Thank you, Fr. Wild, and especially the Haggerty Family. And congratulations to Bob, Pol, Sheila and Amy; it’s humbling to be standing here after hearing about your important projects, especially in comparison to my little books on children.

This is, of course, a great honor, and as I searched for an explanation for how I came to be at this podium today, I’ve come up with two: First of all, I was lucky enough to find a research field with room to grow, and to find a voice to articulate why it was important for us to understand the place of children in history. Second, I was fortunate enough to have joined a department with senior colleagues who modeled a seriousness of purpose and a natural integration of their scholarship with their responsibilities as teachers and as members of the Marquette community: they include Fr. Francis Paul Prucha and Frank Klement—who were retiring about the time I arrived—but who were nationally known historians who also received the Award for Teaching Excellence. Their ability to maintain a scholarly reputation at the same time they became legendary teachers should inspire everyone at this university, where we expect excellence in both research and teaching. I especially appreciate the example set by Athan Theoharis, who won this award in 2002, and who set impossible to duplicate standards for professionalism and for connecting historical research to social justice and public policy. It’s presumptuous of me to say this, but he’s been my model for how to conduct my scholarly life since I arrived on campus and I appreciate his advice and friendship more than he knows.

I could mention a number of current colleagues in the department—some senior to me, some among the many we’ve hired since I’ve been chair—who have continued the Prucha – Klement – Theoharis tradition of honoring all facets of our responsibilities as faculty members at this university.
I have to add a little known fact: I grew up in a little tiny town in South Dakota. The winner of this award two years ago, Pat Carey from Theology, grew up about thirty miles away, in Mitchell. The winner of last year’s award, Steven Downs of Biology, attended Augustana College as an undergraduate, in Sioux Falls, about sixty miles away. I’ve never thought of being from South Dakota as being an advantage in academe, but I might need to re-think that assumption.

My first love as a historian was the Civil War; I was a little boy during the Centennial in the early 1960s and almost inevitably became a historian—and so I’ve always associated my work with some of my favorite memories of growing up. And, like many baby boomers, as an adult I was a little obsessed with thinking about childhood—my own, and my children’s—and that clearly played a role in my evolution into being a historian of children and youth. As a result, my research has always been meaningful in very personal ways. This award suggests that it’s been meaningful in larger ways, too; it also encourages me to suggest to my colleagues and to the university as a whole that we, as faculty members and as institutions of higher learning, should always strive, as we do generally—but not always—to make sure that research is an organic element of one’s life as a scholar rather than simply a way of keeping score—that the quality and relevance of our publications is as important as their quantity.

None of this would matter at all without my wife Linda and our children, Lauren and Eli; when I’ve needed to go on the road to do research, or go to a conference, or spend more time than usual at the computer, Linda has always picked up the slack without complaint. But really, more importantly, nothing I’ve accomplished in writing about children and families would mean a thing to me without the presence of these real people in my life, and I just wanted to thank them publicly.
As a historian of children who is also a historian of war, I read a lot of sad stories. However, when I think of my work as a historian and, for that matter, as department chair, I recall one of the first sets of letters I read from a Civil War mother to her soldier husband in which she complained about all of the trouble her little boy got into—my own son was a toddler at the time, so I could identify. Yet she could tell her husband that the little boy was “A Caution for fun.” I still feel that way about my own research, and can only hope that all of the scholars in the Marquette community being honored at this reception—and that’s all of us, not just the five who visited this program—can say the same about theirs.