices of the unwed mothers-to-be rather than the social welfare experts whose perspectives typically dominated public discourse about single pregnant girls and the organizations designed to serve them.⁴ Unlike the retrospective accounts written by these birth mothers decades later, the Konopka interviews provide a glimpse into a crucial moment in time for these young women as they teetered on the edge of a culturally proscribed motherhood. They show girls looking to the future as they made the difficult decision to surrender, believing that separation afforded the best chance of success for their babies.

They also make clear that this belief reflected the cultural biases and limited choices available to single, white pregnant girls in midcentury America. Following the advice of parents and social workers and cognizant of the double standard that held girls, but not boys, responsible for upholding traditional standards of sexual propriety, the young women who surrendered their babies often felt they had no other choice.

Booth Memorial Hospital, Adoption, and the Unwed Mother

The Salvation Army began tending to women in crisis in St. Paul in 1898, when it opened a rescue home for "fallen" women—the poor, the homeless, the addicted, the prostitute, the

unwed mother—at University Avenue and Jackson Street. In 1913, the rescue home moved into a new building at 1471 Como Avenue, and by 1920, all of the residents were unmarried pregnant girls and women, whom the Salvation Army had come to believe were more malleable than hardened prostitutes. Salvation Army officials saw unmarried mothers as victims of exploitative men and encouraged them to keep their babies in hopes that the maternal bond would cement their transformation into proper women. “The Salvation Army never separates mother and child,” Booth superintendent Anna Cowden told the *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* in January 1921.⁵

After World War II, however, social welfare experts came to see the relinquishment of white, illegitimate children for adoption as the “best solution”—for a child in need of a stable family, for an unwed mother wanting a fresh start, and for an infertile couple yearning for a baby. This solution maintained conservative values that condemned premarital sex while tacitly acknowledging the increasing willingness of young people to flout such conventions. In 1957, the same year the baby boom peaked, the number of babies born to unmarried women in the United States surpassed 200,000 for the first time, a 125 percent increase since 1940. While the overall birthrate in the United States increased less than 1 percent from 1960 to 1961, the illegitimate birthrate rose 7 percent. These trends were mirrored in Minnesota, when from June 1960 to June 1961, the overall birthrate increased by 0.4 percent over the preceding year, but the illegitimate birthrate jumped by 8.8 percent, reaching its highest level in 20 years. Nearly one in five of those births occurred at the Salvation Army maternity home, by then known as Booth Memorial Hospital.⁶



Salvation Army Brigadier Gunborg Fugelsang (standing) presides over religious service at Booth, sometime in the early 1960s.

By this time, social workers and maternity home staff no longer viewed the child born out of wedlock as the vehicle for the mother's redemption. Instead, the primary goal was to safeguard the child's future, oftentimes from the child's own mother, who many experts viewed as emotionally and economically unstable. In their eyes, women like my mother were neurotics driven by a subconscious desire to become pregnant in order to compensate for dysfunctional relationships with their own parents. “The vast majority of unmarried mothers represent girls and women who have had some problems with their own parent-child relationship,” US Children's Bureau chief Katherine Brownwell Oettinger told the *St. Paul Dispatch* for a series of articles about “girls in trouble” in 1959. Still, caseworkers believed in the possibility of recovery for these

allegedly damaged women. The Salvation Army promised that its program of spiritual guidance, medical care, educational programming, and social casework would provide the unmarried mother with “a life rekindled, a faith renewed, and a new beginning.”⁷

Rehabilitation for the mother, however, could not come at the expense of the child. Although the Salvation Army insisted that its goal was to help each individual mother-to-be arrive at her own decision regarding her baby, it also argued that “the rights of the child . . . must be kept in mind to insure that [it] is given the opportunity to grow up in the best possible social, economic, moral, spiritual, and emotional environment.” In Minnesota, as elsewhere, child welfare officials believed that adoption was the best means of providing “illegitimate” children with

Caseworkers believed in the possibility of recovery for these allegedly damaged women.

these “protections” and thus often steered girls toward adoption. In 1956, a state study found that surrendering mothers received “fuller and better service” from staff in Twin Cities maternity homes than did those who elected to keep their babies; 11 years later, the Minnesota Council on Illegitimacy described caseworkers as “more responsive” to mothers who chose adoption.⁸

Many infertile couples were eager to take children into their homes. The postwar period witnessed an expanded acceptance of adoption as a means of creating families. As occupancy at maternity homes across the country soared, so, too, did formal adoptions, increasing from 50,000 in 1945 to the historic peak of 175,000 in 1970. The majority of these newly formed families united white parents with white babies. This resulted not only from differing attitudes regarding premarital pregnancy and relinquishment among blacks and whites, but also from racist practices by maternity homes and adoption agencies that denied services to African Americans and from race-based economic inequality that made it more difficult for prospective black parents to adopt. As historian Barbara Melosh argues, “adoption was a strategy of upward mobility that, in practice, benefited whites almost exclusively.”⁹

Sharon Moore’s surprise pregnancy in 1960 landed her squarely in the middle of these dynamics. A middle-class white woman with an otherwise bright future, she entered Booth “with her plans well formulated,” according to her caseworker.

Nevertheless, however carefully she had “considered her own future as well as that of the child,” she made her decision in an atmosphere that encouraged relinquishment.¹⁰ The Konopka interviews reveal the painful deliberations undertaken by young women like my mother as they weighed their personal circumstances and desires against such cultural pressures.

The Konopka Interviews

“My baby is beautiful and I am giving her up,” a 17-year-old Caucasian girl told Vernie-Mae Czaky on October 16, 1963. She and her boyfriend had planned to marry when they learned she was pregnant, but she broke the engagement after her mother emerged from an alcohol treatment program. The girl decided to focus on repairing her relationship with her mother and finishing high school, and she wanted to give her recently delivered baby a chance for a better life than she herself had had. “She is a part of me,” the girl explained. “She always will be my daughter but I realize that it is not fair for me to keep her. She is in very good hands and that’s what I want for her.”¹¹

This young mother was one of the 33 Booth residents, aged 14 to 19, who agreed to participate in Gisela Konopka’s study of adolescent girls “in conflict” with society’s mores. Konopka was a professor of social work at the University of Minnesota from 1947 to 1978. Born in Germany in 1910 and arrested at least twice for anti-Nazi activities, she arrived in the United States in 1941 and spent



Gisela Konopka, professor and director of the University of Minnesota’s Center for Youth Development, 1965.

the next several decades studying social group work methods and advocating for adolescents. She took a special interest in teenaged girls, especially those who violated prevailing social norms. Konopka was aided by Vernie-Mae Czaky, a research fellow in the School of Social Work and former sergeant in the Women’s Army Corps during World War II. Of biracial descent, Czaky was instrumental to the project until she became seriously ill in July 1965 and had to turn her duties over to another assistant. Once each week between October 3 and November 6, 1963, however, Czaky spent a day at the maternity home, interviewing girls about their values, relationships, and goals. Caucasians accounted for 31 of the girls; 2 were “Indian.” Most of them were working- or middle-class, Protestant schoolgirls who otherwise had not run afoul of law or custom. Seven of them had already had their babies and were waiting out the eight-day post-delivery period at Booth. Konopka and Czaky compiled information about the girls from the records kept by Booth’s casework

supervisor, Evelyn Headen, but assured the participants that their identities would remain confidential and that nothing they said would be passed on to Booth staff. Konopka insisted that her goal was “only to listen and to learn.”¹²

What she heard was young women struggling with the ramifications of their illicit pregnancies, for both their babies and themselves. More than half of the young women—18 out of 33—clearly stated that they planned on having their infants adopted. Three others had made plans to keep and raise their babies: two with the babies’ fathers, one with the help of a supportive aunt. Although the remaining 12 girls did not explicitly say that their babies would be adopted, many of them implied as much. They spoke of returning to schools or hometowns where nobody would know what had happened or starting new families under better conditions. In any case, the majority of the girls expected to be separated from their babies.

Most girls indicated that adoption was their choice of last resort, but a few expressed conviction in their decision. Sometimes they came from troubled families and wanted more stability for their children. One 17-year-old white girl had been impregnated by a 31-year-old “colored” man. At the time of her interview, her child’s father was in jail and she was on parole to Booth from the Sauk Centre Home School for Girls, where she had been sent for running away from home multiple times. She admitted that she wasn’t ready to take care of a baby. “I have two years left to be a teen-ager and I want to go out and have fun,” she told Czaky. She also envisioned a more secure life for her child. “I have to give up the baby because I know the father will not marry me and I want the baby to have a mother and a dad.”¹³

Brigadier Mrs. Gunborg L. Fugelsang interviews girl.

Major Alfreda Foster examines baby needing special care.

The Forward Look

Unwed motherhood is an increasing social problem. The Salvation Army offers both help and hope to girls who face the dilemma

By MRS. MAJOR JOHN TROUTT

FIFTEEN-year-old Mary—pretty, petite, well-dressed and popular in school—did little serious thinking or worrying until she learned she was pregnant.

What should she do? Her parents were well-known in the community and respected. She was too young to marry. Besides, she didn't love the father of her baby.

After consulting her pastor, Mary's parents took her to the Booth Memorial Hospital at St. Paul, Minn., where arrangements were made for her to stay until her baby was born.

The first few weeks, Mary was unhappy, threatened to run away and showed her resentment in many ways. She wouldn't eat, ignored rules and told everyone that she didn't need or want any friends. She either refused to talk to people or else growled. "Just leave

me alone; I can get along by myself," when anyone approached her.

Gradually, however, after weeks of counseling and understanding care, her attitude changed. She began to make friends and to take an interest in the activities around her.

Before she left Booth hospital, she told some of the staff members that she now had new values in life, and although she regretted the experience that had brought her to Booth, she believed that the future would be a very different one.

Mary is just one of the five hundred fifty-eight girls cared for at the hospital last year. Some were at the home only a few days, while others stayed for several months. This Salvation Army home for unwed mothers, with a capacity for fifty-seven girls, is typical of thirty-five other homes and hospitals

in the United States, located in the larger cities.

Thirty-one per cent of the girls who came to the St. Paul home last year were from fifteen to seventeen years old, with two per cent even younger. For them the Army has set up a program that provides for continuity in their education. School goes on for these girls—in smaller classes and away from the conventional school setting—but with four qualified teachers from the public school system, who conduct classes at the home five days a week, from nine until three.

Graduation is a big event every year. Last June chubby little Rose walked up to the high school principal who presented her with her diploma, proud to know that she had earned it, even though she had removed herself from

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Booth Memorial Hospital was featured in a look at unwed motherhood as an increasing social problem in the Salvation Army's national publication War Cry, March 17, 1962.

Even girls who came from more secure backgrounds and had committed partners sometimes felt it better to release their babies than to begin a family under the stress of illegitimacy. “A boy wants to marry me but I will not do it,” one 19-year-old said. She had witnessed the demise of her brother’s marriage, prompted by an unplanned pregnancy, and believed that her niece “would have had a much better life if her mother would have given her away.”¹⁴

In some instances, young women chose to surrender their babies even

when boyfriends and parents had urged them to retain custody. A 19-year-old American Indian mother believed that she was ill-prepared to raise her baby, despite her parents’ willingness to help. She may have been leery of their offer, given her own troubled upbringing. She said that she had had intercourse with multiple partners, having first been “introduced” to sex by an uncle who lived in her family home. Her father had “played around with other women,” and the girl had cycled through nine foster homes before

landing at Sauk Centre for stealing. Her parents and new boyfriend urged her to keep her baby, but she refused. "I don't know what kind of life I have ready for it and a child should have love and a good home." Besides that, she did not want to taint her own future with a marriage formed under such circumstances. "I just want to get married and . . . put everything out of my past."¹⁵

This girl was not the only one who saw adoption as a way of preserving her own future as well as her baby's. Booth girls wanted to attend college, get jobs, marry, and become mothers in stable families—prospects that an illicit pregnancy threatened to derail. The desire to start over with a "clean slate," as one girl put it,¹⁶ reflected the realities of American culture. In 1963, high schools and colleges were within their rights to expel or deny admission to pregnant or parenting girls. It would take Congress another nine years to outlaw such sex discrimination in education, and six more after that (1978) to ban employment discrimination against pregnant women, married or single.

Unwed motherhood also compromised young women's ability to partake in the "American dream." Like many Americans, Booth girls were entranced by the good life promoted by Hollywood and Madison Avenue, on campaign trails, in church pews, and at family dinner tables—the one in which the white, middle-class, nuclear family played a starring role. According to the dominant cultural narrative of the day, this idealized family embodied American political virtue and it was girls' responsibility to maintain the moral virtue on which it depended. Nineteen of the interviewees said they believed, as one 16-year-old put it, "sex should be saved until after marriage," and several of them agreed with another interviewee that "it's the



A Booth caseworker counsels a young woman, early 1960s.

girl who ought to say 'no.'" Although they may not have linked their personal moral virtue to the nation's, they struggled with implications of the gap between their behavior and the values with which they had been raised. "I was brought up in a good Christian home, and we had high moral standards," a 19-year-old said. "I had thought very strongly against pre-marital sex behavior. But now, I don't know what to say."¹⁷

Some Booth girls openly criticized the sexual double standard as they hid behind the walls of a maternity home while their male partners continued their educations or pursued new jobs and relationships. "When one has relations, the man's ego is flattered, yet the woman is looked down upon," one self-assured girl told Czaky. When she got pregnant, her boyfriend—whom she had thought

she would marry—left her in order to pursue a college education. But she, too, had been accepted to college and had "ambitions and dreams." Her predicament was so stressful that she had become suicidal; eventually she sought help from a psychiatrist, who apparently helped her make a difficult decision. "After I have now decided to give up my baby, there is a comforting thought. I can start a renewed life. . . . I tell you women really carry the responsibility."¹⁸

This young woman was not alone in suggesting that others had encouraged the decision to surrender, either through direct counsel or the withholding of essential support. Many girls in Konopka's study would have needed their parents' assistance in order to raise their children, even if their boyfriends had proposed marriage; in 1963 in Minnesota, girls aged

16 to 18 needed parental approval to wed. If marriage was not an option, a single mother could apply for Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) funds if she was willing to endure the accompanying stigma. Some officials condemned ADC as “a tax-supported brand of prostitution,” suggesting it was better to remove children from unmarried mothers than to use public money for “subsidizing immorality.” Housing for single mothers was also in short supply.¹⁹

Without the safety net of public assistance or parental support, then, many unmarried mothers felt they had little choice but to release their babies. One 19-year-old had dropped out of high school after becoming pregnant with her first out-of-wedlock child, whom she surrendered, and had been working as a waitress when she got pregnant again. She wanted to keep this second baby but felt she could not do so without the support of her parents, who, according to the case notes, “refuse to have anything to do with it.” A 16-year-old wanted to raise her child with the help of her boyfriend, but her father refused to

“I want to keep my child so badly but I have no place to go. I have no choice.”

grant permission to marry. “When I have delivered, I will have to go to a foster home,” she said. “I want to keep my child so badly but I have no place to go. I have no choice.”²⁰

Ministers, doctors, probation officers, psychiatrists, and social workers also counseled unwed mothers-to-be. While some Booth girls had sought the assistance of such experts on their own, others had been compelled to work with them under mandate of the court, county welfare department, or Booth itself. Although the details of those interactions are not available, the Konopka records hint at the influence such professionals wielded, given the girls’ sense of themselves and their plans for the future. A 16-year-old girl who cried throughout her interview seemed to embody the stereotypical neurotic unwed mother. “Perhaps I deliberately got myself into

this,” she said, speculating that she had wanted a baby to make up for a lonely childhood with a self-absorbed mother. Either she was an unusually self-aware girl or she had internalized messages she had received from various people: the school psychiatrist who counseled her after a suicide attempt, the minister who encouraged her to leave school to avoid the baby’s father, the social worker who “suggests to give up the baby.” She wanted to raise her child, she said, but “everybody thinks it’s right to give the child away. . . . I can’t support it and I have to give it away.”²¹

A social worker appeared to have played an instrumental role in helping another girl, herself an adoptee, make plans for her newly delivered son. Coincidentally, this same social worker had facilitated the adoption of the girl’s brother some years earlier, so knew some of the girl’s family history. Although the girl’s adoptive parents were “very understanding and willing to help,” she had decided to relinquish her son. “The social worker said I had many years ahead of me,” she reported, then mentioned an infertile couple who had been longing for a baby. “How happy they would be if they could have one. Many of us can have more.” She also wanted to spare her son the stigma of illegitimacy. “It’s better that I bear the grief and the mark instead of the child. It was my mark, not his.” Still, letting go of her baby boy was not easy. “You can’t help but love the child,” she told Czaky.

A baby born at Booth, early 1960s. Many unwed mothers without a safety net felt they had little choice but to release their babies.



"After the delivery, I saw the baby before he was cleaned up and again after he was cleaned up. He had dark features and hair like me. It was hard for me to give him up, but I realized he would have a happy home."²²

AS THIS GIRL AND OTHERS make clear, the decision to release a baby for adoption was not a selfish tossing away of responsibility. Although some Booth girls indicated that surrendering their babies preserved their power to make choices—not to marry, not to assume a responsibility for which they were not prepared—most of them felt powerless to choose anything but surrender. They lived in a world of circumscribed options that trapped them in a stifling double bind. They faced legally sanctioned discrimination, pervasive cultural stigma, and a professional community that believed "illegitimate" children would be better off in adoptive homes. So, oftentimes against their own desires, they released their babies to what they hoped would be a future free from economic privation, familial instability, and the taint of illegitimacy. Yet what social workers had assured them was a noble sacrifice was sometimes condemned as self-serving and callous: "They Give Away 'Own Flesh and Blood,'" proclaimed a 1965 *Minneapolis Star* headline.²³

But the Booth girls whom Konopka and Czaky interviewed understood what they were giving up when they decided to let their babies go. The pain of separation was especially acute for those who had already delivered. They became "very subdued," or "cold and unsmiling," or "quite depressed," and tried to make sense of their pain by leaning ever more heavily on the better future promised by parents, ministers, counselors, and social workers. Whether they had chosen adoption freely or



Booth staff members pose in front of fireplace inside the facility, Christmastime, 1965. Brigadier Gunborg Fugelsang is standing, left.

under pressure, due to personal or structural limitations, surrendering mothers wanted people to understand that they did so with the best interests of their children at heart. "Most of us really feel we care for the babies and we love them," a 17-year-old told Czaky. "If the older people realize we love the babies, then perhaps there will be less hate for the girls that get in trouble."²⁴

End of an Era

These Booth girls constituted one small segment of the population featured in Gisela Konopka's 1966 book, *The Adolescent Girl in Conflict*. Although single pregnant girls and their adoption decisions were not the primary focus of her study, Konopka

offered some important insights about both. Unlike many experts who viewed unmarried mothers as neurotic and hostile, Konopka described those she had met as lonely but intelligent girls who had had intercourse within the bounds of committed relationships even though they had been raised to believe that premarital sex, especially for girls, was immoral. Moreover, Konopka believed that "the majority [of girls] would keep their babies if there were provisions for their doing so." She argued that unmarried mothers deserved "physical and emotional support" and services, such as childcare assistance, that would allow them to raise their children "with dignity."²⁵

By the time Konopka published her plea, the tide had already begun

to turn. Although the number of out-of-wedlock births in Minnesota had increased each year from the time Sharon Moore gave birth in 1961 to the time Konopka's book was released, fewer single pregnant women were concealing their pregnancies inside maternity homes. In 1965, just over one-quarter of single pregnant girls and women in Minnesota sought assistance from the four maternity homes throughout the state; four years later, fewer than one-sixth did so. *Newsweek* reported the demise of the "old-fashioned home for unwed mothers" in 1972, describing it as a casualty of "liberal attitudes that gave rise to the Pill and legal abortion."²⁶

No longer did single pregnant women have to secret themselves away in order to save face. Nor did they feel so compelled to let others raise their babies. The national Salvation Army office reported that 60 percent of its single mothers relinquished their babies for adoption in 1966, a decrease of 10 percentage points from 1961. In 1970, a committee charged with studying unwed mothers in St. Paul found that only 40 percent surrendered children for adoption. Just a year later, the Ramsey County Welfare Department noted that 77 percent of unmarried mothers opted to *keep* their babies, signaling an almost complete inversion of the Salvation Army figures from 1961. In 1975, Gisela Konopka reported that many of the teenaged girls she had met in the course of her new research believed that unmarried mothers should raise their own babies, and that surrendering for adoption was "far less acceptable than it [had] been ten years ago."²⁷

These cultural shifts contributed to Booth's demise as a home and hospital for unwed mothers. By the time Booth completed a controversial, years-long remodeling project in

1969, the home was struggling to fill its beds. From the peak, overbooked years of 1959–61, occupancy at Booth had fallen by 1968 to 61 percent in the home department and 31 percent in the hospital. In February 1971, Booth closed its hospital facilities, sending all of its mothers to the University of Minnesota hospital for delivery, and began providing residential care for girls referred by the juvenile court.²⁸ In 1973, the year marking the 75th anniversary of its origins as the Salvation Army Rescue Home, Booth shuttered its program for unwed mothers altogether and became the Booth Brown House, which today provides temporary shelter and transitional housing at the Como Avenue facility for young people aged 16 to 25.

THE RECORDS DON'T REVEAL what became of the Booth girls that Gisela Konopka and Vernie-Mae Czaky interviewed in 1963, including whether or not those who planned to have their babies adopted by others ultimately let them go. Likewise, the lives these children went on to lead were not recorded. The identities of the girls and their children were kept confidential and birth and adoption records from that time period are notoriously difficult to obtain, even for adoptees themselves. But the story of a young woman who delivered a baby girl at Booth in January 1961 is known.

Sharon Moore Wikstrom married, raised a family, flourished in her career, and saw her husband through a years-long battle with Parkinson's disease, all the while keeping her past a secret from her family until her first child reappeared in her life in 1994. What was an exciting revelation to me and my brother provided my mother with some long-sought closure, answers to questions she had not allowed herself to ask aloud for more than 30 years. She returned to the

University of Minnesota in 1997, a year after my father died, to complete her bachelor's degree, this time in English and creative writing. Among the reams of paper she left behind when she died were two essays and a prose poem detailing her experiences as an unwed mother caught in midcentury America's gap between changing sexual behavior and traditional sexual mores. Her writings portray Booth as the brick-and-mortar embodiment of this disconnect.

For Sharon Wikstrom, the redemption that supposedly resulted from surrendering her baby for adoption came with a cost: years of doubt, denial, and self-condemnation. "During the first year of my child's life," she wrote in the late 1990s, "I had all the nightmares and regrets I thought I deserved, but I learned to seal off the painful memories and tuck them into a place where they wouldn't destroy me." She spent years wondering if her child had had the good life she'd been promised. Her wounds began to heal when her daughter, named Kim by her adoptive parents, re-entered her life 33 years later. Thus it was reunion, not separation, that redeemed her, and even then the past was not so easy to let go. Kim's return helped my mother come closer to accepting that she had done the best she could in difficult circumstances. But the scars of silence remained. "I cherish [Kim's] presence in my life," she wrote, "even though it has forced me to let go of some long-held illusions about who I really am. . . . Silence and secrecy take a toll. My reticence is rooted deep and tangled and strong, and just when I think I have weeded out my fear enough to confide in someone, a green tendril of doubt shoots up to remind me of who I am and what I have done and what I have too often left undone."²⁹

If Kim's return helped my mother achieve an uneasy sense of closure



Sharon and Lynette/Kim, just after reuniting, 1994; another view from 2008, one year before Sharon's death.

about a pivotal period in her life, for me it opened a new window onto a woman I thought I had known. Only after she died did I realize how little I actually understood, and so I turned to the historical record with both regret and hope. Although the Konopka interviews are not perfect

reflections of my mother's experience, "hearing" the Booth girls of 1963 explain why they planned to release their babies for adoption provided insight into who my mother had been and what she had done. As such, they helped me compensate for what I had left undone. ▣

The author is currently conducting oral history interviews with former residents and staff of Booth Memorial Hospital. If you or someone you know worked, lived, or delivered a baby at Booth, please contact Kim Heikkila at kimheikkila68@gmail.com.

Notes

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1. Sharon (Lee Moore) Wikstrom, "Birth Rite," unpublished manuscript, n.d., in author's

possession, likely written as part of her coursework in creative writing when she returned to the University of Minnesota in 1997.

2. "St. Paul Booth Memorial Hospital, Percentage of Occupancy," box 47, folder 12, United Way of the Saint Paul Area Organizational Records, Minnesota Historical Society (hereafter cited as United Way Records MNHS); United Way Records MNHS, box 47, folder 4, undated memo containing admissions data for area maternity homes; Salvation Army, "Service to Unmarried Parents and Their Children, 1961," 7, Women's Social Services—Rescue Homes (Unwed Mothers), Salvation Army National Archives (hereafter WSS-SANA); United Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, Oct. 1, 1962, United Way Records

MNHS, box 47, folder 5, Booth Memorial Hospital Records. Booth served as both a home and hospital: a 46-bed wing of the facility served those in the late stages of pregnancy; the hospital delivery wing had 11 beds. Like maternity homes throughout the US, Booth was not a licensed adoption agency; infants often were placed in foster homes while awaiting final placement in adoptive families as arranged by agencies such as Lutheran Social Services.

3. WSS-SANA, 7; "Referral History Guide," packet prepared by Patricia Peart, caseworker for the Anoka County Welfare Board, January 1961, in author's possession; Sharon Wikstrom, "Greyhound," unpublished manuscript, n.d., 14; Ann Fessler, *The Girls Who Went Away: The Hidden*

History of Women Who Surrendered Children for Adoption in the Decades Before Roe v. Wade (Penguin, 2006).

4. See, for example, Fessler; Linda Back McKay, *Shadow Mothers: Stories of Adoption and Reunion* (North Star Press of St. Cloud [MN]: 1998); Meredith Hall, *Without a Map: A Memoir* (Beacon Press: 2007). An exception is Jean Thompson's *The House of Tomorrow* (Signet/Harper & Row, 1967), a memoir about the time Thompson spent in a Salvation Army maternity home in 1960.

5. Kim Heikkila, "'Brighter and Better': Building the New Salvation Army Rescue Home of St. Paul, 1913," *Ramsey County History* (Spring 2016), 3-11; "200 Unwed Mothers Cared for Annually at Maternity Home," *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* (Jan. 23, 1921), 26, available online at Historical Minneapolis Tribune, MNHS. The shift to serving unwed mothers was not unique to the Salvation Army, and though the distinction between supposedly predatory prostitutes and victimized unwed mothers did not always hold in reality—some prostitutes certainly became unwed mothers—rescue home workers emphasized the difference in order to maintain the righteousness of their work. See Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (Yale University Press, 1993), 16-25; Diane Winston, *Red-Hot & Righteous: The Urban Religion of the Salvation Army* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 157-158.

6. Barbara Melosh, *Strangers and Kin: The American Way of Adoption* (Harvard University Press, 2002), 106; Elaine Tyler May, *Barren in the Promised Land: Childless Americans and the Pursuit of Happiness* (Basic Books, 1995), 140-147; Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe v. Wade* (Routledge, 1992); Alan Petigny, *The Permissive Society: America, 1941-1965* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 114-115, 125; Solinger, 13; Stephanie J. Ventura and Christine A. Bachrach, "Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States, 1940-1999," *National Vital Statistics Reports* 48.16 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Oct. 18, 2000), 2, 10, http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr48/nvs48_16.pdf; "Vital Statistics of the United States, 1961, Volume I - Natality," 1-3, 1-14, 2-91, National Center for Health Statistics, 1961, available online at http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/vsus/vsus_1961_1.pdf; "Booth Memorial Hospital Study," April 8, 1963, 2, box 10, "Unwed Mother Study" folder, Community Planning Organization (St. Paul) Records, MNHS. Solinger demonstrates the race-specific understandings of single pregnancy: white women were viewed as neurotic but redeemable, while black women were supposedly acting out their biologically inferior hypersexuality (see ch. 2). Consequently, homes for unwed mothers, premised on the notion of reforming malleable behavior and psyches, largely excluded black women thought to be enacting immutable biological characteristics.

7. Falsum Russell, "Varied Reasons Given for Illegitimacy Rise," *St. Paul Dispatch*, Oct. 26, 1959; "The 20th Baby: Where to Turn," Salvation Army brochure, c. 1961, WSS-SANA.

8. "Service to Unmarried Parents," 7; "The Unmarried Mother in Hennepin County: A Committee Report of the Family and Child Welfare Division," October 1956, 6, box 19, folder 5, Community Health and Welfare Council, Hennepin County, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota (hereafter CHWC-HC, SWHA). See also Kunzel, ch. 2; Melosh, ch. 3; Solinger, ch. 3; Cara Kinzelman, "A Certain Kind of Girl: Social Workers and the Creation of the Pathological Unwed Mother, 1918-1940" PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2013; Leontine Young, *Out of Wedlock: A Study of the Problems of the Unmarried Mother and Her Child* (McGraw-Hill, 1954); Sara B. Edlin, *The Unmarried Mother in Our Society: A Frank and Constructive Approach to an Age-Old Problem* (Farrar, Straus and Young, 1954). Committee on Services to Unmarried Mothers Meeting Minutes, April 15, 1956, folder 3, and "Report of Ad Hoc Committee on Unmarried Mothers Who Keep Their Babies," Minnesota Council on Illegitimacy, 1967, folder 10, both in box 19, CHWC-HC, SWHA; Melosh, 124-129.

9. Melosh, 105, 108, 148-153 (quote from 153). For more on race and adoption, including racial matching policies, efforts to expand adoption in the African American community, and transracial adoption (usually of Asian children from outside of the US), see Ellen Herman, *Kinship by Design: A History of Adoption in the Modern United States* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), ch. 7.

10. Quotes from "Referral History Guide."

11. Interview BH-240, Adolescent Girl in Conflict: Individual Interviews—Booth Memorial Hospital (Unwed Mothers) 1963, box 19, folder 2, Gisela Konopka papers, University Archives, University of Minnesota (hereafter Konopka papers). All interview records come from these papers.

12. "Unwed Mothers—General Tabulation," Dec. 1, 1964, 2, box 17, folder "AGC: Progress Report as of April 30, 1965," Konopka papers; "Presentation For Booth Memorial Hospital Staff," n.d., box 19, folder 2, Konopka papers; quote from letter from Gisela Konopka to prospective study participants, Sept. 26, 1963, box 19, folder 2, Konopka papers. The "Unwed Mothers" report noted, "Negroes were under care at Booth Memorial Hospital . . . but did not volunteer to participate." The Salvation Army declared "its arms [were] open to receive all, regardless of religion, nationality, race and color" ("Service to Unmarried Parents," 2), but given the widespread racialized notions of single pregnancy and adoptability of "illegitimate" babies, it is clear that white females dominated Booth's population. In her final data and analysis reports, Konopka counted only 32 interviews from Booth, noting that one girl "failed" the interview. The interview records contain notes from all 33 girls, however, so I have included all of them in this article. For a complete biography of Konopka,

see Janice Andrews-Schenk, *Rebellious Spirit: Gisela Konopka* (Beaver's Pond Press, 2005).

13. BH-236, "Final Tabulation," n.d., box 19, folder 1, Konopka papers. BH-236 and BH-219 were the only interviewees who mentioned the race of their babies' fathers ("colored" and "Mexican," respectively). Czaky noted that BH-236 seemed to warm to the interview once she realized that Czaky herself was "mixed." BH-236 was one of six Booth girls in the study who had had a "major court hearing," most often for running away from home or other "miscellaneous" offenses.

14. BH-228. Among the girls who indicated they would release their babies for adoption, half reported that the fathers had either proposed marriage or were contributing toward the cost of the girl's stay at Booth. In some cases, both the young man and young woman wanted to marry but were prevented from doing so by their parents; in at least three instances, the girl declined the boy's offer of marriage. Nine of the interviewees said that they did not want to be forced into marriage because of an unplanned pregnancy.

15. BH-245. As Melosh points out, some pregnant girls and women—especially those from white working-class, rural, evangelical, and African American communities—faced as much stigma for relinquishing their babies as for keeping them (142-144). BH-219 faced an extreme form of pressure when her Mexican boyfriend "threatened her if she gave up the baby." Two of his sisters had become pregnant outside of marriage and "were keeping their babies. He thought, therefore, that this girl should keep hers." She had already delivered her baby and explained, "I have no husband to go visit," so she "had to let the baby go." The parents of BH-224's boyfriend wanted her to keep the baby, but she was concerned that if she did, "everybody would know" about her illegitimate pregnancy. BH-241, BH-243, and BH-248 all said that someone—parents, boyfriend, or other family members—wanted them to keep their babies but that they had not made a decision at the time of the interview.

16. BH-223.

17. Solinger, ch. 1, esp. 34-38; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (Basic Books, 1988); BH-230; BH-237; BH-229. Six young women said that, at least in certain circumstances, sex before marriage was acceptable. One girl said she believed premarital sex was "a sin because it results in pregnancy, not because it is bad in itself" (emphasis in original, BH-222). In 1963, access to the birth control pill was still largely limited to married women and legal abortion was yet to become the law of the land. If they engaged in intercourse, they risked becoming pregnant and bearing responsibility for the child. Although sex education in public schools was often perfunctory and sometimes absent, many girls said they understood that sex could lead to pregnancy and that their sex education had been sufficient.

They said they'd decided to have sex in spite of the risk of pregnancy because they had gotten caught up in the moment or believed they wouldn't get pregnant. Of the 19 girls who discussed their sex education, roughly equal numbers felt it was sufficient and felt it was lacking; sometimes the same girl expressed both opinions, as did BH-248, who said her mother had discussed "everything including intercourse" with her, but that she "never had any birth control information." She and two other girls (BH-239 and BH-241) were the only ones to explicitly mention birth control, and only one of them (BH-241) said she'd been provided enough information about it (from her mother).

18. BH-222. High school girls could continue their education at Booth through the St. Paul school system, which stationed four teachers at the home. In 1964, 15 girls received their high school diplomas while at Booth. "Unmarried Mother Services in Greater Minneapolis," June 1966, 39, box 19, folder 7, CHWC-HC, SHWA. Twelve interviewees said that wives should put home and family before career, even if they wanted to get a college degree.

19. Carl Rowan, "The Family: A Failure?: Increase in Unwed Mothers is an Index of the Problem," *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Feb. 25, 1959, 13; Ruth Chaskel, "Changing Patterns of Services for Unmarried Parents," *Social Casework*, January 1968, 7. Rowan contrasted this punitive attitude with the more benevolent view of most social workers, including Katherine Oettinger of the Children's Bureau, who stated, "punishment is not the answer to the crisis of the unmarried mother." Chaskel notes, "the fewest societal hurdles are placed in the way of unwed mothers who fall into two particular categories, those who give up their babies for adoption and those who do not need community support" (5). Otherwise, she wrote, they "are still deprived, generally neglected, and disadvantaged" (10).

20. BH-220; BH-233. Boys aged 18–20 needed parental consent in order to marry. BH-220 was one of eight interviewees whose families had some prior history of extramarital childbearing.

21. BH-242. This girl's obvious angst over her decision to surrender her baby embodied what Melosh says most social workers wanted of their clients: careful deliberation about the painful decision, but a decision to relinquish nonetheless. See Melosh, 125.

22. BH-237. Despite the increasing demand for adoptable white babies during this time period, this was the only girl who expressed any awareness of how her sacrifice would affect the fortunes of prospective adopters.

23. Ben Kaufman, "They Give Away 'Own Flesh and Blood,'" *Minneapolis Star*, Aug. 19, 1965; "Discussion Guide: Termination of Parental Rights," letter from T. O. Olson, Southern Minnesota Chapter, National Association of Social Workers, Aug. 24, 1965, box 19, folder 10, CHWC-HC, SHWA. Kaufman observed a day in Judge Lindsay Arthur's courtroom, with court

referee Alden Sheffield interviewing single mothers who had petitioned the court to place their children for adoption. Sheffield scolded one girl for not being willing "to put forth the effort [to raise] her own flesh and blood." Minnesota social workers vehemently objected to the portrayal of surrendering mothers as "calloused, unfeeling people" and noted that "the majority [of them] struggle over their decision to surrender." Social workers worried that Kaufman's article would deter both unmarried mothers and prospective adoptive parents from pursuing adoption. Other press coverage of unwed mothers during this period was more sympathetic but was often couched in a patronizing tone. See, for example, Falsum Russell, "They Are Not 'Born Bad,'" *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Oct. 25, 1959, Second Section, 15; "WCCO Television Reports: Unwed Mothers," recorded Oct. 26, 1960, aired Nov. 28, 1960, available online at the Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, University of Georgia Library Special Collections, <http://www.libs.uga.edu/media/collections/peabody/>. Thanks to Amanda Campbell, my St. Catherine University Summer Scholars partner, for her careful deconstruction of the discourse in the WCCO program.

24. BH-223; BH-240; BH-245; BH-250. The case notes make no comment about the link between the disposition descriptions and the fact that the girls had just delivered and surrendered their babies. BH-250.

25. "Presentation at Booth Memorial Hospital," prepared by Vernie Mae-Czaky, Nov. 6, 1963, Adolescent Girl in Conflict: Individual Interviews—Booth Memorial Hospital (Unwed Mothers) 1963, box 19, folder 1, Konopka papers; Gisela Konopka, *The Adolescent Girl in Conflict* (Prentice-Hall, 1966), 127–129. As early as 1961, sociologist Clark E. Vincent challenged the prevailing notion that young women who became pregnant out of wedlock were neurotic or in any significant way different from their nonpregnant peers. See Vincent, *Unmarried Mothers* (Free Press, 1961). Konopka also pointed out that, in the past, society punished premaritally pregnant women by forcing them to keep their babies. In midcentury America, however, "the unmarried mother is made to feel that she is totally selfish if she keeps her child." Of the 181 girls Konopka interviewed, 76 of them were unmarried mothers residing in the three Twin Cities maternity homes, 32 of them at Booth (see note 12).

26. "Unmarried Mother Services in Greater Minneapolis" and "Some Facts About Out of Wedlock Births in Minnesota," Jan. 10, 1967, Minnesota Dept. of Public Welfare, folder 6, both in box 19, CHWC-HC, SHWA; "Unwed Mother Study," 1970, 10, 11, Community Health and Welfare Planning Council, Greater St. Paul Area, MNHS; "Aunt Martha's Decline," *Newsweek*, March 27, 1972, 100. The illegitimate birthrate in Minnesota continued to climb, even while the overall birthrate declined.

27. Lucille J. Grow, "Unmarried Parents Served by the Salvation Army, Selected Data Col-

lected April through June 1969," June 1, 1970, 12, WSS-SANA; "Unwed Mother Study," 1970; Ramsey County Welfare Department Annual Report 1971, 26, Ramsey County Welfare Dept. Annual Reports, MNHS; Gisela Konopka, "The Changing Family: The Adolescent Girl," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, April 1, 1975, 384. The marked difference between the figures reported by the Salvation Army and the Ramsey County Welfare Board might also be attributable to the fact that the welfare board had contact with a greater number and more diverse crowd of unmarried mothers. The 1970 "Unwed Mother Study" noted that 62 percent of unmarried mothers worked with county welfare boards vs. 38 percent of mothers who sought help from voluntary agencies; moreover, only 20 percent of unmarried mothers received residential care at any of the four maternity homes throughout Minnesota (4). Thus, to the extent that mothers served by maternity homes were more likely than others to release their babies for adoption, the percentage of welfare board clients who opted to keep their babies may have always been higher. The decline in the number who relinquished their babies for adoption corresponded to the decline in number of completed adoptions in the U.S., which peaked at 175,000 in 1970 and has decreased in the decades since. See Melosh, 105, 243; "Adoption Statistics," The Adoption History Project, <http://pages.uoregon.edu/adoption/topics/adoptionstatistics.htm>.

28. "Unwed Mother Study," 3; "St. Paul Booth Memorial Hospital, Percentage of Occupancy." Booth had been affiliated with the University of Minnesota for most of its existence. Medical students trained at Booth, doctors from the university provided onsite care, and women who needed more than basic delivery services were sent to the University of Minnesota Hospital. In January 1964, Booth became a licensed affiliate of this hospital.

29. Wikstrom, "Greyhound," 19; "Birth Rite," 10.

Photos on p. 229 (top), MNHS collections; p. 229 (left), 230, 239, courtesy of Kim Heikkila; p. 231, 234, 237, Salvation Army Central Territories Museum; p. 232, 235, 236, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries; p. 233, University of Minnesota Archives, University of Minnesota—Twin Cities.



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