



Illustrated by Ted Rand
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About MY MOUNTAIN SONG

In the early 1980s I read a book that changed my life. It was Cynthia Rylant's *When I Was Young in the Mountains*. (Dutton, 1982) I read that book and said "Hey! That's my story, too!" Her book talked about life in the mountains in West Virginia, which is just across the state line from eastern Kentucky where I was born and had spent many happy summers visiting relatives. I had also recently read a poem about mountain folk by Mittie L. Jordan. It read, in part, "I was born a mountain child/born of mountain farmers/strong people who know that it is hard/to produce a harvest from a rock/strong solid people/who believe enough to try."

I had been writing poetry for many years and those two pieces of writing prompted me to try my own poem about loving the mountains. After I'd written a poem, people read it and said that it sounded like there was a whole story there. Hmmm . . . I expanded my poem and wrote a picture book from it—the very first book I wrote specifically to be a book for children, **My Mountain Song**.

Many years after I wrote this book I ended up selling it to Clarion (Houghton Mifflin). But while I was still trying to sell it, people who read the story told me that it sounded like there was more to the story. They wanted to know more about the girl, Brenda Gail. Hmmm . . . I expanded upon it again and wrote a novel. That novel also sold to Clarion and became **Spitting Image**. I dedicated the novel to my sister, Brenda, as she was the basis for the little girl in **My Mountain Song**. Although **Spitting Image** was sold after **My Mountain Song**, the novel was published first, as it did not require illustrations. Also, we waited to get a really fine illustrator, Ted Rand.

My Mountain Song is, perhaps, the book closest to my heart for several reasons. It was the first book I really wanted to write for kids, it is based upon my true experiences of going down South every summer to visit grandparents, and it has my sister in it. Also, the nickname I gave to Brenda Gail was mine. Some in my family still call me "Shuck Beans." And the name I gave to the bothersome cousin is my dad's name, Melvin. (See the dedication in the book.)

I hope you enjoy **My Mountain Song**, as it is one of many songs in my heart.

S. C.
May, 2004.