

women subordinate all their individual and collective interests to those of the nation, that women must not play an active and public role in the running of the nation, and that the prime contribution of women to national life can be only maternal, bearing and nurturing successive generations of committed nationalists. The success that women in Québec have enjoyed in the last quarter-century in achieving a greater role in the economic, cultural, and political life of the province has occurred when, collectively and individually, they have given the highest priority to the needs of women rather than those of the nation. What nationalism has done to, and meant for, women in Québec receives no methodical or critical consideration in this book.

There are other issues of similar importance that this book raises but does not examine. Class and ethnicity, for instance, run throughout the history of women in Québec, yet neither merits systematic examination in this book.

*L'histoire des femmes* remains a useful guide to the general shape of the past shared by women in Québec but it provides few explicit insights and none of the essential explanations of that past. The past is meaningful in our lives when we know and understand more than just the chronological detail; we achieve meaning through explanation. Ten years after the original edition of this book, it is no longer enough to tell a story to make women angry; it is time to explain why the past reveals such a dismal story. In failing to do so this book, despite

bringing the story up to 1990, is a disappointment.

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**Joseph E. Illick.** *At Liberty: The Story of a Community and a Generation: The Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, High School Class of 1952.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989. Pp. xvii, 349, illus. \$38.95 U.S.

Joseph E. Illick graduated from Liberty High School in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1952. By the 1970s Illick, a professor teaching American history at San Francisco State College, had developed an interest in the history of the family. When he learned that his high school class was to have a twenty-fifth anniversary reunion, this event triggered his determination to "gather the family histories of my classmates...and write a broad social history of my generation that would appeal not only to scholars but to anyone interested in contemporary America" (p. xvi). For a variety of reasons Illick took far longer to complete the project than he had originally intended, but he eventually produced this very fine book.

Although Bethlehem had been founded by Moravians from Germany in the middle of the eighteenth century, the Bethlehem in which Illick and his classmates grew up was very much a modern industrial city, dominated by the giant Bethlehem Steel Company.

Through their childhood and youth a combination of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and the Second World War diffused somewhat the overwhelming economic power of Bethlehem Steel and the political power of the local Democratic party. These events, however, impinged only very lightly on the lives of the young.

Most grew up in the tight embrace of their sometimes extended families, their ethnic group, and their congregation. Both neighbourhood and school helped youngsters move out "into that mysterious world peopled by multitudes unknown to us" (p. 116). Moving out was perhaps easier in the crowded working-class South Side that was, as George "Skip" John recalled, "the League of Nations. We had Mexicans, we had colored, we had the Italians and Hungarians and the Slovaks and the Russians and all that. It was mixed, and yet it was a real good community at that time" (p. 89). For most, however, both from middle and working-class families, the move into the wider community was only a partial one. Ethnic groups often intermarried, but religious faiths seldom did. As Nick Begovich explained, "I went to Catholic School. And my [Croatian] father always said about girls to marry, 'Go...and get a good Slovak': so I did. He said, 'Marry your kind'" (p. 72).

*At Liberty* is a complex construction. Illick recreates the lives of his subjects as children and as adolescents in their family setting, in the particular neighbourhood in which they grew up, in the schools—and especially the high school they all attended. He traces their later lives in the world of

work, in the marriages into which they entered (and sometimes left) and through their roles as parents and eventually as grandparents. Illick's rich set of data included such traditional documentary material on Liberty High as school annuals, photographs, school board reports, and the like. At the time of his high school reunion, Illick sent a questionnaire regarding their whole life course to that point to the 480 members of his class of 554 whose addresses he was able to track down. Over two hundred people responded, from whom he selected fifty for further interviewing in 1976. After a pause of some seven years, Illick conducted a further set of follow-up interviews in 1983. He also wrote his autobiography as his own primary contribution to the enterprise.

Illick quickly discovered the truism that underlies all oral history: the present governs the past. It is their lives at the moment of completing a questionnaire or being interviewed that predisposes both what subjects draw from their earlier lives to describe and their stance towards what they select. One is not therefore surprised to find that some subjects took a different position on things over the seven years between one interview and the other. These shifting perspectives pose considerable problems for those of us accustomed to histories that provide both a distanced and detached perspective on their subjects. Illick's account, however, differs more in degree than in kind from more traditional monographs and, in any case, I think that at least in this particular example we gain more than we lose from his shifting format. First, we benefit from

the way in which Illick deploys the historian's traditional skills in considering evidence; he makes a tight connection between it and his conclusions. Further, although the perspective from which events are viewed shifts from time to time, the book is held together not only by the high school experiences that its subjects share but by the belief many of them hold that, as Pat Frankenfield observed, "the high school years were the best of your life" (p. 177).

Four tables constructed out of the data collected by means of questionnaires underlie the chapter in which Illick examines the working lives of his classmates. One is not surprised to learn that the jobs held by the parents of the class of 1952 affected the curriculum—academic, vocational, or "general"—that their children selected and, in turn, that there was "a positive relationship between the courses chosen" and their subsequent careers (p. 167). Such conclusions, and the many exceptions to them, are effectively brought to life through the long quotations drawn from the interviews which illuminate this as well as all other chapters. (This is not to suggest that Illick assembled his book in such a mechanical way; the text makes it clear that he crafted his manuscript out of a complex interaction, conducted over a long period of time, and involving both his sources and such contextual literature as that on the history of the family.) Nancy Vaitekunes' parents had not completed high school "and they couldn't help me at all with my work...[but] they supported me." At *Liberty* she felt socially inferior—"coming from the South Side into

Liberty" where there was a clique or cliques drawn from the well-to-do on the North Side (p. 191). Nonetheless, she "wanted to do very well, my best" and after graduating from high school took a degree from the local Moravian College and became a science teacher at a Bethlehem junior high school (p. 191). By 1976, Vaitekunes was a single parent with thirteen- and nineteen-year-old daughters, and "the only woman...and oldest science teacher" in her school (p. 189). Soon after, she died of cancer. Gus Romero played on the liberty football and wrestling teams. The school did not push athletes to do well academically and Gus' father "always let me loaf" (p. 93). After high school he went to work for Bethlehem Steel, was eventually laid off, and then went to work for the post office. His son, who "had it with studying," did not go to college either. In Gus' opinion, he "didn't give him the incentive...just like our parents didn't give us the incentive we needed" (p. 94).

Many reviews end with an admonition that the book discussed is "must" reading for those interested in its field. Since it contains no historical surprises, no startling insights that would make us view American, or educational, or childhood history in a new way, one might argue that Illick's *At Liberty* is mostly useful to those who want a case study of the childhood and education of a certain group of Americans at a particular time, and how these relate to their later beliefs and behaviours. The bemused foreigner, for example, can perhaps begin to understand how growing up in Bethlehem and then living her life there, led

Lucy Hendrick to approve of the American invasion of Grenada. She was "tired of being walked on, as a nation, by third-world countries....I am not a violent person. I detest violence. I never hit my kids. I don't believe in bullying—I hate bullies, as a matter of fact. But there's something about being a strong country that I have a thing about" (p. 247).

There is however one important reason for historians to read *At Liberty* and that is because it models a different way through which one can approach the history of childhood and the history of education. If Illick's conclusions do not startle us, his personal involvement both in his story and his telling of it does. He shows that in sensitive hands historians can get remarkably close to their subjects. When, years ago, I read A.J.A. Symons' *The Quest for Corvo: An Experiment in Biography* (London: 1934), I was intrigued by his account of searching out the life of the writer Frederick Rolfe but also felt it was very definitely a "one-off" effort. Now I think it regrettable that few if any biographers or historians followed Symons' style of approaching a subject. Instead, we had to wait a half-century for Illick to show us that it could be done.

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Gwyn Dow and June Factor, eds.  
*Australian Childhood: An Anthology*. South Yarra: McPhee Grib-

ble, 1989. Pp. 328. \$29.95  
Australian.

In the Introduction to *Australian Childhood: An Anthology*, editors Gwyn Dow and June Factor state that their purpose is "to bring together, for the pleasure and enlightenment of readers, a range of writing about childhood in Australia" (p. 1). They draw accounts from a wide range of primary and secondary sources including autobiographies, biographies, letters, oral histories, first-hand accounts, archival materials, historical documents, and when appropriate, some fiction. They also include a small number of "factions" which they define as "writing which, while fiction in format, is acknowledged as close to autobiography" (p. 1). A number of accounts are by well-known Australians, but many others are by unpublished and unknown writers.

*Australian Childhood* is arranged chronologically to cover four time periods: 1788-1849; 1850-1889; 1890-1929; 1930-1949. Accounts are selected to give readers insight into childhood experiences in different geographical regions, urban and rural settings, economic levels and occupational backgrounds, and ethnic, sex, and social classes. Recurring themes include work, education, family, friendship, fears, prejudice, the pains of puberty, religion, morality, and games and recreation. Also included are personal and moving accounts that illuminate "the inner world of fantasy, dream and thought, and the children's subculture of play and ritual" (p. 2). The Subject Index and the List of Con-