

**WE WERE NOT ORPHANS**  
**Stories From The Waco State Home**

By Sherry Matthews

Foreword by Robert Draper

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“The memories captured here have been kept quietly alive for decades in the hearts and minds of the alumni, many of them now up in years. Matthews rescued these stories from the scrapheap of history. She got their secrets just in time.”  
— Denise Gamino, *Austin American-Statesman*

“The single most stunning feature of these monologues is the resilience of childhood. **We Were Not Orphans** is inspirational for one reason: the storytellers. They dared, after all, to be children.”  
—Robert Draper, from the foreword to **We Were Not Orphans**

**NEW BOOK PRESERVES FIRST-PERSON ACCOUNTS  
OF LIFE AT WACO STATE HOME UNCOVERING SECRETS  
LONG HIDDEN FROM PUBLIC VIEW**

**Author Sherry Matthews Combines Personal Interviews With  
In-Depth Research To Paint Searing Picture Of Institution  
That Both Helped And Harmed The Children It Was Meant To Protect**

When Sherry Matthews was a toddler in 1940s Texas, her three brothers were taken away to live at the Waco State Home, an institution that cared for children whose parents could not provide for them. For six years, Sherry and her mother visited the Home. Yet even after her brothers left the institution, Sherry knew very little of what life was like for them. It was a dark mystery.

In her new book, **WE WERE NOT ORPHANS: Stories From the Waco State Home** (University of Texas Press/February 2011), Matthews presents riveting, first-person accounts

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by nearly sixty of the institution's alumni who describe their daily activities – schooling, job training, sports, discipline, friendships, flirtations, pranks, and more.

Some of the stories paint a picture of a thoughtfully run institution where children were well-fed, well-schooled, and learned the value of hard work. As alumnus James Smith remarks in the book, “The Waco State Home was the best thing that ever happened to me.” Others remember the sense of community they shared. “I enjoyed all the kids,” says Betty Dubose. “You were never alone or lonesome, always had a lot of good friends around you.”

But a dark undercurrent runs through all of the stories compiled in **WE WERE NOT ORPHANS**. Some alumni allude to sexual abuse and beatings. Others openly describe the brutality of key staff members. Throughout the book, Matthews carefully preserves the original voices of everyone she interviewed – even when their stories contradicted each other.

In addition to conducting interviews, Matthews also dug deeply through public and private records to learn the truth behind the accusations of cruelty at the Home. In doing so, she discovered an incredible story of cover-ups and cronyism that kept the abuses hidden from public view. She presents her findings in a riveting Epilogue.

**WE WERE NOT ORPHANS** is the first book to peel away the secrets of the Waco State Home. It is both an homage to the many people who grew up there and a document about the ways that the abuses at a public institution can be swept under the carpet. Matthews opens our eyes to the resiliency of childhood and the power to persevere in a splendid and thought-provoking volume. As she writes in the book's Prologue, “I hope this book honors the cherished memories of those who shared their lives with such candor. I also hope that those who believed they had no voice as children will discover that they found it here.”

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#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Sherry Matthews has spent most of her life working for change through her advocacy marketing firm and has won many awards on behalf of government agencies, nonprofits, and socially conscious companies. She lives in Austin, Texas.