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Glimpses of Heartache, and Stories of Survival

By GLENN COLLINS

The letters, more than a hundred years later, are heartbreaking. Many are just rough notes, bearing pinholes where they had been attached to swaddling clothes. Here is a scribble that says, “My name is Rose — I am baptized — 1 year old.” Another mother has dashed off, “Guard this little one and if things turn out as I hope I shall repay you for your trouble.”

A more operatic missive dates from 1874: “I am a poor woman and have been deceived under the promise of marriage. I am without means and without relatives to nurse my baby. Therefore I beg you for God’s sake to take my child and keep it. I remain your humble servant.”

The notes arrived with abandoned infants, many of them left in a plain wicker basket at the entrance to what is now known as the New York Foundling, the 137-year-old family services agency in Manhattan. Now, the entire collection — a trove of documents, photographs and memorabilia that sheds new light on a dark chapter of the New York that was — is going public for the first time.

“The archive is teaching us about our past,” said Sister Carol Barnes, a director of the Foundling, sponsored by the Sisters of Charity of New York, which also co-sponsors St. Vincent Catholic Medical Centers. But the collection, called the Foundling Archives, “is also telling us much about ourselves,” she said. “It is a heritage that is very much alive because the human needs remain the same.”

The New York Foundling Asylum was created in an era of minimal child welfare bureaucracies, when newborns were routinely abandoned on the mean streets, in church entrances or on the doorsteps of the wealthy. It was a time when an estimated 30,000 homeless children populated the city.

In 1870, a year after the Foundling began, the State Legislature deemed the agency’s work so crucial that it appropriated $100,000 for construction of a larger building. The Foundling began boarding babies with volunteer families almost immediately and initiated adoptions in 1873. For decades, it sheltered unmarried expectant mothers and their babies, and it established a pediatric hospital in 1881. By 1910, 27,779 children had passed through its doors.

The need has hardly evaporated. “At the turn of the century, the problem was poverty and, to a certain extent, alcohol,” said William F. Baccaglini, the Foundling’s executive director. “But now we are seeing children suffering from a complex of other problems as well — substance abuse, mental health issues, developmental disability.”

Research in the Foundling’s archives has been entrusted to Richard Reilly, 67, a retired management consultant and history maven. Since December, he has been reviewing and organizing the archive as a member of the Ignatian Volunteer Corps, a Jesuit-run program dedicated to service and spirituality. The Foundling intends to create an archival center and put all of the materials on its Web site in time for its 140th anniversary in 2009.

Steven H. Jaffe, an independent historian and curator who incorporated some of the Foundling’s memorabilia in an exhibition at the New-York Historical Society four years ago, said the archive was important in tracing early child welfare reform efforts, when religious denominations took partial responsibility for orphans in the absence of a public safety net. Although the poorly coordinated system was later deemed Dickensian, it was a vast improvement over utter abandonment, he said.

On a recent afternoon, Mr. Reilly cracked open a ledger book that documented 2,457 babies who were dropped off at the Foundling from October 1869 to November 1871 — many of them left in the legendary cradle that was placed outside its brownstone on East 12th Street off Fifth Avenue. “Infanticide,” Mr. Reilly said, shaking his head, “was a widespread practice then.”

New discoveries in the collection include an 1869 leather-bound ledger, with entries in the spidery black penmanship of Sister Mary Irene Fitzgibbons, the founder of the institution. The ledger details the agency’s minutes, fund-raising and construction plans, including drawings. More mundane items, like an 1891 electric bill for $100.16, have also emerged.

The archive includes admissions registers, annual reports, newspaper clippings dating to 1869, dozens of scrapbooks and hundreds of books and videotapes.

Especially poignant is the collection of baby ledgers, in which abandoned children’s arrivals were noted in precise script. The Foundling’s first baby, Sarah Kinsley, was left with the sisters on Oct. 12, 1869.

But it is the notes and letters — scraps of paper and bits of cloth, many pinned to the babies’ blankets — that evoke the power of stories untold.

On a note from 1873 is written, “This child name is Marie John Dunn — 5 days old.” Penciled the same year is a cryptic message, haunting for its brevity, “Child of Mary E. Farmer.”
Some messages, like one from 1879, suggest life-threatening abandonment. “This infant was found on the sidewalk between 50th and 51st Streets,” it said.

And stark tragedy marked an 1882 note accompanying a quartet of babies conveyed to the Foundling by the commissioners of emigration on Wards Island, “The mothers of three of these children died of puerperal fever, and the fourth mother is hopelessly insane.”

Another adornment of the collection is a replica of the long-disintegrated 1869 wicker cradle where mothers left their babies.

On May 30, 1870, an article in The New York Times described the cradle “standing from morning to night and from night to morning to receive its human burdens.” It added, “A bell nearby gives warning to the attendant nurse when the cradle has an occupant.”

The Foundling continued the cradle tradition when it relocated to 3 Washington Square North. In 1873, the agency moved to a red-brick building (partially financed by the Legislature) that filled the block from 68th to 69th Streets between Lexington and Third Avenues. In 1958, it moved to 1175 Third Avenue, where the Foundling stayed for 30 years before moving to its current headquarters at 590 Avenue of the Americas, at 17th Street.

In the late 19th century and into the 20th century, the Foundling was a pediatric and maternity hospital and participated in the “orphan trains.” Starting in the mid-19th century, and continuing for 75 years, the trains shipped as many as 200,000 city children to do farm and domestic labor out west. Many city welfare agencies, including the Foundling, lauded the practice as wholesome rural salvation. Some of the children were trained in the trades, others were adopted.

Ultimately the child-protection system of which the Foundling was a part was assailed by child-development researchers, who said that institutional care deprived children of maternal care, and by reformers who saw rampant inequities in assigning children to religious-based agencies.

There was increasing pressure to place foster children in permanent homes through adoption. And the legalization of abortion caused a reduction in the number of babies, “so we had no need for large nurseries in a big building,” Sister Barnes said.

These days, the Foundling is the city’s second-largest foster home provider and the third-largest child welfare agency. Under city contracts, it has 13,000 children in foster care in 44 programs in the five boroughs. It also has programs for children and developmentally disabled adults in Rockland and Westchester Counties and in Puerto Rico.

The Foundling also runs a pediatric center for children with severe birth defects and neurological disorders, and it has a maternity residence, a respite care unit and a family crisis unit.

Most of the Foundling’s $88 million budget comes from private contributions, bequests and contracts for welfare services with government agencies. It gets a grant of $5,000 a year from the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York.

Now, the Foundling is renovating a former industrial building at 170 Brown Place at 136th Street, in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx, hoping to transform it into a $26 million charter elementary school. It would combine academics and welfare services for 90 children.

“In these neighborhoods, we need a holistic approach,” Mr. Baccaglini, the director, said of the school, which could open as early as 2008.

To the orphans of another era, the archives are “our story,” said Mabel Anne Gruele Harrison, who is 98 and lives in Lincoln, Neb.

She did not know that she had been adopted until she was 27, when she learned she had been shipped from the Foundling on an orphan train to Colorado Springs at the age of 2 years and 4 months. She was adopted there and raised as a Catholic by a childless couple, John and Anna Gruele.

Long after Mrs. Harrison married, had two children and became a speech pathologist, she found the names of her birth parents in Brooklyn — Jenny Rubin and Mo Cohan — and learned that they were Jewish; her birth name was Mabel Rubin.

Although the orphan trains have been criticized for high-handedness in consigning some children to what critics described as indentured servitude, Mrs. Harrison termed the system “a wonderful thing.”

She added: “I got a good upbringing and landed on two feet. Why should I complain? It was good the Foundling was there to take me.”
Pauloosie Keyootak Survived The Arctic When He Was 62 Years Old. Photo credit: OutdoorHub. In early 2016, Pauloosie Keyootak and two family members had planned a snowmobile trip from Iqaluit to the neighboring town of Pangnirtung. This was the closest town to their home, and it was separated by 300 kilometers (190 mi) of frozen wilderness. A snowstorm threw them off track.  


Glimpses is a collection of poetry and prose that will allow you to take a look at the memoirs of past love, excerpts from books that will not be written, snapshots of broken. poetry. Since when is McCain a survival story? He attempted suicide—the others all fought to survive. mccaret on July 12, 2009 4:55 am.  

Aron Ralston is probably one of the most awe-inspiring stories of perseverance we've ever heard of. I think it teaches us all something about how to think and operate in the face of fear. When we are in that flight or flight mode, the limbic system of our brain (the “lizard brain”) overrules our cerebrum, which is the system capable of rational thought and problem solving. The research points to the astonishing 96 per cent survival rate of the 45 sporting stars who have contested the Wimbledon final since 1960 - only two have died. If tennis players lived the same number of years as an average male, more than a third of that number would have died by now. The longevity of Wimbledon champions suggests the game is key to living longer, a new study has revealed. Among a raft of 90-something former tennis players is 97-year-olds Vic Seixas, the oldest surviving grand slam champion, and Budge Patty, his younger by six months. Elite tennis players are expected to live.
When it comes to survival, you have to grow beyond yourself, to prevent certain death. Mining accidents, falls from heights, shipwrecks and day-long odysseys through the desert these are all disasters that often involved the lives of those to an end in a most rapid manner. Advertisement. Some have survived by chance or by a fortunate twist of fate, Others fed on raw human flesh and even drank their own urine. When people fall into an extreme emergency situation, then they suddenly do things that they would have thought are possible never in normal life and so they finally secure their existence. Here are ten incredible stories of survival in extreme situations. Have a look! 1. Self-amputation with a pocket knife Aron Ralston. The history of the United States' response to child abuse and neglect has been marked by a tension between two missions: an emphasis on rescuing children from abusive or neglectful families on the one hand, and efforts to support and preserve their families on the other. Today we have many different agencies to help with the welfare and survival of many children and their families. However, years ago, many people relied on their community and religion to get them through tougher times. The community's investment in the well-being of its children is reflected in the cultural mores and social norms, and in legal frameworks that permit intervention in individual families when children are abused or neglected. From deep within the Amazon to out on the open oceans these are 25 amazing stories of survival against all odds. Subscribe to List25. 25. Juliane Koepcke. She was the sole survivor of LANSA flight 508 that came apart mid-air over the Peruvian rainforest after being struck by lightning. Juliane fell thousands of feet still strapped into her chair but her fall was cushioned by the jungle canopy and she survived with only a broken collarbone. Luckily there was a stream nearby and after following it for 9 days she was rescued by loggers. 24. Nando Parrado and Crew. After a Uruguayan rugby team crashed high into the Andes Mountains the survivors resorted to cannibalism. Marion Cotillard flashes a glimpse of her toned stomach in a cut-away printed maxi dress during Cannes Film Festival Chic. Rose Byrne reveals she has witnessed sexual misconduct and seen 'unacceptable' behaviour from men on 'several' of her projects Shaming. Lady Victoria Hervey, 44, wows in a sheer diamante dress at charity gala during Cannes Film Festival The socialite, 44, looked dazzling. Continue reading the main story. Glimpses of Heartache, and Stories of Survival. By Glenn Collins. Sept. Here is a scribble that says, My name is Rose I am baptized 1 year old another mother has dashed off, Guard this little one and if things turn out as I hope I shall repay you for your trouble. A more operatic missive dates from 1874: I am a poor woman and have been deceived under the promise of marriage. I am without means and without relatives to nurse my baby. Therefore I beg you for God's sake to take my child and keep it.