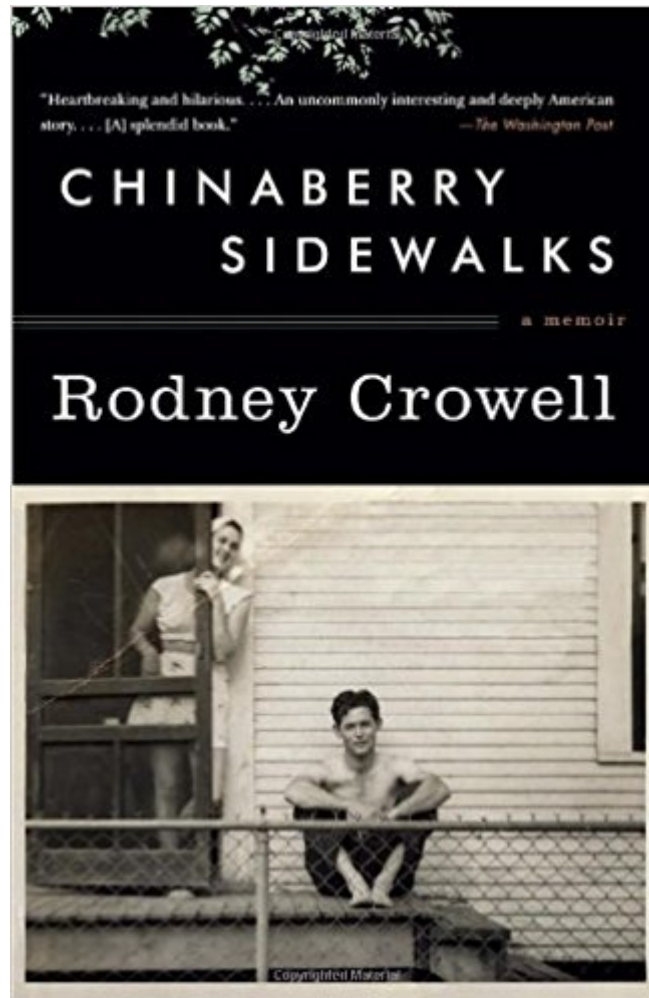




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# Chinaberry Sidewalks: A Memoir



## Synopsis

In a tender and uproarious memoir, singer-songwriter Rodney Crowell reveals the good, the bad, and the ugly of a dirt-poor southeast Texas boyhood. The only child of a hard-drinking father and a holy-roller mother, acclaimed musician Rodney Crowell was no stranger to bombast. But despite a home life always threatening to burst into violence, Rodney fiercely loved his mother and idolized his blustering father, a frustrated musician who took him to see Hank Williams, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, and Johnny Cash perform. Set in 1950s Houston, a frontier-rough town with icehouses selling beer by the gallon on payday, pest infestations right out of a horror film, and the kind of freedom mischievous kids dream of, *Chinaberry Sidewalks* is Rodney's tribute to his parents and his remarkable youth. Full of the most satisfying kind of nostalgia, it is hardly recognizable as a celebrity memoir. Rather, it's a story of coming-of-age at a particular time, place, and station, crafted as well as the perfect song.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Singer-songwriter Crowell's upbringing in Texas had all the prerequisite elements of a hardscrabble country music story--drinking, guns, fistfights, fierce spankings, infidelity, Pentecostal preachers, fishing, love, hate, laughter, tears, sex, drugs, and of course, music. But Crowell's storytelling abilities and narrative flair elevate this book far above the average music memoir. Born in 1950 to a blue-collar, hard-drinking, country-singing father and religious mother, Crowell lived in Jacinto City, east of Houston, in a shoddily constructed house cursed with leaks,

mosquitoes, and vermin. He recalls hurricanes, fishing trips, rock throwing fights, and bow-and-arrow mishaps, all with the enthusiasm of a hyper 10-year-old pedaling at full speed (something he and neighborhood kids did when following the "Mosquito Dope Truck," a DDT spraying vehicle that they chased on their bicycles). Crowell touches on his early musical influences, including a Hank Williams concert when he was only two, and an outdoor show by Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Johnny Cash in a thunderstorm, as well as his first time playing music with his father's band. It's not music that's at the heart of this book, however, but his loving and turbulent relationships with his parents and their often strained but deep love for one another. (Jan.)

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**\*Starred Review\*** Crowell is among the best storytellers to emerge from Nashville. Up to now, he told his stories in song, but with this heartfelt memoir, he can now be called a writer of the first order. Houston, where Crowell grew up in the 1950s and early 1960s, was a city full of characters found in stereotypical country songs: hard-drinking fathers and long-suffering mothers singing along to the beer-soaked ballads of Hank Williams. But this is not fiction; Crowell actually lived the life, soaking up its exhilarating and disturbing atmosphere. Crowell is unsparingly honest, yet there is an admirable restraint here, too. He clearly loves his family, accepting their bountiful deficiencies even when he criticizes them or wishes them harm. He can now see the kind of lives his parents wanted to live, and how they fell woefully short. He calls his father an enigma and savant; he admires his mother, who suffered from double dyslexia and epilepsy, for her towering instinct for survival. But he also discusses lighter topics, such as his early days in a rock & roll band, making for an exceptional memoir. --June Sawyers --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I have loved Rodney Crowell since hearing his 1st album, and before I knew who he was on Emmylou's earliest albums. I found his memoir funny, sad, loving & touching, much like his music. Sometimes so open and honest, auto correct suggested horney for honest, lol & yes that too in his descriptions of his constant pursuit of girl's as a teenager & college drop out. I was surprised the Book ended so quickly, perhaps because I wasn't ready or done reading his word's. He's as honest and funny as much of his song's suggest. I loved reading his story of his crazy mom & dad, they remind me of my own wacky family. I would have liked more about Roseanne Cash and his wonderful relationship with his beloved father-in-law Johnny Cash, but I respect his careful way of

keeping their story private. A good read for me from one of my all- time favourite musicians.

Excellent written. Mr. Crowell has a way of expressing things that really puts you there with what he is sharing. His only child blue collar upbringing was much like mine here in Texas which made it very easy to feel as though I fit right in with his world. The vocabulary is so just perfect for the period of time he is writing about ----- such great description of times, places and music of the period ----- really perfect. A real picture of a real family and American life. Chinaberry Sidewalks you will not want to stop reading. Definitely not dull and every page is full of the author's sharing of honesty, adventure, sadness, struggle, talent and all that comes with life. This is my first review and am doubtful as to what kind of influence I have given to the book that has become one of my favorites. Chinaberry Sidewalks is sitting right beside Liar's Club by Mary Karr. If you enjoy one you will enjoy the other.

Being a long-time Rodney Crowell fan, I was excited to read his memoir. I've always loved his songwriting, so I assumed I would enjoy his prose just as much. I was a bit leery, however, since I'd read that the memoir didn't talk about his music career. Wow! This book captured me from the first chapter. In every story he told, I was there. He captures the moments; the feelings, the sights, the smells, even, of every childhood memory. Many people, if they choose to admit it, will relate to the dysfunction of his parents' relationship, and thus, the dysfunction of the entire household. The fears, the sometimes disgust, the need to have a parent BE a parent. I don't mean to convey that this book is a downer. It's just the opposite. It's often very funny, and it ultimately portrays the reconciliation that occurred between Rodney and his parents, and the mutual understanding and love that prevailed. I didn't want to let this book go. I was sad when I finished it. I wished there were more stories to tell, of these fascinating, flawed people.

This book brought back so many memories of what it was like living in the 50's, 60's & 70's. Especially the areas I grew up in- Galena Park, Jacinto City, Channelview etc. Definitely a very good book to read. I never knew Rodney Crowell lived in Jacinto City, Texas. Loved this book.

That Rodney Crowell is multi-talented has never been a well-kept secret, but who knew that his gift extended to such an excellent degree as an author? From western Ky myself, and accustomed to hearing many localisms, metaphors, I learned some hilarious new ones and I especially enjoyed reading those he attributes to his father. Having visited frequently an older sis who resided in

Pasadena during the era of which he writes, I had no problem recognizing Rodney's description of that area in east Texas. If Rodney's goal was to cause the reader to fall in love with his little family (including all their warts), and to reminiscence about one's own childhood neighborhood, he was more than successful. Buy it! Read it! You will 'feel it' and you will appreciate his honesty!!!

Someone close to Rodney intrigued me into buying this book by noting the "violence in that culture, the sharecropping culture." Not only the culture, but also the Crowell family's overall violent mindset. Parts of Rodney's journey reminded me of my own, fist-fighting my way thru grade and high school. But Rodney's life was more desperate than mine and some of his experiences are fueled with an anger from his circumstances that suggest an edge all too many do not survive. How this man emerged from that to become the sensitive, intuitive songwriter he is today is open to question. Living on the edge does not guarantee one will transcend it to a higher place; most simply die there. And Crowell came close to death more than once. While this is a fascinating read, its verbosity is rough on the comprehension in spots, both due to the story being told and to the syntax Crowell sometimes employs. Often I found myself having to re-read heavily packed sentences to connect the dots and grasp the central message. But that's a small complaint compared to the page-turning story within its pages. I've always respected Crowell's songwriting, now I have something else to respect him for. I hope this won't be his only book. He is clearly an insightful and entertaining writer.

I bought the book because of the title, and because my family lived in Crosby when the author did. He might even remember my siblings. I've appreciated his song-writing/story telling for a long time. I was not disappointed with his prose. This memoir offers an entertaining view into what childhood was like for blue collar families on the Texas Gulf coast, post WWII.

I like Rodney Crowell especially when he sings with Emmy Lou Harris. This is his backstory. Good read.

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