

The Shoats Family, Reedsville, West Virginia:

Rachel Shoats, the mother, is 45 years old, 5-6 tall, 140 pounds. She has shoulder-length dark hair, streaked with gray. The hair is not tied back or coifed; it is simply combed back and forms a large mass around her head. She is no longer attractive, but she gives the impression of having been attractive when she was young. She speaks softly. She smiles easily in a self-conscious manner. She makes jokes about herself ("I likes my coffee"). She is hardy enough to walk long miles doing chores such as carrying back groceries from Reedsville which is about two miles from her house. To return to her house, she must ascend a long hill, about a mile long. She never complains about her poverty and family situation. She usually speaks in single sentences only, and usually in response to a direct question. She doesn't express any unsolicited opinions. She doesn't express any negative opinions of government or any "rights" or any demands. She acts deferential to just about everyone except her own family. The deference transfers to her body movement; she moves in such a way that she seems unobtrusive, at once yielding space to anyone in her path or anyone passing near her. She dresses plainly, never in slacks, usually in a loose dress about knee length or longer, with something large like a flannel shirt or a cardigan sweater on her upper body. She makes no effort to beautify or adorn herself. She wears no jewelry except for a wedding band without a diamond. In the winter she wears knee-high boots and a coat cut like a Navy peabody coat about mid-thigh in length. Also, she wears a kerchief tied under her chin, in the 1950s style, which gives her the look of a peasant when she is trudging along with a bag of groceries. She wears flat shoes that are easy to walk in, tennis shoes or flat-bottomed leather shoes. She makes no apologies or explanations for the shabbiness of her house. She makes no comments about being poor or statements of self-pity. She introduces her blind husband and retarded sons without any explanation. She is gentle toward them, but not mushy or sentimental. Most of her energy seems directed on providing for her family which she does by securing cheap goods and laboring constantly to make the most of what she has. She washes clothes by hand using water from a well. The two-room house the Shoats's live in has a wood stove in the kitchen and a wood and coal stove in the other room which serves as a living room and which is also where everyone sleeps. The large room has a couch by the stove and mattresses that are set up against the wall during the day and down on the floor at night for sleeping. The walls are tacked up with large pieces of cardboard to keep out the

wind. The house has no electricity or phone. The Shoats's light the house using kerosene lamps and seldom use a phone. Ray Shoats, the father, has no income. He is blind owing to a mining accident, but receives no worker's compensation as he is unable to prove that the accident happened at work. He doesn't have the savvy to know how to deal with the public agencies that might assist him in obtaining some relief. The Shoats's have three sons aged 18, 16, and 8. Junior and Nathaniel, the two oldest, are so retarded that they are incapable of speech. To communicate, they grunt and make hand gestures. Tommie, the youngest son, is normal. He has a hopeful, bright face and smiles easily though he speaks very little.

Rachel and Kris Steward:

"I always tries to tell Tommy, 'You're from a poor family, and I knows you know that, I knows it makes you feel bad and sorry for all of us, but it don't make you a bad person, it don't mean your own future won't be bright.' That's what I tells him."

"Well, that's a beautiful thing to tell him!"

"Thank you, ma'am. I tries."

"And you say it in such lovely words!"

"Thank you. I'm much obliged."

"I really mean it!"

"Thank you."

"That boy has a wonderful mother!"

"Well, if he do, thank God."

This interaction is typical of how Kris relates to all of the clients. She is attentive and kind, and talks to everyone in an upbeat "Valley Girl" accent.