

## Where I'm From

I am from clothespins,  
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.  
I am from the dirt under the back porch.  
(Black, glistening,  
it tasted like beets.)  
I am from the forsythia bush  
the Dutch elm  
whose long-gone limbs I remember  
as if they were my own.

I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,  
from Imogene and Alafair.  
I'm from the know-it-alls  
and the pass-it-ons,  
from Perk up! and Pipe down!  
I'm from He restoreth my soul  
with a cottonball lamb  
and ten verses I can say myself.

I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,  
fried corn and strong coffee.  
From the finger my grandfather lost  
to the auger,  
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.

Under my bed was a dress box  
spilling old pictures,  
a sift of lost faces  
to drift beneath my dreams.  
I am from those moments--  
snapped before I budded --  
leaf-fall from the family tree.

--George Ella Lyon

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The poem above was the original writing on which this exercise is based. Since the poem was written, the writer (and people all over the Internet) discovered that it is not only poetry, but also a way to examine one's roots, reflect on family and traditions, and say something profound and poetic about one's own identity. In order to make the most of this, it is important to recognize the difference between LITERAL and NON-LITERAL language. For example, a person cannot *literally* be from "fudge and eyeglasses" like it says at the beginning of the second stanza. This is just a poetic way of saying that fudge and eyeglasses played a significant role in her family.

Literal language says exactly what it means: I am hungry.

Non-literal language suggests meaning beyond the words themselves in order to make a point: I am starving to death!

If my son comes home very late, I might call him a "night owl." That does not mean he is actually an owl; it is non-literal language that suggests he stays up very late...like an owl. Get it?

I knew you were sharp! Bright, too! (Those are non-literal ways of saying you are intelligent.)

## Where I'm From

I am from the '64 Pontiac Star Chief, from Quaker Oatmeal "rolled" in a metal pot on an old stove, served with half-and-half; from the Koken barber chair in the basement and the old, red picnic table on the patio; and Fry-Chik.

I am from the small red-brick home on the large green lot on 2600 North.

I am from the circle of multicolored roses, one a year until the garden was complete, and the border of little purple-capped flowers that looked edible...but were not.

I am from women who wore only dresses and men who wore slacks and long-sleeved collared shirts to the hardware store.

But I am also from broken traditions and rediscovered faith, from vegetarian Sunday suppers, from Rose and Bill, Toone and Thompson, who worked their bodies six long days a week and rested on the Seventh.

I am from worriers and savers, from self-sufficiency and security.

From "Waste not, want not," and "Even this shall pass away."

I am from church (and nothing else!) on Saturday, quiet respect for all Faith, and loving tolerance of neighbors who don't feel the same.

I am from Scotland and Wales, "peas and potatoes," and garden-fresh everything.

From Grandma running over a turkey during her first lesson and thereafter refusing to drive a car, from Grandpa's fear of being buried alive after seeing the unembalmed dead "sit up" during a funeral when he was a child.

I am from aged hands - leathery and deep-veined, rough but warm - that swung me in a scrap-quilt swing while we waited for my parents, hoping they would not arrive too soon.

--Thompson

*I focused my "Where I'm From" poem on my paternal grandparents, who were very active in my upbringing. The imagery in the poem includes many of the things I remember about their home. So, while the poem includes many literal descriptive images that I remember from childhood, it is non-literal phrasing to say that I am FROM these things.*

*Now it's your turn!*