

# Portland Book Review

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## We Were Not Orphans: Stories From the Waco State Home

Reviewed by Emily Davis

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In *We Were Not Orphans*, Sherry Matthews chronicles experiences of children from the Waco State Home. The book is a collection of over 100 accounts from the Great Depression to the 1960s. Many “state-homers” enjoyed their childhoods: “All that I am, I owe to God first and the Waco State Home second,” recalls Charles Goodson, who attended from 1939-1952. Memories, from onion fights and camp-outs to soapbox races and sneaking into girls’ dorms, recount happy times for children who had been living through poverty, abuse, or with parents who could not support them.

However, other children had entirely different experiences: “They seemed to delight in inflicting pain on us—mentally, emotionally, and physically,” recalls Steve Folkner, (1956-

1970). Matthews reveals that “there was a lot of discipline and not much love;” some children were hit with umbrellas, molested by their dorm parents, and beaten until they bled for slight infractions. Matthews documents the politics and prejudices that allowed such abuse to occur, but also highlights employees who actively fought for the rights of children who could not fight for themselves. *We Were Not Orphans* is a beautifully assembled collection that provides an unbiased perspective of life in Waco.

