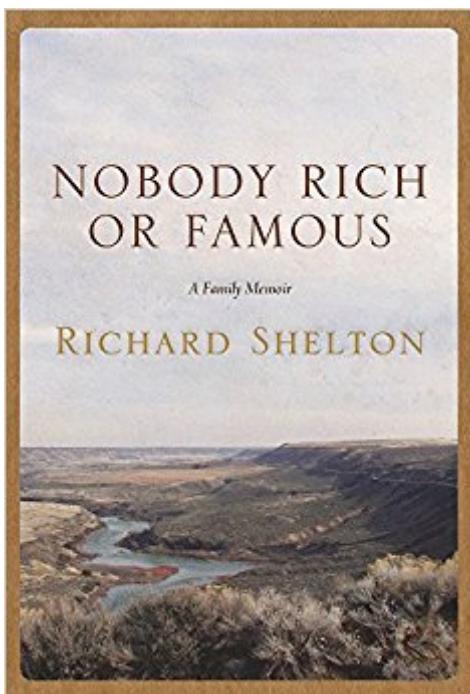


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# Nobody Rich Or Famous: A Family Memoir



## Synopsis

Once in a while, a book comes along that redefines the concept of family. Frank McCourt did it with *Angela's Ashes*; Annie Dillard did it with *An American Childhood*. In *Nobody Rich or Famous*, author Richard Shelton (b. 1933) immerses us in the hardscrabble lives of his Boise, Idaho, clan during the 1930s and '40s. Using a framework of journals, road trips, and artful storytelling, Shelton traces three generations of women. We meet his mother, Hazel, a model of western respectability, who carefully dresses in her finest clothes before walking into a bar and emptying a loaded handgun in the general direction of her husband. We meet his great-grandmother, Josephine, who homesteads a sod shanty and dies too young on the Kansas prairie. We follow his grandmother, Charlotte, as she grows from a live-in servant girl to a fiddle-playing schoolteacher who burns through two marriages before taking up with the iceman. Known for his storytelling, Shelton crafts a tale of poverty and its attendant sorrows: alcoholism, neglect, and abuse. But the tenacity of the human spirit shines through. This is an epic tale of Steinbeckian proportions, but it is not fiction. This is memoir in its finest tradition, illuminating today's cultural chasm between the haves and have-nots. In the author's words, *Nobody Rich or Famous* is "the story of a family and how it got that way."•

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"*Nobody Rich or Famous* is a triumph! One of the best memoirs I have ever read, written with understated grace and mesmerizing power. Do not miss this shining light of a book."•  
Naomi Shihab Nye, author of *Transfer* • "A gritty book, with several unflattering

portraits of an alcoholic father, a physically abusive older brother, and the rough-and-tumble life in the 1930s and 1940s. But there is also the miracle of close observation, of tender feelings, and the poet who grew like an odd flower between the cracks. • Michael Hogan, Emeritus Humanities Chair, American School Foundation of Guadalajara

“Nobody Rich or Famous is a beautiful testament to the power of Richard Shelton’s gifts as a writer and human being. Part memoir, part social history, part prose poem, he has made a wise and astute portrait of his family growing up in the hard-rock seams of Idaho. Pampered was not a word known to the Sheltons; ingenuity was. Through his brutal and at times sideways insights, we see the human family more fully.” • Terry Tempest Williams, author of *The Hour of Land: A Personal Topography of America*’s National Parks

“A quietly profound memoir.” • Kirkus

“His easy, comfortable tone is inviting, and he shares the scandals as well as the triumphs of his colorful family.” • Booklist

“Richard Shelton doesn’t so much tug on the heartstrings as play an entire set upon them.” • Foreword Reviews

“A hard and honest memoir of a life filled with brutalities.” • Tucson Weekly

Richard Shelton is a poet, author, and Regents’ Professor emeritus at the University of Arizona. He is the author of eleven books of poetry and the award-winning memoirs *Going Back to Bisbee* and *Crossing the Yard*.

Richard Shelton read from this book at the Tucson Festival of Books last month. I already purchased a copy and finished reading it a couple of days ago back in Oregon. He is an outstanding author, a true wordsmith. This is the third book of his that I’ve read. All of them are outstanding reads, poetic and highly entertaining. *Nobody Rich or Famous* taught me that every family, probably every family, has emotional peaks and valleys as life happens and our relatives pass away. I appreciate Richard Shelton’s account of his family and will always remember this book as one of the best I’ve ever read.

His story is fascinating and very well told. I marvel that he is such a success as a human being after being raised in such a multigenerational dysfunctional family. It shows how much a difference one person (his grandmother) can make in a child’s life for him to understand there is a better way. Of course it says a lot about the child that recognized and acted on his understanding. He grew to be an honored academic, poet and writer. Our daily newspapers show this unfortunately is a very

unusual outcome. But this book left me feeling in awe and even encouraged about humanity. In spite of their often dysfunctional relationships and behaviors we learn each member of the family also had positive, even likable attributes.

Richard Shelton is more than just a gifted writer. He's funny, intelligent, compassionate - the sort of person you'd love to meet or have coffee with every week. His memoirs reflect that greatness of spirit and mastery of craft.

Such a well-written, poignant book. I highly recommend it. It was a pleasure to read.

A truly interesting book, and beautifully written. It's an unvarnished look at a complicated and fascinating American family. It's part genealogical drama and self-reflective memoir. Shelton is masterful.

A fascinating read of a family with flaws, but with enough love to carry them through

my wife learned a lot about her relatives

Best book I read, all year.

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