New book examines how college students practiced motherhood on orphaned babies
7 November 2014, by Marc Ransford

The long forgotten practice of using infants from orphanages as "practice babies" in college home economics classes has been rediscovered in a new e-book by a Ball State University professor. "Borrowed Babies: Apprenticing for Motherhood," written by Jill Christman, a Ball State English professor, examines how most American land grant colleges used "borrowed" infants as teaching tools, while prepping the little ones for adoption.

"I first found out about this in a fiction writing workshop in graduate school and was amazed that I had never heard about these babies," Christman said. "I went to the archives looking for muckraking, or maybe even a love story, and came out with something completely different.

That said, it wasn't all bad for the babies. When the babies got too old to be useful in the practice homes, there was a long list of potential adoptive parents who wanted a baby who had been "raised by the book" in these homemaking laboratories.

Expecting a child

The initial research and interviews for the book took place during the summer Christman was several months pregnant with her own first child. She didn't want to go to New York to start the project: "I wanted to stay home, be pregnant, eat crackers and feel sorry for myself, but I forced myself."

In the book, she looks inward to examine how her journey into motherhood would unfold against the backdrop of the practice apartments.

"I want the book to be valuable to readers both for the history it reveals and for the big question it
asks: What does it mean to become a mother?” she said. "I'm hoping this question will resonate with readers—and that I wasn't the only one who had this question!"

Christman's book was released in September 2014 by Shebooks, a publisher of high quality nonfiction and fiction by women in e-books that can be read in one sitting.

Provided by Ball State University

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