



Ghost Dances: Proving Up on the Great Plains

Josh Garrett-Davis

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Growing up in South Dakota, Josh Garrett-Davis knew he would leave. But as a young adult, he kept going back--in dreams and reality and by way of books. With this beautifully written narrative about a seemingly empty but actually rich and complex place, he has reclaimed his childhood, his unusual family--and the Great Plains.

Among the subjects and people that bring his Midwestern Plains to life are the destruction and resurgence of the American bison; Native American "Ghost Dancers," who attempted to ward off destruction by supernatural means; the political allegory to be found in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*; and current attempts by ecologists to "rewild" the Plains, complete with cheetahs. Garrett-Davis infuses the narrative with stories of his family as well--including his great-great-grandparents' twenty-year sojourn in Nebraska as homesteaders and his progressive Methodist cousin Ruth, a missionary in China ousted by Mao's revolution. GHOST DANCES is a fluid combination of memoir and history and reportage that reminds us our roots matter.

Ghost Dances: Proving Up on the Great Plains Details

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Author : Josh Garrett-Davis

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From Reader Review Ghost Dances: Proving Up on the Great Plains for online ebook

Carrie says

An interesting view of growing up on the great plains. At times a little dry, but full of history. Having visited South Dakota several times, the descriptions of various locations bring back some interesting memories. I would recommend this!

Recieved as a First-read

Monica says

Whew, what a relief - I have other books out of the library now and don't have to finish this one. It's not that it's bad, it's just ... I dunno ... It started off good... I learned things... I didn't realize that South Dakota had the first Arab American senator... and that Willa Cather liked to kill and dissect stray animals and supported vivisection (yuck! Makes me never want to read My Antonia again) ... but I dunno. A lot of the book is about Garrett-Davis' family, and it's interesting, but... I guess not enough for me to care about finishing. Odd because I usually like the format of moving from personal story to history and back, but it just didn't work for me here.

Janice says

Truthfully I read the first half of the book and then spot read the rest. To me it was more like reading a history book than a reading a book for enjoyment. Josh Garrett-Davis is a good writer I'm sure but the book was just not my cup of tea. Sorry Josh! Sorry goodreads for the FREE book that I just didn't want to finish cover to cover! On to my next book!!

John Benson says

Josh Garrett-Davis grew up in South Dakota in the 1980s as the only child of two very liberal parents in a conservative state. His parents soon divorced and the author tries to make sense of his parent's lives within the context of the Great Plains environment. Most of the book makes sense but the last few chapters are very hard to understand what he was trying to get across to his readers.

Jim Wilson says

This was a really fascinating read. Personal history combined with history of and meditation on the Great Plains. The kind of book that made me want to, quite often, tell the author that he had something wrong or if not wrong he was making sweeping assertions or generalizations that I felt needed qualifiers or explanation. I was bothered often by the tone but could not select specific material that I found objectionable. Good book to

read.

Ron says

Read my review at my blog.

Amanda says

I received this book through the Goodreads First Reads program.

This was a nice memoir and I have been really into historical fiction lately but I think I would have enjoyed this book more if I had grown up in the plains or South Dakota. I have never been out there and there are a lot of references that I think locals would appreciate.

Jessica says

Ghost Dances is unlike any other book about the Great Plains. A genre-bending read that blends memoir with history with reportage, Garrett-Davis has a voice that is distinct on the page. How many books about South Dakota include a mix-tape roundup of early 1990s punk rock and its relationship to small town ennui? Of particular interest to me was the chapter on the hatemongers at Westboro Baptist Church. Garrett-Davis treats even the worst of people with an astounding generosity that does credit to his progressive Midwestern roots.

Kim Ode says

Growing up in South Dakota may have helped me get through parts of this book -- which is not really a good thing. I'm not sure what others might make of the semi-obsession Garrett-Davis has with former governor Bill Janklow. Granted, not a character worthy of much defense, but his odd way of throwing in a Janklow shot in the midst of another topic was disconcerting.

I enjoyed much of the history he recounted here. Where I fell off the wagon was in how the memoir aspect seemed forced. Drawing a comparison between the fight for a T.Rex skeleton and himself in his own parents' custody battle was, well, a stretch. And a half.

Garrett-Davis is a good writer, and I'm curious what is next on his plate. But as with many memoirs, this felt written too soon.

Michael says

This is essentially an autobiography, written by a late-twenty something man growing up in small-town South Dakota feeling alienated because his taste in heavy-metal music and skateboarding found so little cultural support. Along the way we learn of the melodrama of divorce between his parents and his resulting emotional struggles.

I found it of limited interest for its content, and unexceptional in its writing, language or story-telling.

This was a required reading for a class at the University of Colorado Center of the American West. I suspect it was chosen for its title and its cover graphics as much as for its content, and perhaps because of the wish of the instructor to appeal to a group of young undergraduates.

The theme of the course appears to be an effort at debunking the mythology that has grown up around the western United States, though it's a stretch for me to see small-town South Dakota as anything resembling the West. I do recall, however, seeing a billboard in Nebraska in 1971, "Where the West Begins." I read that as more a statement of hope than a reflection of reality.

Staci says

Disclosure: I received this book for free through Goodreads First Reads. Thanks to the publishers for the opportunity to read this book for an unbiased review.

I hate to say this but as a Kansas native and a transplant to Missouri I was disappointed in this book. When I won it I was very excited but found it very difficult to get into. That being said, in all fairness, I must also disclose that I do not enjoy reading about history so that may have something to do with my response. My 14 year old daughter, however, picked it up and read it through in just a few short days and said she really enjoyed it.

Maureen M says

I wrote this review for the newspaper:

Josh Garrett-Davis couldn't wait to get out of South Dakota and get on with his life. But when he moved to the East Coast, he began to realize how much his life had been shaped by growing up on the Great Plains. This memoir of a young man explores his coming of age in homes broken by divorce, dislocation, politics and geography. He traces his own family history as well as that of the plains, the bison and the American Indians who came before his folk. He looks ahead to the developing movements to "rewild" the plains as the people drain away. He paints the powerful contradictions of the Great Plains, contrasts as sharp as the Badlands themselves: solid rock that disintegrates, an empty landscape that fills the heart, settlers who can't settle down or "prove up." Fittingly, he does it both with and without sentiment: sharing what he can now see from a distance, but with the perspective of a loyal native son.

Claudia Putnam says

Uneven. I think this should have been packaged as an essay collection. But I really enjoyed the sections about the author's childhood in South Dakota and his personal ambivalence about being a child of the Great Plains.

Full Stop says

<http://www.full-stop.net/2012/09/28/r...>

Review by Danielle Bukowski

In the grand mythology of American history, the Great Plains are the symbol of opportunity and starting fresh, of success through rugged individualism. Yet the harsh climate and isolation have made it difficult for any one group to settle and stay for long: to “prove up,” in the terms of the 1862 Homestead Act. “Coming and going is the only thing native to the Plains,” Josh Garrett-Davis writes, which makes him a South Dakota native through-and-through. When he left for college on the East Coast, the author had every intention of leaving South Dakota behind in a cloud of dust; but the myth of the Plains kept calling him back. *Ghost Dances: Proving Up on the Great Plains* is a reckoning of Garrett-Davis’ troubled relationship to the land he called home but in which he never felt he belonged.

The book is part memoir and part landscape history, which makes for an idiosyncratic project. Garrett-Davis weaves the story of growing up feeling like an outsider in South Dakota with the tales of the various tribes, homesteaders, and intrepid individuals who lived and left the Plains. In Garrett-Davis’ repopulation of the Plains, there are teenage punks and American Indians, bison and hot-headed politicians. Tying all of these characters and stories into a cohesive narrative is not without its bumps and awkward transitions. It is Garrett-Davis’ obvious love for the place that propels the story forward, winding the prose around to another little-known fact or lushly described landscape, with a storyteller’s sense of direction.

Read more here: <http://www.full-stop.net/2012/09/28/r...>

Sharon says

This book had a definite meandering quality that I saw others did not like. He definitely jumped around from telling about his experiences growing up to extended family history to literary influences. I found it interesting, though, so didn't mind the wandering nature of the narrative. It had the quality to me of having a series of coffee dates with someone and getting to know their story and how they got to be where they are today. I found the first half much more interesting than the second half, but overall a good read. I would definitely be interested to read his next book - and hope he will write more.
