

## THE NAUGHTY CARRIAGE ON THE ORPHAN TRAIN

# BACKGROUND & INSPIRATION

The roots for the story come from true events in American history. These are *The Orphan Train Movement* and *The Disappearance of Bobby Dunbar*. The real-life events of a former British orphan and foster parent, who I will call Mary Smith to protect her anonymity, has also provided inspiration for the piece.

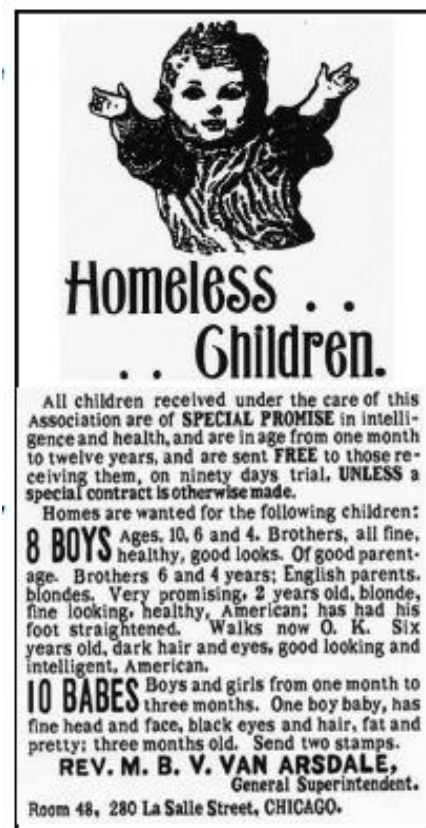
### - THE ORPHAN TRAIN MOVEMENT

The Orphan Train Movement ran between 1854 and 1929 in America. It relocated almost a quarter of a million young people. These orphans were branded as “being thrown friendless upon this world”. They were transported from crowded Eastern cities of the US to rural areas in the Midwest.

The children were cleaned and fed, taken to Grand Central Station in New York and began a train journey. They travelled in extremely uncomfortable conditions. State by state, the train would stop and the children were taken to a theatre or a community space. There, they were exhibited to families who were keen to adopt a child.

In an auction-like atmosphere adults came to check the children’s strength, their teeth, their hygiene and general manner. The chosen children were placed in a family who were obliged to care for them until they turned 21. Many testimonies later stand as evidence that children were given away with no paperwork. They were often put into a slave market. The whole programme required no legal adoption processes and a handful of people called agents monitored thousands of placements.

*“Some ordered boys, others girls, some preferred light babies, others dark, and the orders were filled out properly and every new parent was delighted”,* reported The Daily Independent of Grand Island, NE in May 1912.



**Homeless . . . Children.**

All children received under the care of this Association are of **SPECIAL PROMISE** in intelligence and health, and are in age from one month to twelve years, and are sent **FREE** to those receiving them, on ninety days trial, **UNLESS** a special contract is otherwise made.

Homes are wanted for the following children:

**8 BOYS** Ages. 10, 6 and 4. Brothers, all fine, healthy, good looks. Of good parentage. Brothers 6 and 4 years; English parents, blondes. Very promising, 2 years old, blonde, fine looking, healthy, American; has had his foot straightened. Walks now O. K. Six years old, dark hair and eyes, good looking and intelligent, American.

**10 BABES** Boys and girls from one month to three months. One boy baby, has fine head and face, black eyes and hair, fat and pretty; three months old. Send two stamps.

**REV. M. B. V. VAN ARSDALE,**  
General Superintendent.  
Room 48, 280 La Salle Street, CHICAGO.

Newspaper cutting from an Orphan Train announcement in Chicago.

# WANTED

## Homes for Children

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A company of homeless children from the East will arrive at  
**TROY, MO., ON FRIDAY, FEB. 25th, 1910**

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These children are of various ages and of both sexes, having been thrown friendless upon the world. They come under the auspices of the Children's Aid Society of New York. They are well educated, having come from the various orphanages. The citizens of this community are asked to assist the agent in finding good homes for them. Persons taking these children must be recommended by the local committee. They must treat the children in every way as members of the family, sending them to school, church, Sabbath school and properly clothe them until they are 17 years old. The following well-known citizens have agreed to act as a local committee to aid the agents in securing homes:

O. H. Avery   E. B. Woolfolk   H. F. Childers  
Wm. Young   G. W. Colbert

Applications must be made to, and endorsed by, the local committee.

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An address will be made by the agent. Come and see the children and hear the address. Distribution will take place at the

**Opera House Friday, Feb. 25, at 1:30 p. m.**

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B. W. TICE and MISS A. L. HILL, Agents, 105 E. 22nd St., New York City.  
REV. J. W. SWAN, University Place, Nebraska, Western Agent.





**Top:** Orphans lining up with the Train Agents waiting to be transported to Grand Central Station.

**Centre:** The Orphan Train with orphans posing.

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## - THE DISAPPEARANCE OF BOBBY DUNBAR

Branded as “a case for Solomon”, the American boy Bobby Dunbar disappeared at the age of four in April 1912 and was found again in mysterious circumstances eight months later.

During a family trip to Swayze Lake in Louisiana, the four-year-old went missing leaving behind his hat and his shoe. After an eight-month nationwide search, the child was found in Mississippi. Authorities and the Dunbar family claimed that the child was indeed the missing Bobby and presented him to the press as the returned boy. However, the picture of the missing boy from before and the one given after the disappearance showed peculiar signs of disparity.

A woman named Julia Anderson travelled to Mississippi, claiming that the boy in the papers was in fact her son, Bruce Anderson. She accused the Dunbar's of kidnapping. She could not afford legal coverage, and after a most controversial trial, custody of the boy remained with the Dunbars.

After 91 years, a DNA profiling test in 2004 resulted that the “returned” Bobby Dunbar was not in fact a blood relative of the Dunbars, deeming the case forever unsolved.



**Above:** Headshots of Bobby Dunbar before and after his disappearance.



**Top Right:** The “returned” Bobby Dunbar aged 5 with his mother Lessie Dunbar. **Top Left:** The “returned” Bobby Dunbar aged 5. **Bottom:** The Dunbar Family

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## - FIRST HAND TESTIMONY FROM MARY SMITH\*

Though the current research and development phase has been supported by plenty of literature about the matters at hand (books, biographies, online information and written testimonies from Orphan Train riders), the piece has been inspired by a testimony from an orphan we will call Mary Smith to protect her anonymity.

Mary is (in 2018), 87 years of age. Her connection with the writer is that she is part of a choir he directs. Mary Smith was orphaned at 5 years old when she lost her parents in the war. Following the tragedy, Mary was placed in an orphanage for a number of years, put in a foster programme and later adopted by two loving parents. Mary grew up to work in social care, psychology, and nursing. She worked with young offenders and children dealing with grief. Her work and legacy are inspiring, however it was her approach to the orphan life that made her such a valuable contributor to this piece.

When she was put in foster care, she was given a new name as her foster carer did not even bother to look it up. When she went to sleep at night, she was told not to cry. As a strong young girl, she waited for the bedroom door to close, and then she would comfort herself with tears. When placed in an orphanage, Mary tells her encounters of protecting other children and being a motherly figure herself to save them from beatings, bullying and other cruel fates.

Later on in her life, she proved to be a strong supporter for young offenders and children dealing with grief. Both are strong themes for the musical. Her insight has been invaluable in shaping up the piece's characters. The strength within herself and the strength she provided for fellow orphans is the back bone to Champ's character.

Lastly, she is the original creator of "The Bear Who Drinks Tears". This ballad in the first act is a homage to one of her forms of therapy. Mary told children that it is fine to cry, for there is a bear who loves drinking tears and no tears will go wasted. The creation of this wonderful character is owed to Mary completely.

May this piece honour her life, work and the invaluable impact she's had on other people.