
“My mother was thirty-eight years old when Papa died. With eleven children still in the household, and the Great Depression pressing sore in the land, she faced poverty, trials, and tribulation with fortitude, resourcefulness, and a deep faith in God.” Thus spoke Carolyn Guy about what inspired her first published novel, *Autumn Bends the Rebel Tree*, a fictionalized account of her amazing mother who bore seventeen children, including two sets of twins.

The author fashioned her fictional heroine Clarinda Darningbush, who also bore seventeen children, including two sets of twins, after her own mother. Clarinda’s marriage at fourteen to handsome banjo-playing Rufus McCloud, himself barely eighteen, and her great love for him and all their children are beautifully portrayed in this finely crafted work. Life in the Appalachian Mountains during the 1930s and 1940s was hard, and readers will be reminded of that song by Bob McDill and sung by Alabama, “Somebody told us that Wall Street fell, but we were so poor that we couldn’t tell.” But these people were strong and not without their pleasures in life, including their music, their religion and strong faith in God, and the bounteous food which they worked so hard to produce and which sustained them. Carolyn Guy portrays many humorous incidents drawn from her own family and friends’ lives and from stories told to her as she was growing up. She captures the dialog of mountain folks beautifully for, as she herself says, “That’s how I talked growing up.”

When her beloved Rufus dies, Clarinda remains a widow for a long time until she meets and marries (against her children’s advice and warnings) Wadell Dudley, a well-to-do but selfish and rather mean-spirited farmer. He refuses even to buy shoes for Clarinda’s youngsters and begrudges the very food they eat, and never lives up to his promise to teach her boys how to drive a team of horses. But Clarinda refuses to let this setback destroy her family, and turns this relationship into a benefit for her struggling family. She bends like the Rebel apple tree in her yard, but never breaks.

Some chapters begin or end with poetry or a song, many by the author, for she is a published poet. This book was awarded the Clark Cox Historical Fiction Award for 2011, given by the North Carolina Society of Historians. It is an appropriate read for young adults to seniors and should be considered a must purchase for any public or university library which includes North Carolina history, fiction, or Appalachian regional literature.

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