

Limping through Life: A Farm Boy's Polio Memoir

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towns of the region shrank with the century-long migration to cities and suburbs and how the nation's attitudes shifted from thinking of small towns as the hearth of the American idea to places where sentimental boys return.

Limping through Life: A Farm Boy's Polio Memoir, by Jerry Apps. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2013. x, 235 pp. Photographs. \$22.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Pamela Riney-Kehrberg is professor and chair of the history department at Iowa State University. Her latest book is *The Nature of Childhood: An Environmental History of Growing Up in America since 1865* (2014). She is also the author of *Childhood on the Farm: Work, Play, and Coming of Age in the Midwest* (2005).

Jerry Apps's *Limping through Life* provides a unique window into the experience of polio. In 1947, at the age of 12, Apps contracted polio. The illness left him a changed child. The boy who could previously run like the wind would no longer be able to make full use of a partially paralyzed right leg. Fortunately for Apps, his farming parents would not allow him the luxury of self-pity, or permit him to vegetate in the house after the worst of the illness had passed. Instead, his father plopped him on a tractor, and Apps's physical therapy consisted of forcing his right leg to move, so that he could work the brakes. Every night after work, his father massaged horse liniment into his leg. Before long, Apps could walk again, although he would always limp, and he could no longer run.

The damage inflicted by polio was also evident in other ways in Apps's life. The psychological pain was acute. Apps writes, "Being alive and not being able to do what other kids were doing at your age can be devastating. It can change how you see the world and how you react to it. I have never gotten over believing that I must constantly prove myself so I won't be seen as worthless" (235). Nonetheless, Apps credits that feeling of worthlessness for the striving he did in high school, college, and throughout his career. In high school, he pushed himself to achieve, and a kind teacher directed him into activities that did not require two good legs, such as forensics, drama, and the school newspaper. He graduated valedictorian, an achievement that allowed him to think about college, given that it carried a semester's tuition at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Once at the university, Apps pushed himself to succeed in the classroom. Following that first tuition-free semester, he also worked at a number of jobs in order to pay the bills. He never told anyone that he had suffered from polio as a child.

The same was true after graduation. Had he revealed his history with polio, he might have been classified 4-F and exempted from military duty. Instead, he neglected to tell anyone, did his military service, and then returned to civilian life as a graduate student. What followed was a long career in extension and in teaching and in writing. At every turn, he pushed himself to succeed. Today, he continues writing while fighting with post-polio syndrome, a return of symptoms that affects many adult survivors in their later years.

Limping through Life is well worth reading. It is an engaging mid-western story of pain, striving, and hard work. Apps's descriptions of his parents' reactions to his illness are priceless and heartbreaking. His father's successful attempt to rehabilitate him through hard work and horse liniment captures both the strengths and weaknesses of farm families facing hardship. They made the best they could of what they had but unfortunately missed the damaged soul that needed tending. This story of farm childhood, polio, and making a new life where a weak leg would not matter is bound to intrigue anyone with an interest in the history of the Midwest, agriculture, or childhood, and makes an excellent addition to the list of recently published memoirs detailing farm life at the middle of the twentieth century.

Rock Island Requiem: The Collapse of a Mighty Fine Line, by Gregory L. Schneider. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2013. xviii, 380 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$37.50 hardcover.

Reviewer Kevin Byrne is professor emeritus of history at Gustavus Adolphus College. His research and writing have focused on military history and the history of technology and railroads.

In the words of a venerable song, the Rock Island line was "a mighty fine line." Gregory Schneider's history of the railroad from roughly 1948 to 1988, however, demonstrates that the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad became a mighty troubled line during those years. How those troubles arose, how executives sought to allay them, and how their efforts failed are the central issues Schneider explores. The Rock Island—ultimately extending from Chicago through Des Moines to Denver, from St. Paul to Galveston, and into Memphis and New Mexico—had played a significant role in midwestern history since the 1850s. Following World War II, however, the company ran aground, eventually leading to the massive liquidation that accounts for the term *requiem* in the book's title.

A historian of American conservatism, Schneider admits to deep affection for this particular railroad. The author's regard for "the Rock"