

# Catalog Shopping

By Esperanza Garza-Gallegos

It was the era of the outhouses. Everyone in the neighborhood had one in their backyard. I believe most everybody had toilet paper. We could not afford toilet paper so we rarely had any in our outhouse. Some people had newspapers and I don't know what else. I remember we had the



big thick *Sears and Roebuck* catalog. It was neatly placed at one corner of the outhouse. I never sat and looked at it because I needed my two hands and my feet and legs to hang on like a sloth to keep from falling into the hole. I was always scared of going to the outhouse. I would go in the yard behind the house to pee and sometimes to do

caca. I would try to hold it until my grandma went to the outhouse, because I felt safe with her. She would tell me that when I picked up a roll of toilet paper to look in the hole for spiders before putting my fingers in to unroll it. Of course, that rule only applied if we had toilet paper. I stopped checking for spiders at the age of 38 when I realized I had a habit and a fear of spiders waiting for me inside the roll of paper.

One day, as I sat on the rough seat of the outhouse, I contemplated why anyone would be throwing away so many beautiful things in the outhouse. It seemed like a waste to be wiping our butts with all the items shown in the catalog. I didn't say anything to my grandmother, but later in the day, I returned to the outhouse to get the catalog. I took it in the house and got the scissors. I lay on the cool cement floor and flipped through the pages. I looked through the furniture, clothes, toys and many other things. I was amazed at how much I could buy. I went to the women's section and began shopping for dresses for my grandmother and nice clothes for my grandfather. Then I shopped for furniture for the house. I cut out all the items I liked and wanted and made little piles of pictures. I didn't make a pile for myself. I was too busy shopping for

my grandparents and for the house. I stacked them neatly and waited for Grandpa to come home from the fields. I did not tell Grandmother anything about this because I thought about what a wonderful surprise it would be when we showed up at the house loaded with all my purchases. In my mind I pictured the look on Grandmother's face when she saw the beautiful dresses I bought for her. I had also picked out toys for my brother and sister. Everyone would get beautiful and wonderful things. I was very excited.

When Grandpa got home from the fields, I could not contain myself and ran to greet him with the stacks of pictures in my hand. I explained to him that we had to hurry up and go pick up those things. I asked how anyone could just throw those things away and waste them in the outhouse. "We have to hurry up and go bring these things home, now." I exclaimed. He pursed his lips and tried to hold back the laughter. He did not want to hurt my feelings when he broke the bad news to me. He gently began to explain that we could not take the pictures and pick up those things. He struggled to tell me that the pictures were to show people what they could buy but that people needed money to buy them. Somehow, I knew we didn't have the money. I felt my heart go down to my feet. I was so disappointed that I would not be able to get all those things for my family. Grandfather redirected my mind to other things as he usually did to help me get over my disappointment. Somehow, I accepted the fact that we would never have all those beautiful things I longed to have for my family. It was a hard and deep disappointment that I have never felt again. So the catalog went back into the outhouse. My grandfather went with me to walk it back. I would glance up at him and see his smile, as he wanted to chuckle at times, but didn't. As I laid the catalog back into its place, I accepted its demise.

