

## Patron Review – Virginia McGee Butler

*The Most They Ever Had*

by Rick Bragg

Rick Bragg, as is his custom, draws this small book of essays from the people who form his roots. Had my first memories not been in a mill community where my father was pastor of the “mill church,” a mission of the First Baptist Church, I would have thought Rick Bragg’s people were idealized and overdrawn, but he paints an authentic picture of their lives. In essays that are vignettes of life in the mill community, he honors the stamina and commitment of mill workers who lived in immediate danger from powerful machines that often took a finger or an arm and the long-term danger of bacteria laden cotton lint that filled the lungs of the workers and left them struggling to breathe. In spite of the hardships, these mill folks found joy in their faith, in country music played on a guitar, and in their baseball games. Rick Bragg tells the true and touching stories of hardscrabble people who are grateful for jobs that brought them a small step up the ladder out of poverty.

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