

Mail-Order Kid: An Orphan Train Rider's Story

An Amazon and Kindle best seller

Comments:

As I read through *Mail-Order Kid* it was like Jessie Teresa Martin was sitting on the couch with me telling the story of her life. It is so real. I knew Jessie Teresa personally. In fact, she stayed in our home attending one of OTHSA's reunions of Orphan Train Riders. She sat in the yard swing; her feet in the air because she was so short, and laughed as she told me about flirting with the doctors and how she loved to dance. She showed me her Star of David and told how she came to have it. Her remark was that she had all her bases covered with her Catholic upbringing and her Jewish genetics.

Everyone who met her loved her. She was just that kind of person and Marilyn Coffey has caught the real Jessie Teresa on the pages of this book.—Mary Ellen Johnson, Founder and Executive Director, Orphan Train Heritage of America, Inc.

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Quite fascinating, a new and unusual look at the Orphan Train experience.—Pippa White, "The Orphan Train," One's Company Productions

An excellent job of bringing to life a little-known part of our country's history.—Sandy Hill, journalist, novelist

"A classic"—Kira Gale publisher, River Junction Press

★★★★ An emotional, moving, and thoroughly engaging book that brings to life the struggle and plight of the thousands of orphans transported against their will into the interior of the US to become adoptees. —Mely Gates, NetGalley Reviewer

★★★ I enjoyed this story a lot, because of its subject. I'd never before heard of the orphan trains although I wasn't at all surprised by what I learned as I progressed through the book. This sort of thing happened worldwide, the only differences being that it was carried out by different organizations for a variety of different supposed causes.

I grew to love Teresa and totally understood why she constantly was at odds with herself to fit in, to better herself, to be recognized for something other than being an orphan, a *Geschickte*, a Mail-Order Kid. Her story was heartbreaking in parts and I rejoiced for her at times also. Nobody deserved happiness more than she did.

This book was an enjoyable, easy read, which served its purpose well in informing the wider world of the plight of Teresa and hundreds of thousands of children like her who were plucked from their surrounding and deposited in far flung destinations.— Clara Carter, Educator

★★★★ Teresa was three years old when she was taken from the orphanage where she lived and taken to live in Kansas where she would be beaten and abused

This tragic tale is woeful.. It was hard to read and I must admit my heart broke for her and the many children that also went through what she did.

I don't know if I would read it again and although the story is well told I felt sad that it stayed on my mind for days after I read it.—Tracy Shephard, NetGalley Reviewer

★★★ After reading fictional works about the orphan trains, it was good to read this true account and consider the lifelong effects of such an early life experience. I couldn't help but admire Teresa, her resilience, tenacity, and success in life. However, despite all of that, she never escaped the shadow of the orphan train.—Sandi Hemming, NetGalley Reviewer

★★★ Born in 1907, this is the full biography of Jessie Theresa Martin, aka Jessie Feit or Theresa Martin, who had been transported from a Foundling home in New York City at age 3 to a German-speaking foster family in Schoenchen, Kansas. Although she would be removed from Schoenchen in 1920 to nearby Abilene, the discipline and abuse she undergoes well into high school is punitive and somewhat graphic. She eventually marries twice, gives birth to two daughters, moves to Denver, works as librarian for many years, and researches her family and parents in New York as a result of attending meet-ups with other orphan train riders throughout the 1960s-1980s.—Kristine Fisher, NetGalley Reviewer

★★★★ This book was a riveting look at a period that I was extremely interested in when younger (reading the Orphan Train fiction series) and to see a factual take was exciting. The story grabbed your interest and didn't let go with a fast pace and clear language.—Lauren Clark, NetGalley Reviewer

★★★★ The Mail-order kid tells the story of the Orphan train children between the years of 1854-1929 who were taken from orphanages and shipped by rail to different states. Specifically the story focusses on Teresa who we meet at only three years old who is taken to Kansas and severely mistreated.

Resilience and perseverance in the face of adversity is what sums this story up as we follow Teresa's life. A real eye opener and page turner I enjoyed this book very much and rooted for Teresa all the way through whilst marvelling at her spirit.— Kelly Furniss, NetGalley Reviewer

Link: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8707122-mail-order-kid?from_search=true

★★★★ I have always been fascinated by the period of history when children were literally taken from the streets of NY and relocated to the Midwest by do-gooders and the Church who felt that living on farms as part of families and communities well distant from their homes was an improvement for children. In some cases, it was, indeed, a success. However, more often, children were abused, treated as indentured servants, and felt the effects of losing any connection with their homes, families, and histories.

This is a true story of Theresa (Jessie) Feit who was placed with an elderly couple in Kansas and lived a troubled, near tragic life but managed to become a success in life

through pure grit and determination. Her original placement was terminated when her foster father abused her and literally scalped her. Turned over to the care of the courts, she is continually placed in situations for which she was totally unsuited and with "caregivers" who sexually or emotionally abused her. Through it all, she fought for an education and eventually became a medical librarian at Porter Hospital in Denver, Co.

Her luck with men seems to have been imprinted by her early experiences with her abusive father-figures. Her marriages were unfortunate though she persisted in them because of her Catholicism and her need for a secure life.

She is given a hint as to her real heritage when strangers in Denver ask if she is Jewish. After much digging, mostly by her daughter, Teresa does find out that she is, indeed, Jewish and was placed in a Catholic foundling home where she was baptized.

Although this is a story of the Orphan Trains and Jessie is survivor, this is even more a story of Midwestern life in the early twentieth century. Theresa/Jessie's long life made her one of the few "children" to survive to see the 21st century.

The treatment that Jessie and other children receive should infuriate you but it is the story of another age when children were valued for the work they could provide in a home. The Orphan train sagas are an intriguing part of US history, just as the removal of Native American children to boarding schools was. In each case children are totally cut off from their history at the behest of a paternalistic society that "knew better".

My reservations about this book are that there may be more interest for it in Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado where the book primarily takes place. Though not a critical purchase, it is an interesting one and should be part of any collections that highlight the Orphan Train movement.—Lois Gross (Librarian) NetGalley Reviewer

★★★★★ Wow! I cannot believe the life the orphan train rider that the author focused on experienced! The author did an amazing job of researching a topic that is typically not researched so thoroughly. By narrowing the focus of the writing to mainly one child, the author made it possible for me to vividly imagine what life was like for this poor child. I do not think I would have been as invested if there were more stories told, as I think the flow of the book would not have been as good if the author had to weave back and forth between experiences of several people.—Cristie Underwood, NetGalley Reviewer

★★★★ I'm not sure if this was a true story or not, but what a story! Teresa and Orphan train was a fantastic book. I really felt for Teresa. The middle of the book was more positive and the ending was very good. The Judge was a wicked man. I didn't like him at all. A must read that you will really enjoy.—Carley Adair, NetGalley Reviewer

★★★★★ Grab some nourishment, sit down, and be prepared to read this book straight through. It was such an engrossing read of Teresa's life. I fell in love with spunky orphan who always tried to better herself. Teresa did not have much going for her, an orphan, sent away from New York to Kansas on the Orphan Train, brought into an abusive house, made to learn another language, yet she preserved. I admired her drive, her determination, and her great love of dancing!—Jennifer Juenke, NetGalley Reviewer

★★★ It is a gem of a book but a rough diamond, for someone like me who does not know this part in American history.—Helena Manoli (Educator) NetGalley

Orphan Trail BY SALLY DESKINS for The Reader

Author Marilyn June Coffey says she tears up every time she reads this part of Teresa Martin's story: "*As she slipped her wide foot into her shoe, she felt like Cinderella donning the glass slipper. Up from ashes. She could hardly breathe. After all those school children's taunts, after the years living with the hurtful Biekers, the years scrubbing floors, the lonely fight to be educated, after a lifetime of being mail-order orphan, now, at last, in her seventies, blood relatives had claimed her. She blinked back tears.*" It's the moment Martin meets her blood relatives after years of hardship; being one of the hundreds of thousands of orphans shipped from New York City to unknown lands and family in mid-America. For Martin, it was Hays, Kansas in 1910, at age three. "She had so much fear, such low self-esteem, she thought they couldn't be her family," says Coffey, "This was the most powerful moment — when she accepted being part of a family, and miraculously, they accepted her." Omaha resident Coffey wrote her third novel, 2010's *Mail-Order Kid*, after four years of weekly interviews and study with Martin and additional years of research on the Orphan-Train Movement. Before meeting Martin, Coffey spent five years touring Nebraska as a speaker with the Nebraska Humanities Council performing as various orphan train riders she'd researched — from inspirational stories of children placed in loving homes, to heart-wrenching stories of abuse and forced separation. Unlike most of the written stories of the orphan experiences which stop at the relocation without exploring the life-altering affects, Coffey's *Mail-Order Kid* tells Martin's story from her memories in the orphanage, throughout her childhood with an abusive adoptive family, her marriages, children and library career, to her death in 2001. "*Mail-Order Kid* is a story of transformation," writes Coffey in the book's preface, "This biography depicts how the abuse Teresa experienced as a child weakened her self-esteem. It shows how she at first accepted this self-deprecation and then fought it until, through her efforts and the love of others, she no longer needed to apologize for having ridden an orphan train." Coffey didn't read about Martin's story in the library, however. Their friendship started with a hand-written note by Martin mailed to Coffey in the midst of her speaking-traveling days, in 1992, while Coffey was teaching at Fort Hays State University, and her activities were publicized in *The Hays Daily News*. Martin wrote, "How can you lecture on orphan trains when you've never heard my story?" Coffey agreed. Although she'd been performing as an orphan train rider, she had never actually met one. Coffey planned on a 20-minute acquaintance, but upon meeting the "warm and thoughtful" Martin and her closet stacked with documents from her life, the project blossomed into one of inspiration and life-learning which became *Mail-Order Kid*. Martin had her hand in each chapter through her death, which Coffey wrote from conversations and notes taken herself. Martin was thrilled with the result, as stated in the book's preface, "she beamed, 'It makes my life alive again!'" Of the writing process for the book, Coffey writes, "I learned from Teresa the value of genuine humility. In her lack of pretension, she showed me the joy of connecting with other people by not putting herself above them — or below them."

