

When roads were graveled and barrels were staved,
When worn-out clothing was used as rags,
And there were no plastic wrap or bags,
And the well and the pump were way out back,
A versatile item, was the Flour Sack.

Pillsbury's Best, Mother's, and Gold Medal, too
Stamped their names proudly in purple and blue.
The string on top was pulled and kept;
The flour emptied and spills were swept.
The bag was folded and stored in a sack
That durable, practical Flour Sack.

The sack could be filled with feathers and down,
For a pillow, or t'would make a nice sleeping gown.
It could carry a book and be a school bag,
Or become a mail sack slung over a nag
It made a very convenient pack,
That adaptable, cotton Flour Sack.



Bleached and sewn, it was dutifully worn
As bibs, diapers, or kerchief adorned.
It was made into skirts, blouses and slips.
And Mom braided rugs from one hundred strips;
She made ruffled curtains fo the house or shack,
From that humble, but treasured Flour Sack!

As a strainer for milk or apple juice,
To wave men in, it was a very good use,
As a sling for a sprained wrist or a break,
To help Mother roll up a jelly cake,
As a window shade or to stuff a crack,
We used a sturdy, common Flour Sack!.



As dish towels, embroidered or not,
They covered up dough, helped pass pans so hot,
Tied up dishes for neighbors in need,
And for men out in the field to seed.
The dried dishes from pan, not rack,
That absorbent, handy Flour Sack!

We polished and cleaned stove and table,
Scoured and scrubbed from cellar to gable,
We dusted the bureau and oak bed post,
Made costumes for October (a scary ghost)
And a parachute for a cat named Jack.
From that lowly, useful old Flour Sack.

So now my friends, when they ask you,
As curious youngsters often do,
"Before plastic wrap, Elmer's glue
and paper towels, what did you do?"
Tell them loudly and with pride don't lack,
"Grandmother had that wonderful Flour Sack!



THIS FRUGAL ATTITUDE, BORN OUT OF EXTREME NECESSITY, CAME INTO PLAY MORE PROMINENTLY DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION.

During that time, very few families had enough money to buy anything, let alone a new article of clothing at the company store. Mothers mended socks and sewed patches over holes in clothes and feed sacks were transformed, almost miraculously, into all manner of garments for the family. Many families even saved and used the string which sewed the sack together.

Widely used in the 1930's and 40's by farm families across the country, flour or animal feed sacks often came in a patterned material as a sales incentive. It was often difficult to match sack patterns. Stores would get a truck load which might sell out quickly before customers had an opportunity to get the sacks they needed to finish a quilt or an article of clothing.

With disposable items rapidly gaining popularity in the late 1950's, the production of cloth sacks dropped sharply and almost without anyone realizing it, the era of feed sack clothing in the mining and farming communities was over.

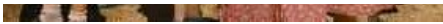
Mine muslin was the fabric used to block off unused areas within the mine and was widely used by women to create everything from curtains to clothing to rugs. Feed wasn't the only commodity that came in cloth bags, so did flour, salt and oatmeal. The flour sacks, once emptied and washed, were the softest and finest material of the lot. This material was most often used to make underwear, baby clothes and even diapers. Farmers bought cattle feed, chicken feed and hog feed in large 100-pound sacks.

These sacks, once emptied, washed and ironed, would become dresses, shirts, pants, or whatever was needed at the time.

The sacks were sometimes printed so that the design looked like curtains or in the case of a flour sack, pillowcases. The white sacks were bleached, sewn together and used as bedsheets; and also used for the backing of quilts.

Women of the era wasted nothing, if they could help it. The cotton thread used to sew the sacks together was even saved for later use. Scraps left over from making garments were saved in the scrap box and used for making pieced, quilt tops. There was always an abundance of scraps by the year's end.





Ida Mae Dox-Rifenburgh, Great-Great Grandmother of G. T. Shulz wearing a "Flour Sack" dress. Photograph used with the kind permission of G. T. Shulz.

