



10-15-1987

I Remember Mama in 1951 / Picking up Shinnery Roots

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Recommended Citation

Sailors, Ava Snowden and North, Margie Snowden (1987) "I Remember Mama in 1951 / Picking up Shinnery Roots," *Westview*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 1 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol7/iss1/14>

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I Remember Mama In 1951

The seven of us live in a little two-room shack
 Where the Oklahoma wind blows sand in through the knotholes.
 We carry aluminum buckets of water up the hill from the well;
 Burn shinnery roots in an old iron stove when northers hit.
 Mama sews our clothes from chicken feed sacks,
 Then washes them on a washboard,
 Her hands are red and chapped, never resting from endless chores.
 She is pretty and young — only thirty-six, and
 Though there's no money for a new dress or a lipstick,
 She never complains and is always cheerful.
 Sometimes she sits on Papa's lap
 While we listen to the Grand Ole Opry on Saturday night.
 She can be counted on to laugh at Minnie Pearl
 Or at something one of us might say or do,
 And make popcorn or peanut brittle
 When Naomi, my best friend, spends the night.
 Naomi squeezes my hand, says, "I love to come to your house.
 Your mom is so much fun, and your dad is so handsome!"
 Then I don't mind, as much, the knotholes in our walls
 Or the sand on the faded linoleum floors and in our beds
 Because Mama, with her patience, laughter, and love,
 Has transformed the little shack into our HOME.



The author's mother and granddaughter, 1977.

*While growing up, I couldn't appreciate the many sacrifices Mama made for her family and the way, even without much money, she still gave us a good feeling of security. Now a mother and grandmother myself, I admire her — not only for being the kind of mother she was and is — but as one woman admires another. I love you, Mama.

AVA SNOWDEN SAILORS spent her formative years near Erick. Now a resident of North Richland Hills, Texas, she previously lived for several years in Pueblo, Colorado.

winter warmth

Picking Up Shinnery Roots

By Margie Snowden North

Clearing the land and piling up
 winter's fuel
 for the round-bellied stove.
 Sun glares, white-hot,
 and not a cloud in sight.
 Even Mama's slat-bonnet flaps are
 still in the windless day.
 Sweat pours,
 trickles down backs and faces,
 M-Farmall crawls
 across sea of sand

pulling the root-wagon,
 leaving ruts a foot deep.
 Think it'll ever be cold enough
 To use these old roots anyway?
 Papa's sweatin' too.
 Sun beats,
 burning backs and faces and ambitions.
 Us kids waiting (casting side-long glances)
 for magic words
 that'll take us back to the house.

This weather ain't fit for man nor beast.
 I'm spittin' cotton already.
 How 'bout you kids?
 And in ten minutes we're home
 layin' on cool, quiet floors
 with wet towels draped over our backs
 and dreaming of places where
 no one ever even hears of a shinnery root.