



# The Captured: A True Story of Abduction by Indians on the Texas Frontier

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On New Year's Day in 1870, ten-year-old Adolph Korn was kidnapped by an Apache raiding party. Traded to Comanches, he thrived in the rough, nomadic existence, quickly becoming one of the tribe's fiercest warriors. Forcibly returned to his parents after three years, Korn never adjusted to life in white society. He spent his last years in a cave, all but forgotten by his family.

That is, until Scott Zesch stumbled over his own great-great-great uncle's grave. Determined to understand how such a "good boy" could have become Indianized so completely, Zesch travels across the west, digging through archives, speaking with Comanche elders, and tracking eight other child captives from the region with hauntingly similar experiences. With a historians rigor and a novelists eye, Zesch paints a vivid portrait of life on the Texas frontier, offering a rare account of captivity.

## **The Captured: A True Story of Abduction by Indians on the Texas Frontier Details**

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## From Reader Review The Captured: A True Story of Abduction by Indians on the Texas Frontier for online ebook

### Joyce says

Before participating in a book discussion on Pauline Jiles's News of the World--still the most memorable book I've read this year--a friend suggested I read Captured as background into what the young woman being returned "home" in Jiles's book must have felt. So I did--it's a fascinating look at several captives, taken in Texas and then returned to their families. What their lives were like with the Indians and how they adjusted--or mostly didn't--to life back with their "real" families. For the most part they really missed their Indian lives and families, and this book gives us a glimpse into why that was the case. Well-researched, compelling, filled with a wealth of interesting characters, a look at what life with the Indians was like. In some ways it's a brighter look at kidnap victims during their captivity, but a darker look at what happens when they're finally "free."

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### TXGAL1 says

A riveting telling of Texas children abducted from their frontier homes by raiding and murdering Indians during the latter part of the 19th century.

Loved the honest portrayal of the captives thoughts on life with their "adoptive" families and existence on the frontier. Well done!

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### Catherine says

After reading News of the World and The Son this year, I was intrigued by the real-life accounts of kids who were kidnapped and adopted by the Comanche, Apache, and other Southern Plains tribes in the late 1800s. The real stories were every bit as sensational as the fictionalized accounts, and I could definitely see where the authors of those novels drew on historical accounts.

My take-away:

Both sides were pretty brutal, but the Native tribes got screwed the hardest in the long-run.

Being a Native American kid was a lot better than being a German-American frontier kid, so it's not a huge mystery why the abductees adapted so quickly and didn't want to return to their actual families.

The after-effects of returning to white society were heartbreaking for most of the abductees.

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### David says

Scott Zesch is a relative of Adolf Korn, a well-known Indian captive of the 1870s. Korn's captivity and the subsequent efforts to bring him back to his family excited much comment at the time. What is less well-known is that Korn never adjusted to white life after being an Indian. He became a hermit, living in a cave

above the Llano River. The Captured is Zech's effort to make sense of great-uncle Adolph's experiences. Zesch compares the stories of many Texan child-captives, detailing Indian raids, parents' efforts to recover their children, frontier warfare, and captives' lives after their return home. Zesch's work is fascinating and essential for anyone trying to write about Indian captives on the Texas frontier. If there are two topics that could be explored more fully it would be the role of the Kickapoo in ransoming captives and the Parker family as a group both divided & united by captivity.

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## Patricia Doyle says

The Captured is a true story about white children being captured and "Indianized." It was mystifying as to how little time it took for them to reject their own white race and choose to live with their captors. In at least one instance – Harman Lehmann – the Indian raiding party passed by his old home. Herman was urged to go in and see his mother. He refused.

Anthropologists differ in their beliefs in the making of a white Indian. Some believe early age of abduction contributes to children becoming converts. Several examples prove this to be not necessarily true. Some believe it to be Stockholm Syndrome, where hostages come to identify with their captors as an irrational but natural way of coping and staying alive. It seems that Indianization remains a neglected topic of scholarly research.

Generally, Indians were very considerate of their captives. White youth were accepted into the families and taught the Indian ways within a tribal community, such as roping, riding, and herding horses, along with chores, but they were also allowed time for games and roughhousing. Conversely, white children had a very harsh existence with hard farm work and isolation. It was not unusual for a meager 12x10 log cabin to be an hour away from its nearest neighbor.

Recovered children usually had traumatic readjustments. It took them far longer to relearn the white man's ways than it did for them to become "Indianized". Young men struggled to fit in with their white families; many could not, and returned to the reservations. They did not fit fully in either world.

This historical story was very well told, and I enjoyed it very much, but it saddens me to think that most were unhappy, never quite adjusting to their life back in their white communities in – what they felt was – captivity. Most marriages failed, although these former captives managed to hold the affection and admiration of their children. Most, however, died broken men.

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## Jeanette says

This non-fiction reads like a history book. It's clear writing and thorough research. But it is so fact-filled in the who, what, where, how, & why that the scope of people (numbers alone) in far flung spheres of location (huge expanses of the American Plains to Southern fringes of Texas) becomes a dry and difficult read.

Most of the prime and most documented to voiced experience cases were in the period 1840-80, with the most highlighted in most detail for 5 or 6 cases during and in the decade after the American Civil War. One of these was for the author's grandmother's grandmother's brother. Whose eventual grave (in age, not in youth) was stuck in the far corner of a white American settler cemetery. Not with any other family as he had ended as a hermit in a cave.

Clearly it was a narrow range of age that were captured/kidnapped and lived to either return to settler life, or return to American Indian tribal adulthood. That age was between 8 to 14 years upon capture. Both boys and girls after that age usually were killed outright by the Indians, as too untrustworthy for adoption, or just too hard to physically control. Under 7 or 8 they were also usually killed outright because of the difficulty in fast and long journey movement that was intrinsic to their strategy. That middle age worked for new tribal members and for hostage fees in exchange (profit)both.

Large tracts of the book concern the Indian tribal and White Germanic (spoke German, not English) settlers' different meetings for compromise and treaty pow-wow. Most of the time neither side had any idea who the other side's authority covered in the first place (usually it was just 1 faction of a single tribe) nor did they ever understand each others' languages.

What is so interesting to me is that in my Cognitive Psychology background, the question of a child's memory and assimilation to language/ culture was a core question. And it seems that this book illustrates how a period of more than 14 months, usually GUARANTEED that the human child (both sexes) would never concede to the return to the American Settler lifestyle, but would either return to tribal life or completely segregate. Most of them returned to Comanche sect or Apache tribal faction living in the full sense, even after their exchange or return to settler life.

Emotionally this is also a difficult book to read, because the children were trained in a way, well harsh is saying it mildly. Much detail is given to this and to tribal clothing and tee-pee lodging. But also in the process of being traded back or "rescued" they also had to say good-bye in heart rending fashion from a Comanche Mother. (Possibly the only Mother they remember in a couple of cases.) In one such case, the adopted daughter was the only tent "child" of that widowed Mother. And in another case the losing Indian Mother raged and knifed others and herself.

From the language avenue, it was shocking that most children taken away longer than 6 to 12 months at ages of 8 to 12- STILL could not voice any English or German upon return. They could understand parts but could never reply in whole words, not until a long "re-learning" period. Their original language replaced very quickly.

This area of abduction highlighted in this book did not encompass just Texas. The 3 Plains Indians groups took many all the way North- all the way to Colorado, most in Oklahoma.

The photographs were fabulous in this hard cover. Not only of the prime Indian chiefs, pouncing warrior groups in dress, leaders of searching parties, kidnappers of fame, owners, go-betweens who traded kids back, and also cave pictures of a particular place a returnee chose to live in neither society.

What comes across so huge, is that neither side had any perception of "eyes", nor context, nor words, or worldviews for what the opposite group was suggesting or demanding or offering. And also that if you were a child who cried visibly or often, you would not be adoptable and would not survive long on the returning to Indian village trek.

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## Jason Koivu says

Don't let the title fool you, this is not just *a* single story. There are numerous stories about abduction on the western frontier in *The Captured*, and most of them are written with all the enticement of a newspaper headline w/photo.

## ***WHITE BOY CAPTURED BY ENGINES!!!***

Okay, that was a little too sensationalistic...not to mention racist.

However, there is a load of action and gruesome imagery in *The Captured*, as many of the abductions were the result of raids during which there were casualties on both sides, the white frontiersmen usually getting the worst of it.

The ones who most often survived these violent encounters were surprisingly the young children. They would be abducted and then raised within the tribe. Occasionally they were recovered soon after, sometimes they were never seen again, and every once in a while an abductee would be recovered many years later.

It's interesting how many of the children, who'd spent up to a year or more with their adopted tribe, would not want to return to their birth families. It becomes a recurring theme within the book. And tragically, those that did return often had great difficulties reintegrating into white society.

Scott Zesch does an admirable job pumping enough energy into these old stories to bring them back to life. There are other creative nonfiction writers out there with more talent at their craft, but Zesch's impetus for writing the book was his search for the truth behind his own relative's abduction, a narrative he weaves intriguingly through out *The Captured*, and it is apparent in his writing that the story has great personal value to him.

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### **Vonze says**

The book, at its heart, is about the author's step relative who was abducted as a child. From family legends, the author knew that his relative, once returned to his family, had a difficult readjustment to the 'white' society he was born. He never lost the lessons and ways of his one-time native family. Through his research, author Zesch found many examples of other children who felt the same way. They never blamed or hated their adopted families.

Zesch does his best to show both sides of the story. Although, at times, segments were difficult to read. Contains graphic violence against women and infants. One capture and escape in particular seemed like a tall-tale: pregnant woman scalped, shot by arrows, walks miles in the snow at night to her neighbors who tell her BTW not to bleed over everything as she flees without her, and she survives (and has the baby if I remember correctly). I smell an old-timey newspaperman who wanted to sell papers over heresy and terror.

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### **Kelli says**

This book was equal parts eye opening, terrifying, informative, and truly sad. As well-researched as is possible, the book oozes of the author's passion for and dedication to uncovering the truth about his great uncle's capture. This results in a long, storied history that details life in the Texas wild country, raids, politics, Indian relations, and the kidnapping and return of many captive children. I could feel the author's deep desire to understand why his uncle and many other captives struggled to assimilate back to society, some eventually returning to their tribes and others living as best they could, displaced and unhappy.

As a reader I felt a deep sadness surrounding this entire history. As someone said in the book, there was

always enough land for everyone to use and the Indians never understood the Americans policy of land ownership. There was so much we could have learned from them...from each other, I suppose. This is an important historical account that will lead me to other books on this subject. I will never stop being amazed at just how wild the West really was...and it was not very long ago at all. 3.5 stars

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### **Kurt says**

The stories of six boys and two girls who were kidnapped (in separate incidents) by Indians (Comanche and Apache) from their homes in the hill country of Texas during the 1860's. The events surrounding their capture are shocking and disturbing because of their brutality. Yet, on the other hand, the lives these children led after being assimilated into their new families and tribes were exciting, adventuresome, and fulfilling to such a degree that they all suffered greatly upon being forced back into the white man's culture.

Probably the most distressing story was that of Temple Friend who was kidnapped at the age of 8 (in the most horrific Indian attack I have ever read) and returned to his family at age 13. After spending nearly all of his memorable life with the Comanches, Temple simply could not or would not make the transition, and after being "home" for only two years he slowly just died at the age of 15.

This was truly a good book. I loved every minute that I spent reading it. The only problem I had with it was that it didn't really tell the whole story -- but only because it could not be told without a lot of literary license, which would have turned this book into historical fiction. So much of what these captives and their captors could have told us has never been recorded, and those people who knew them are all dead now too. Nevertheless, the author did a fantastic job of putting together the pieces and creating a coherent and memorable story.

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### **David Eppenstein says**

About a month ago I read "News of the World", a book with a rather popular following. I thought the book was okay but was otherwise not terribly impressed. However, I was intrigued by the subject of white children being captured by Native Americans and then being reluctant or even hostile to the opportunity to return to their white families. In her end note the author suggested that if the reader were interested in the psychology of captive children then they should read Scott Zesch's "The Captured". Sounded like good advice and Amazon made another sale from yours truly. Now that I've read "Captured" I am rating it 3 stars which by no means indicates that I thought this was a less than satisfactory book. In fact it is a very good book but it failed to deliver what I had hoped to learn from it.

The book begins as a search by the author into the experience of his great uncle who was in fact a child captured by the Comanche Indians. Because there is very little in the way of written records of the experiences for most of these children the author had to resort to extrapolating his uncle's ordeal from the lives of other children from the same area and for which there was more available in the manner of documentation. The author is able to use the stories of about half a dozen boys and two girls in order to give the reader an idea of what these kids went through and how their "Indianization" occurred. Now this would have been useful except, through no fault of the author, the sample body of children is too small and for the most part they are from the same immigrant German community of the Texas Panhandle. The German community was reputed to be hardworking and no nonsense. Their children were not coddled and were expected to pull their weight in the family. The Germans were also said to be rather cold and undemonstrative. A child taken from an environment like that might easily have preferred life in an Indian

tribe where children were never punished, were doted upon, and were taught things a white child might have found to be fun and adventurous. So was the refusal to return to their families really the result of some sort of mind control practiced by the Indians or was this simply a reaction to a harsh ethnic culture? The author is unable to say but the effects of their captivity did seem to last into their return and into adulthood.

As I was reading this, and especially as the lives of the boys was described, I couldn't help but think the psychology involved was a combination of that of the Lost Boys of "Peter Pan" fame and the boys in "Lord of the Flies". Captured boys were very soon instructed on those skills needed for them to become Indian warriors. While some of this instruction was rigorous and even painful the rest would have been great fun for a young boy. Being taught about horses and how to ride them; learning how to build a bow and arrows and how to shoot them, how to survive in the wilderness, etc. After acquiring the necessary skills these white Indians actually participated in raids on other whites and either witnessed or actually took part in some of the rather extreme violence. The reader should be warned that some of the described actions by whites and Indians are very violent and extreme. Further, males did absolutely no work in the camp. All labor in the camp was the domain of the women and that is why having only two girls in this book is unfortunate. It is also unfortunate that the captivity of these girls was no where near as long as that of the boys. The stories of the girls might have been different had they reached maturity while with the Indians and that might have resulted in different outcomes. Nevertheless, while the book really didn't reach any definitive determination for the cause of "Indianization" it was definitely an interesting book and the lives reported were worth reading about.

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## **Cathrine ?? says**

### **4.5★**

Fascinating well balanced account of how just a few months with native Americans could so drastically alter childrens lives forever. The author's many times great uncle was an Indian captive and like many of the others taken did not wish to return to his family. Why? The stories profiled attempt to answer that question. Once rescued and returned many of the captives spoke well of their treatment and lifestyle and disparagingly of the army when recounting their experience to relatives and friends throughout the years. Others could not reconcile themselves to a life in white society, much like many native peoples still living on reservation lands today. Are there gruesome horror stories? You bet. Just unbelievable what some individuals were able to endure. In my soft, too much of everything world it still amazes me that as a country we emerged from such rugged stock.

Highly recommended for those interested in this subject matter or opposing POVs to questionable one-sided historical renderings. This story pertains to rural Texas and the Comanche and surrounding tribes in particular. It was a good follow up read to the excellent *Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches, the Most Powerful Indian Tribe in American History* which recounts the last days of the great tribe and their chief Quanah Parker, himself the son of a Comanche chief and white captive Cynthia Parker. Her father would spend eight years trying to find her and was the inspiration behind the John Ford movie *The Searchers*. Unlike Natalie Wood's character in the movie, Cynthia is counted among *The Captured* who did not want to be found.

1/30/17 Update: I just finished reading *News of the World* which is an excellent fictional story weaving many the facts recounted in Scott Zesch's book. Highly recommend.

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## **Renaë Hinchey says**

A few months ago, I read “News of the World,” the story of a young white girl captured in the hill country of Texas by Native Indians in the late 1860’s and then resisting her return to her family. This piqued my interest on the subject of settler’s children being captured by Indians (Comanches and Apaches) and not wanting to go back to their white families, so I took the author’s recommendation to read Scott Zesch’s “The Captured.”

Zesch’s book is so well researched on the kidnapping of settler’s young children during the period of 1860-70’s in the hill country of Texas. The author was drawn to write this true story because he had little knowledge of his great uncle’s (Adolph Korn) experiences while captured by Indians, as well as his difficult adjustment back into the “civilized” society of the the white man.

Zesch does a wonderful job in showing both sides of the story. This is a tragic time in American history. As German immigrants moved into Indian territory taking Indian land and buffalo hunters killing most of the buffalo for the sale of the hides, the Indian’s lost their home and food supply. To survive, the Indian’s attacked the settlers homes taking cattle and horses, as well as capturing young children between the ages of 7 to 14 to replenish their numbers due to the mortality rate.

Zesch researched 8 young white children who were captured and eventually returned to their families. These children, both boys and girls, conformed to tribal life so quickly and completely that they never were able to adjust to their Anglo/German families upon their return and throughout their lives, with some returning to live with the Indians years later. All of those captured said they were treated well while captured and were adopted into Indian families. Due to a treaty between the U.S. government and the Indians, those captured had to be returned even if they did not want to leave their Indian families.

This book brings the question of why these children preferred the Indian way of life. Perhaps it was the freedom that they had, from learning to ride horses and hunting to making bows and arrows and learning how to use them. This was very different from their lives as children of rigid and poverty stricken German immigrants where they were made to work hard on the farms all day with no time for fun or games. The Indians led a more care free life of freedom with hunting, riding horseback, games, dancing, singing, stories, etc.

This was a very engaging read about time in American history. My only criticism is that rather than stick to the story of each of the 8 captured he writes about, he continues to bring them up at different times in their lives throughout the book, making it difficult to follow at times. Besides that, I really enjoyed this book and learned a lot about that time period.

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## **Anthony Whitt says**

This is a great book and an interesting read. The author's narrative flows in an easy reading manner that will keep the readers attention from beginning to end. Zesch is from the area of the abductions and does a thorough job of describing the sometimes brutal attacks on the settlers from that time period. His knowledge of the Texas Hill Country and kinship with his pioneer ancestors add a unique personal perspective to his story. The final work is well worth the read and sheds light on the tragic results that occur when competing cultures collide. The transformation of some of the Indian captives may surprise those that are unaware of the appeal of the free roaming style of living followed by Native Americans.

## **Melinda says**

Wow. This was very hard to read. Tragic on so many levels.

American Indians as a way of life stole children from neighboring tribes. They experienced a high mortality rate among their own people for various reasons, and used kidnapping as a way to replenish their numbers. When non-Indians moved into the Indians territory, the Indians continued their means of building up their numbers and kidnapped White, Mexican, and Negro children. For the parents to try to retrieve those children was something they never would have considered.

An interesting item discussed a bit in the book had to do with which kidnapped children acclimated to their lives among the Indians, and which did not. The Indians seemed to understand that children under the ages of 12 or 14 seemed to adapt more to their new lifestyle. If you look at it from a young teen boy perspective, the life of working hard at home with their parents versus the unstructured and unrestricted life of the Comanches or Apaches would no doubt be very attractive. What boy would not rather learn to ride horses, learn to shoot bows and arrows (or pistols), and go on raids to prove their worth? The theory put forth by the author seems to imply that even though these children often saw their own family killed or mutilated in Indian raids, that the overall lifestyle of the Indians was more attractive than going back to their families.

This book made me interested again in Quanah Parker, whose mother was Cynthia Ann Parker, a young girl kidnapped by the Comanches when she was 9. Cynthia Ann lived among the Comanches for 25 years, married and had three children with her chief husband, Peta Nocona. Quanah was her oldest son, and was the chief of the Comanches during the end of the Comanche Wars.

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