

house's history is obvious through the countless interviews they conducted and their efforts to include historical details that situate the house and its occupants within a broader Iowa story. Because memories involve stringing together brief snippets of lives and conversations with people no longer living, some of the narrative does stray into supposition where no facts provide concrete answers and there were a few missteps in critically evaluating a small number of historical sources and details. Overall, however, it is a well-written, inviting narrative with lovely, informative images. Though centering on the story of one house, at its heart, this book is about families, the memories we attach to places, and finding where we belong.

Booth Girls: Pregnancy, Adoption, & the Secrets We Kept, by Kim Heikkila. Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2021. 256 pp. 21 black and white photos, notes, index, bibliography. \$18.95 paperback.

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What was it like to be an unmarried pregnant woman in the Midwest in the 1950s and 60s?

Kim Heikkila's book, *Booth Girls: Pregnancy, Adoption, and the Secrets We Kept*, offers us a social and oral history of a particular institution (the Booth Hospital in Minneapolis-St. Paul) and the women it served, embedded within a complex set of memoir narratives that intertwine Heikkila's mother's experience of mothering (through relinquishment, and through parenting) with Heikkila's narrative (through pregnancy loss and adoption). These narrative threads—of her mom, of herself, and of the women at Booth in the 1960s—offer a meaningful view of unmarried pregnancy at the time.

As I read *Booth Girls*, the word that kept coming to mind to describe the experience was "stuck." Heikkila's mom (Sharon) and the other young women at Booth were quite simply—and quite intractably—stuck. For a time, Sharon was stranded at home—sent to live in the upstairs room where no one could see her and proof of her pregnancy. Of this time, Heikkila writes, "she was hidden in plain sight, when shame and uncertainty and anger and boredom collided in a modest house on Tyler Street" (64). Then, she was stuck at Booth until she labored and delivered. Next, as we learn from the later passages in *Booth Girls*, Sharon was stuck living a particular version of femininity—as a lively coed

more concerned about looks than books, then married and mothering, and then waiting for a grandchild.

Heikkila notes that the experience of unwed pregnancy was almost uniformly a shameful one (71). Even after the shame of pregnancy was gone, Booth Girls had to learn to live with the shame of having relinquished a child—and, to live unable to speak publicly about the relinquishment or acknowledge the loss. Much later, they might have to live with the shame evoked by the appearance of the relinquished child, and the need to tell their families about it. It's not an accident that Heikkila's book begins with her mother telling her and her brother that they have a sibling they've never known about—the “confessions” related to adoption are part of the cultural history of relinquishment. Notably, tragically, shame is also the experience of a woman, like Heikkila, who suffers pregnancy loss, who adopts internationally, and who is concerned that she's not parenting well.

Booth Girls does important historical work in documenting the practices of Salvationists who staffed the hospital and in examining the experiences of the women who lived there. It also does significant historical work in providing data regarding unwed mothering and a history of relinquishment and adoption practices and in contextualizing the decisions that women made at this time. Heikkila is clear that race and socioeconomic status are determinants of women's experiences of unwed pregnancy, and the manuscript attends closely to how these differences played out in women's lives. *Booth Girls* does perhaps even more important work as a memoir though. Indeed, it is in the juxtaposition of Heikkila's life with her mother's, and with the Booth Girls she profiles, that we truly get a sense of the lived experience of mothering in the Midwest, and the ways that adoption and childbirth both make and unmake families.