

## So Far, So Good

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the post-World War II era was fear: fear of the atom bomb, fear of Communism, fear of radiation, fear of irradiated milk, fear of fluoride, fear *ad infinitum*. Although Riney-Kehrberg does suggest that the public emphasis on missing children ratcheted up parental fears, she might have investigated how parental fear for their children's safety outside fit into society's general anxiety. Despite these criticisms, *The Nature of Childhood* is a solid addition to the history of childhood; it offers a provocative argument and raises interesting questions that invite historians' further consideration.

*So Far, So Good*, by Ralph Salisbury. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013. 274 pp. \$19.95 paperback.

Reviewer Thomas K. Dean is senior presidential writer/editor at the University of Iowa. His extensive writings about the importance of place include *Under a Midland Sky* (2008).

Ralph Salisbury, noted poet and fiction writer, presents here a life-spanning memoir from his Great Depression boyhood growing up on an Iowa farm to his recent days in retirement from teaching at the University of Oregon. Born of a half-Cherokee father and an Irish American mother, Salisbury's work often emphasizes his Native American background. Self-identity in a world of prejudice plays a major role in the book, but, as in much of his writing, Salisbury emphasizes the "tribe of the world." As he states, "I am a Cherokee-Shawnee-English-Irish person, not part this part that but all everything, whatever it is" (242).

Salisbury's memoir, which won the River Teeth Literary Nonfiction Prize, is chronological in only a general sense. The broad strokes of the book's organization move from his birth to the present, but the writing is often associative. Stories and memories spin out from each other and spiral back, creating more of an impressionistic exploration of his experience and identity as opposed to a linear chronicle. Generally, scholars of Iowa history and culture will be most interested in approximately the first half of the book until Salisbury joins the service (underage) at age 17, as well as a later portion dealing with a brief teaching stint at Drake University in Des Moines. Even so, the entire book should be read to capture all Iowa references as well as to understand Iowa influences on the author's later life.

The book is not a farm chronicle per se, but Iowa historians will most likely find interest in specific descriptions of changes in farm life and technology from the early to the mid-twentieth century, especially from the perspective of a poor farming family. Even more compelling, though, is Salisbury's perspective on the role of violence in his life and,

by extension, human life in general. Salisbury explores the violence perpetrated on the family by an abusive father (whom he also admires in many ways, including for his musical talent) but broadens his scope to the violence-fraught world at large. Growing up on a farm, Salisbury was often exposed to the castration and slaughter of animals. But he also senses the violence of, for example, removing kernels from corncobs by rubbing a striker ear against another ear, and then compares that "divide and conquer" technique to dividing Native peoples against themselves in the name of Manifest Destiny and the subsequent "seizure of homelands" and "genocide" (14), leading inevitably to the ultimate violence of the atomic bombs dropped on Japan in World War II.

Some may find Salisbury's memoir overly diffuse, and traditional historical scholars may find his at-times unusual linguistic constructions jarring or somewhat less than transparent, but consider that the book covers the 70-plus-year life span of a poet. Still, common themes can be traced throughout the stories and detours, most notably the struggle between Salisbury's growing Native sensibilities and how those values conflict with modern violence, particularly war. As he says, "Within myself two worlds had collided, the Indian world of hunting and planting and harvesting, in harmony with nature, and the white world of greedily ravaging nature and pirating weaker countries' goods by means of scientific war" (174).