



MY WORD

WITH RODNEY MARTIN

Safety

Prehistoric *solwos 'whole' became Latin *salvus* 'unharmd' and *salvia* 'healing plant'. In Old French, *salvus* became *sauf* and the noun *sauvete* (also *sauge* 'healing plant'). English borrowed *sauf* as *save*, later *safe* 'strongbox'. The ending *-ty* formed abstract nouns in English: *saufte* (early 1300s) 'spiritual safety' became *saft* (c. 1370s) and later *safety* 'freedom from harm'.

Related words: *sage*, *salutation*, *salute*, *salvage*, *salvation*, *salvia*, *save*, *saviour*, *soldier*, *solemn*, *solid*.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Historically, freedom from harm was a relative thing. Travel from the home or village involved a degree of danger – which is why people said 'God be with ye' (the origin of 'goodbye').

In modern, safer countries, education is a basic right. Teachers, charged with this task, are also held responsible for student safety. In some environments, this responsibility is sorely tested. I have visited US schools that were surrounded by barbed wire and with an armed guard at the entrance.

Fortunately we do not see this in Australia. However, contrary to practices in the 1950s to 1970s, we have seen a shift in safety procedures and heightened alertness by teachers.

On a simple practical level, playground equipment is now carefully designed and monitored to improve physical safety. But there are more complex issues related to child custody, and access with split families. So the potential harm can come from those closest to children, or from other children in the form of bullying.

Teachers have also seen a growing change in parental views of safety. Some adults protect their child by being 'helicopter parents' – hovering over and defending the child in all circumstances.

Often this involves challenging teachers' actions or defending a child's misbehaviour, in sharp contrast to the days when the teacher was 'always right'. Either extreme goes too far.

Living carries risks and rewards. Adventurous children have always tried to climb one tree too many. Walking or riding a bike to and from school was part of socialisation with other students. Testing boundaries is part of children practising independence and developing confidence.

Sage 'knowledgeable person' does not have the same origin as *safety* 'security' or *sage* 'healing plant', but teaching and parenting involves both. Positive communication and cooperation between teachers and parents beats being at odds with each other over children's welfare. Collaboration is a safe road to travel.

Rodney Martin is a children's author and educator. His SA family business, Era Publications, creates interactive online children's books for homes, schools and public libraries around the world. (See free samples at www.erapublications.com/south-kids.)