

**MEET**

# Hazel Dickens

A Pioneering Woman of Bluegrass Music



**S**ongwriter Hazel Dickens never thought she would be a writer. She thought she would work in a factory all her life. Born in Mercer County, West Virginia, Hazel was one of 11 children in a poor mining family. No one in the family had much education. They learned from observing and listening to what other people said.

"People who are not educated can do it," says Hazel. They can succeed. Her own accomplishments are proof of that. One of her songs, "Mama's Hand," won the International Bluegrass Music Award for Best Song of the Year. In 1993, Hazel received the Country Music Merit Award.

But these honors did not come easily. It took more than a voice and her talent as a songwriter to make it in the world of bluegrass music. It took guts.

## **IN THE 1960'S, THERE WEREN'T MANY WOMEN IN BLUEGRASS.**

Hazel and Alice Gerrard changed all that, however, when they made a record called "Pioneering Women of Bluegrass." They became the role models for many women of the future who were interested in writing and singing Bluegrass music.

Hazel says that she writes like she talks. Her songs are simple and powerful. Some of her songs are sad. Hazel says she writes to relieve herself of her feelings. She hopes others can identify with what she writes.

It took Dickens a long time to write down her feelings about her mother and to create



"Mama's Hand." She wanted to capture the love and respect she felt for her mother. So, like most people who are trying to sort out their feelings, Hazel kept changing the words, adding parts and taking out parts. Even though it won an award for best song of the year, Hazel says it was "never quite good enough." It could never in her mind live up to the goodness of her mother.

## **FINE TUNE YOUR WRITING**

Hazel Dickens wrote a song about her mother. We all have stories and memories of our families. In most families there are stories you heard over and over again when you were a child. It might be a story that your mother told about growing up, or something that you did when you were little. Write it up.

Save it for  
**YOUR PORTFOLIO.**