



Nobody Rich or Famous: A Family Memoir

Richard Shelton

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In his new memoir, *Nobody Rich or Famous*, poet Richard Shelton doesn't so much tug on the heartstrings as play an entire set upon them.

Rightly subtitled "a family memoir," the book mixes social history with lyrical vignettes. Shelton becomes researcher and biographer of his own family, the roots of which run deep in Boise, Idaho. He digs into the journals of his grandparents and parents and their struggles coming westward. Like an investigative journalist, he tracks down remnants of their former lives and slowly creates a memorable portrait of an imperfect but distinctly Western family.

The prose is stellar. The sentences flow clearly and then swell with just the right amount of figurative language. Characters like Shelton's own mother, Hazel, come to fully fleshed life in expertly crafted episodes, including, among other things, a shoot-out in a bar and a terrifying encounter with a mountain lion. Shelton writes of his family members with compassion and tenderness but doesn't shy away from their flaws. Their shortcomings and struggles give the book its human face.

Perhaps nothing in *Nobody Rich or Famous* reads as beautifully as Shelton's evocations of the natural world. From a boy's perspective, the landscape changes mysteriously from the forested mountains of the Northwest to the vast deserts of Nevada and California. By delineating a personal history in relation to this high and dry environment, *Nobody Rich or Famous* recalls the best novels and nonfiction of Wallace Stegner. It's an impressive entry in the literary canon of the American West.

SCOTT NEUFFER (Winter 2017)

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