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**BASED ON THE TRUE STORY OF A MEMPHIS ORPHANAGE
RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KIDNAPPING AND SELLING OF
THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN IN ILLEGAL ADOPTIONS**

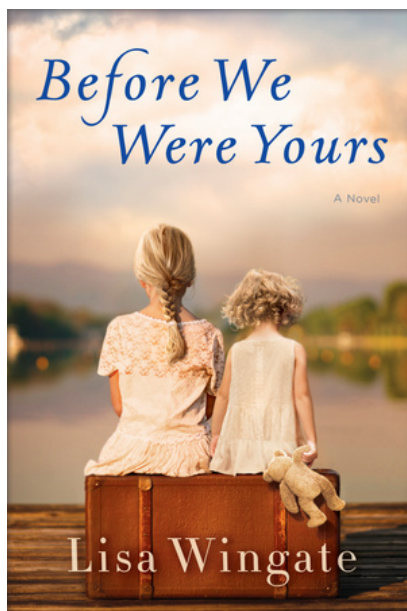
“**[A] fantastic novel . . . Wingate is a compelling storyteller, steeping her narrative with a forward momentum that keeps the reader . . . engaged and curious.**”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“**Thought-provoking . . . strong . . .** Wingate weaves a complex tale about two families, two generations apart, linked by an injustice, based on a notorious true-life scandal.”

—*Library Journal*

“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 *Circling the Sun***



Memphis, 1939. Twelve-year-old Rill Foss and her four younger siblings live a magical life aboard their family’s Mississippi River shantyboat. But when their father must rush their mother to the hospital one stormy night, Rill is left in charge—until strangers arrive in force. Wrenched from all that is familiar and thrown into a Tennessee Children’s Home Society orphanage, the Foss children are assured that they will soon be returned to their parents—but they quickly realize the dark truth. At the mercy of the facility’s cruel director, Rill fights to keep her sisters and brother together in a world of danger and uncertainty.

Aiken, South Carolina, present day. Born into wealth and privilege, Avery Stafford seems to have it all: a successful career as a federal prosecutor, a handsome fiancé, and a lavish wedding on the horizon. But when Avery returns home to help her father weather a health crisis, a chance encounter leaves her with uncomfortable questions and compels her to take a journey through her family’s long-hidden history, on a path that will ultimately lead either to devastation or to redemption.

Based on one of America’s most notorious real-life scandals—in which Georgia Tann, director of a Memphis-based adoption organization, kidnapped and sold poor children to wealthy families all over the country— **BEFORE WE WERE YOURS (Ballantine Hardcover/ On Sale: June 6, 2017)** is a riveting, wrenching, and ultimately uplifting tale reminds us how, even though the paths we take can lead to many places, the heart never forgets where we belong.

LISA WINGATE is a former journalist, inspirational speaker, and bestselling author of more than twenty novels. Her work has won or been nominated for many awards, including the Pat Conroy Southern Book Prize, the Oklahoma Book Award, the Utah Library Award, The Carol Award, the Christy Award, and the RT Booklovers Reviewer's Choice Award. The group Americans for More Civility, a kindness watchdog organization, selected Lisa along with six others as recipients of the National Civics Award, which celebrates public figures who work to promote greater kindness and civility in American life. *Booklist* summed up her work by saying, "Lisa Wingate is, quite simply, a master storyteller."

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BEFORE WE WERE YOURS

A Novel

By Lisa Wingate

Ballantine Hardcover/ On Sale Date: June 6, 2017/ Price: \$26.00

ISBN: 9780425284681 / eBook ISBN: 9780425284698

MORE ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *BEFORE WE WERE YOURS*

"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*

"**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*, 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."

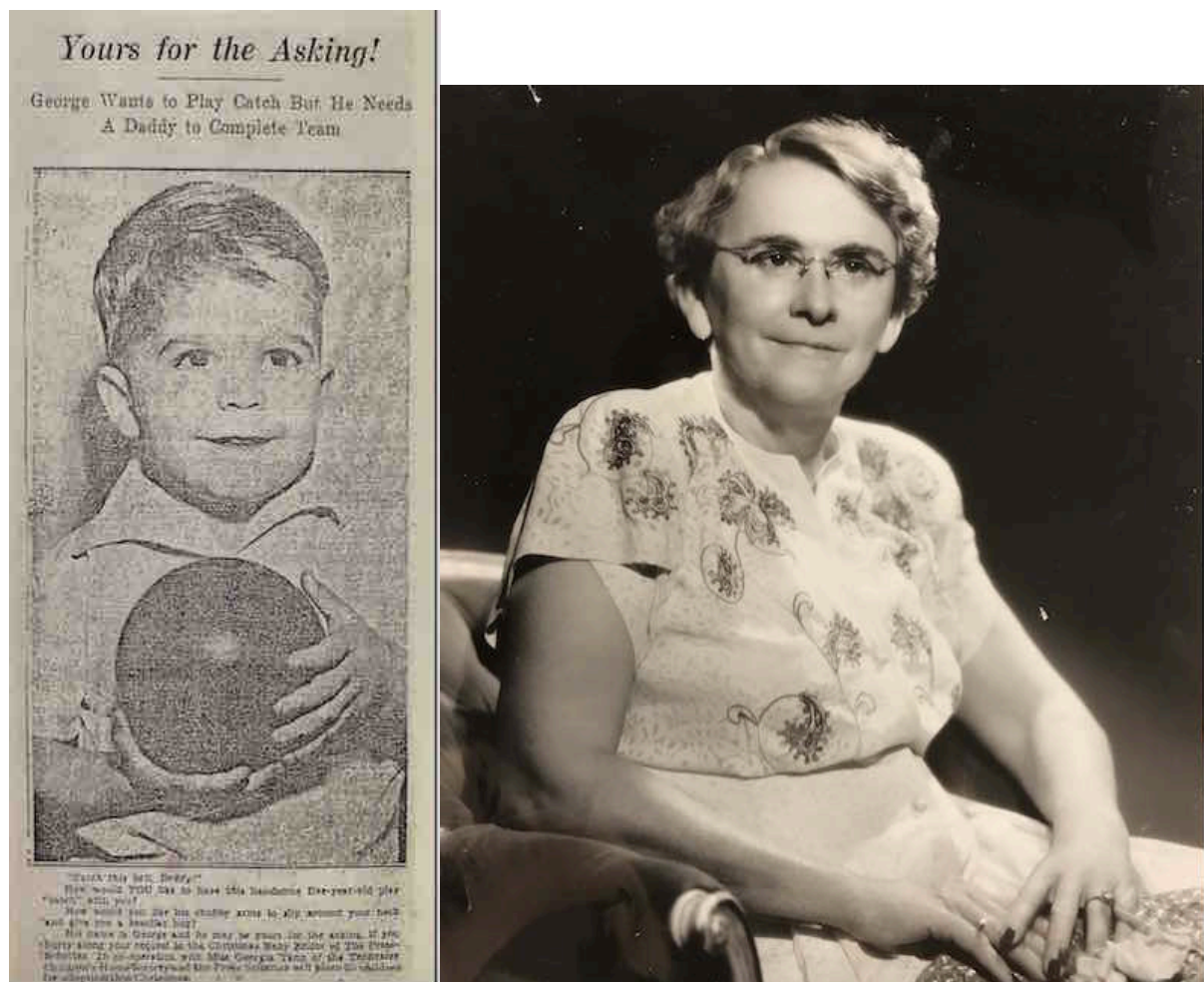
—**Julie Kibler**, bestselling author of *Calling Me Home*

Historical Images – The Story Behind the Novel

NOTE: All images credited to Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis



Left to right– (1) Siblings offered in a “Christmas Baby” ad. The Christmas Baby giveaway was a popular fixture in Memphis papers for years. (2) Georgia Tann posing with Baby Lucy, who is being cleaned up for adoption.



Left to right– (1) A TCHS ward offered as “Yours for the Asking” in the Memphis paper. The caption notes that he is one of twenty-five babies to be given away at Christmas. Many readers looked forward to the photos of the cute orphans with catchy titles and stories. (2) Georgia Tann posing for a formal portrait.

A Q&A WITH LISA WINGATE

Q: How did the idea for *Before We Were Yours* originate?

A: I was up late one night working on materials for a different story, with the TV playing in the background. A rerun of the *Investigation Discovery: Dangerous Women* segment about Georgia Tann cycled through at about two in the morning. I tuned in and immediately became fascinated with this bizarre, tragic, and startling bit of history. I was shocked by the scope of Georgia's network, the number of lives she affected, and the tragic consequences of her cruelty and greed. What, I wondered, could motivate such a person? How could so many others – law enforcement officials, welfare workers, court workers, caretakers – be coerced into taking part in, or at least turning a blind eye to the kidnapping and abuse of so many children? How could an estimated five-hundred children have simply vanished from the care of Georgia's Tennessee Children's Home Society, with no investigation of their whereabouts and probable deaths? How could ordinary people have failed to question Georgia's frequent newspaper ads, offering children as "Christmas presents" and "Yours for the asking?"

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

A: The book was research-intensive. I took in everything I could find about the Tennessee Children's Home Society in Memphis and Georgia Tann. In large part, I found bits of the story here and bits there. The Discovery Channel's *Deadly Women* and *60 Minutes* provided helpful information and visuals. Several books, including *Babies For Sale* by Linda Austin and *The Baby Thief* by Barbara Raymond were particularly helpful in researching the adoption scandal. Harlan Hubbard's *Shantyboat Journal* was a beautiful account of shantyboat life on the river. I also spent time in Memphis, researching locations, combing through the river museum, visiting the library and the university's photo archives, and talking to people who remembered the scandal.

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

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

Q: *Before We Were Yours* tells a story within a story. Are dual time frame stories a challenge to write?

A: It's always a challenge to balance dual time frames and a story within a story. It falls into 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 was balancing the two stories, ensuring that both would be fully satisfying, and that the historical story would serve a purpose in modern-day characters' lives.

Q: How did you write 30 books in 15 years with a family to take care of?

A: I've always loved to write, but I didn't get serious about freelance writing and selling until after I'd graduated college, married, and started a family. I wrote and sold various smaller projects between naps, diapers, and playgroups. And when the boys were older, during soccer practices, in carpool lines, while helping with homework, and in all sorts of other situations. People often ask me if I need quiet in order to write. With boys in the house, if I'd waited for quiet, the writing would never have happened. I learned to lose myself in a story amid the noise of life and I loved it that way.

I asked myself what makes a story last, what really makes a story worth telling and worth

reading? I wanted to write books that meant something, that explore the human soul.

One day, I came across a notebook in which I'd written some of my grandmother's stories of growing up in the depression era. I'd never known quite what to do with those stories, but I knew they were significant in my life. When I rediscovered the notebook, I had the idea of combining my grandmother's real stories with a fictional family who is like and unlike my own family. That little gem of an idea became my first women's fiction novel, *Tending Roses*.

Now that the boys are grown and the house is quiet, I'm redefining the writing routine again. Just as in books, life is a series of scenes and sequels, beginnings and endings, and new discoveries.

Q: Have you had help along the way in your writing career? Who were your mentors?

A: A special first grade teacher, Mrs. Krackhardt, put the idea of being a real writer into my head. She found me writing a story one day at indoor recess, and she took the time to stop and read it. When she was finished, she tapped the pages on the desk to straighten them, looked at me over the top and said, "*You* are a wonderful writer!" That was a defining moment for me. In my mind, I was a writer. When your first grade teacher tells you that you can do something, you believe it.

I was in her class for only a few months before we moved again, but during that time, she left an indelible mark on my life. It's funny how we have defining moments in our lives, and that time in Mrs. Krackhardt's class was one of mine. For years, I couldn't have told you what she looked like, or whether she was a young teacher or an old teacher, but I could have told you that she said I was a wonderful writer. When I left her class, she wrote on my report card, "Keep that pencil working with that wonderful imagination, Lisa!" and "I expect to open a magazine and see your name listed among the contributors." I still have that report card, and I never forgot those words, or the way her confidence in me gave me confidence. Publishing is a difficult business, but I always believed I could do it, because my first grade teacher told me so.

I was fortunate enough to grow up in a family of great storytellers. I classify them among my writing mentors, as well. Nights gathered around the outdoor fire pit on my grandparent's farm were a lesson in weaving together stories in a way that could hold an audience breathless until the final line. Some of those stories were funny and some were sentimental, but the older folks in our family could hold an audience hostage with a tale about going to the grocery store, or getting a haircut. Even from a very young age, I remember being not only enamored with their stories, but fascinated by their skill. Reality and fiction were seamlessly intertwined to create a weave that was flawless. They never let the truth get in the way of a good story, and it was impossible to tell which was which. Both were equally delightful.

MORE PRAISE FOR LISA WINGATE

“A gift for crafting a story. Lisa Wingate never disappoints.” – *USA Today*

“*The Prayer Box* a 2013 resort-area bookstore bestseller” – *Washington Post*

“Wingate is, quite simply, a master storyteller.” – *Booklist*

“Relatable characters and vivid portrayals of events both current and historical create an enchanting, memorable pilgrimage.” – *Publishers Weekly*

“Wingate writes with a sensitivity and lyricism so effortless.” – *ForeWord Reviews*

“A rising star in the world of women’s fiction.” – *RT Bookreviews Magazine*

“Alive with people you’d like to know and places you’d like to be.” – *Detroit Free Press*

“A beautiful lyrical style reminiscent of those of Mary Alice Monroe and Patti Callahan Henry.” – *Booklist (Starred review & a Booklist Top 10 of 2013 Pick)*

“A moving and inspiring story with interesting characters and a colorful Southern backdrop. A good option for fans of Nicholas Sparks and Mary Alice Monroe.” – *Library Journal*

“Lisa Wingate is a glorious storyteller!” – *New York Times bestselling author Adriana Trigiani*

“I am in awe of Lisa Wingate’s Talent.” – *New York Times bestselling author Debbie Macomber*

“Gripping...compassionate and lyrical...reminds us that it is love that changes our world.”
– *New York Times bestselling author Patti Callahan Henry*

“A story beautifully told, with richly drawn characters that will...make you want to laugh and cry.”
– *New York Times bestselling author Karen White*

“Teaches us that it’s never too late to open our hearts.” – *Southern Lady Magazine*

“An excellent read for any reason. A celebration of the power of love.” – *El Paso Times*

“Lisa Wingate is making a national name for herself as an excellent storyteller.”
– *Abilene Reporter-News*