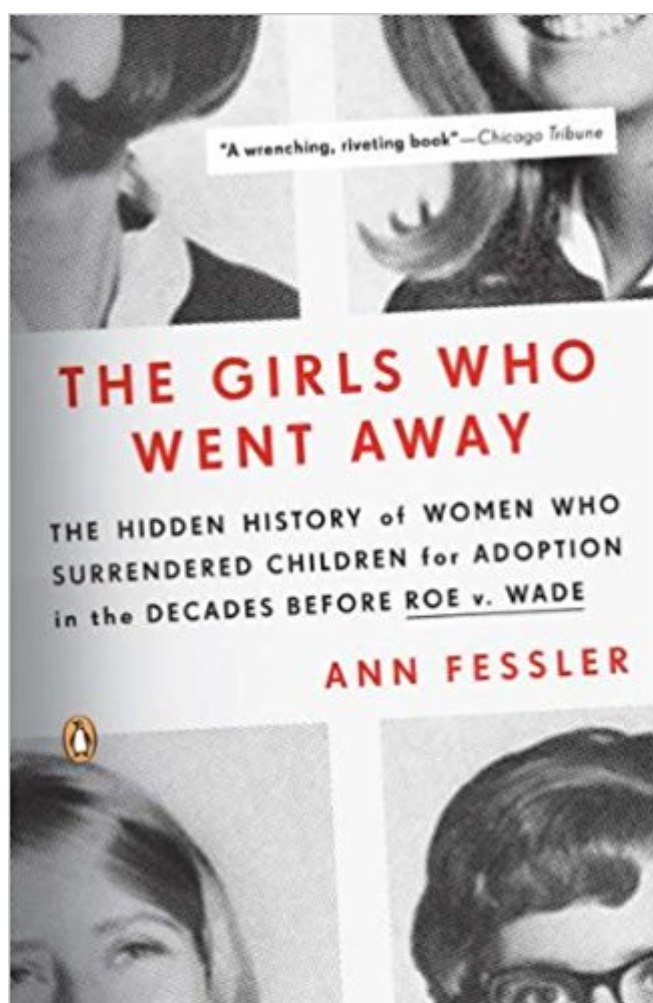


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# The Girls Who Went Away: The Hidden History Of Women Who Surrendered Children For Adoption In The Decades Before Roe V. Wade



## Synopsis

In this deeply moving and myth-shattering work, Ann Fessler brings out into the open for the first time the astonishing untold history of the million and a half women who surrendered children for adoption due to enormous family and social pressure in the decades before *Roe v. Wade*. An adoptee who was herself surrendered during those years and recently made contact with her mother, Ann Fessler brilliantly brings to life the voices of more than a hundred women, as well as the spirit of those times, allowing the women to tell their stories in gripping and intimate detail.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Nobody ever asked me if I wanted to keep the baby," says Joyce, in a story typical of the birth mothers, mostly white and middle-class, who vent here about being forced to give up their babies for adoption from the 1950s through the early '70s. They recall callous parents obsessed with what their neighbors would say; maternity homes run by unfeeling nuns who sowed the seeds of lifelong guilt and shame; and social workers who treated unwed mothers like incubators for married couples. More than one birth mother was emotionally paralyzed until she finally met the child she'd relinquished years earlier. In these pages, which are sure to provoke controversy among adoptive parents, birth mothers repeatedly insist that their babies were unwanted by society, not by them. Fessler, a photography professor at the Rhode Island School of Design, is an adoptee whose birth mother confessed that she had given her away even though her fiancé, who wasn't Fessler's father, was willing to raise her. Although at times rambling and self-pitying, these knowing oral histories are an emotional boon for birth mothers and adoptees struggling to make sense of troubled

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Perhaps it's no surprise that this story has gone untold for so long, considering the personal nature of the subject and the moral dilemma heaped upon the young women who gave their babies up for adoption. What is astonishing is that Fessler, a photographer and video installation artist writing her debut book, manages to tell this compelling story with a perfectly honed sense of restraint and respect. She handles the large volume of source material nimbly, letting each individual story breathe. The only complaint is that her research method—using a self-selected group—isn't up to snuff for academic rigor. In the face of such glowing critical praise, that lone complaint seems, well, a little academic. Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

A really tough read ... REALLY tough; honestly I had about a 12 minute a day max until I came to terms with the bottom line of the book - for me at least: this is the story of my mother (of so many women and mothers of her generation) and I owe it to her to try to feel some of what she felt ... and to try to understand why she is the way that she is ... and this book really, truly helped me to do both. Ultimately, thankfully "the story" becomes one of hope, with the golden threads of healing, forgiveness and self awareness skillfully woven together by the author, and then multiplied by the sheer volume of stories. This is powerful, shocking, painful, sad and important. My thanks to the author ... this project could not have been easy.

This was a life changing book for me. I am now 68 and had no idea I was one of so many girls that went away! I honestly thought it was just me and a handful of others. I personally related to each and every story in the book and that was not only like nothing I had ever experienced before, it was life changing to know so many other girls experienced what I did. I swear the photo on the bottom right of the front cover is a picture of me way back when. WOW! I recommend this book highly. Thank you Anne Fessler for this important work you have done here. I am so grateful to you for writing this and changing my life through a whole new perspective of what I experienced back in 1965 and again in 1970. I have recommended this book to many and shared on social media. I hope it is read by any woman who ever found herself pregnant out of wedlock. Blessings to the author! xo

An excellent account of how so many girls were utterly rejected and scorned by their families and society, and the culture of deceit that went along with it. As an adoptee, I believe that anything I was "told" about my birth parents by social services is most likely a pack of lies, and as a woman who had a teenage pregnancy, I know first-hand how horrible people can be to you, even those who are supposed to help you.

When this came out I read a review and started crying. When it was out at bookstores I went to the bookstore. I touched the book and started crying so I could not buy it. I recently saw it online and decided now that I am 66 years old I could read this book. I was 18 when I was whisked away to a small town, away from family, while I was pregnant. In those days people did not get pregnant without being married...or so I was told. The doctor who refused to give me birth control handled the adoption. My son was born on January 1, 1971, not a difficult date to forget. I started reading and highly recommend this book.

The author, through the words of the girls themselves, tells the story of girls who got pregnant before being married. She also tells of a time when shame and humiliation were the primary factors in decision making related to these girls and their babies. It's a very sad time but one we should never forget lest we risk repeating it.

I had hoped this book would include discussions with children who were born to the birth mothers after they had given their first babies up for adoption. As a child who was born after a baby had been given up my relationship with my Mother is a real struggle. She really only ever wanted what she gave away not what she has in her two children who are with her now.

Having grown up during a time when "going away" was very common (50's and 60's), and knowing a number of girls who were forced to do so, this book really touched my heart. I personally saw the lasting effect on their lives, well into adulthood. The author was very thorough in her interviews and told of many scenarios regarding the lack of sex education on the part of both boys and girls, and the cruelty of the caregivers, as well as the selfish parents who would give up a grandchild because of their own reputation, and expect their daughters to come home and go on with their lives as if it never happened. I am grateful that my children did not grow up in a time when unwed mothers were treated like a pariah.

Very interesting book on a little covered topic. What happened to all those women who were sent to "pregnancy homes" and forced to give up their babies? Ready this book to hear stories from many women. Great balance of oral history and information that puts the information into a bigger context. I would like to see if this author has written more books.

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