
Like Christmas, *Mama’s Wreaths* is about giving and love. Based upon the childhood memories of Ebel’s collaborator, Joan Moretz of Watauga County, this collection of simple narrative poems is carefully crafted with the recurring imagery of evergreens and a mother’s hands. These images, in vivid sensory shorthand, evoke for the reader the experiences of Moretz’s childhood.

Set in the mountains of North Carolina between the months of October and December 1968, middle child Joanie is eager to learn the traditional craft of wreath making from her mother. In the poem “October 1968” Joanie tells us

Mama says there’s a secret
in those green needles -
   a secret that I’ll figure out
someday.

Joanie knows that this is not just an artistic skill that she must perfect but a skill needed to help provide the necessities of life for her family. Through such poems as “Planning, Gathering, Learning” we see Joanie grow in skill and maturity, from girl into an intuitive young woman. In the short but powerful poem “Sacrifice” a more observant Joanie sees:

But those pretty wreaths
don’t happen
without a sacrifice
of two or three layers of skin
off Mama’s hands.

During poems covering the time-span of three months, Ebel present a complete picture of family. It is a classic story of giving and growing, where hardship is tempered by love and joy. In the final poem “The Wreath” Joanie proclaims:

I think how my wreath
is singing “Joy to the World”
   just as Mama’s wreaths are doing
That’s a lot of joy,
Joy to the World.

*Mama’s Wreaths* is classified as juvenile fiction but is a story suitable for families to share or classroom discussion. The book contains supplemental materials on wreath making and the culture of the craft in the North Carolina mountains. Ebel is the author of six previous books, including *The Picture Man* and *Waking Ribbon*.

Deborah Ashby
Sandhills Community College