

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.

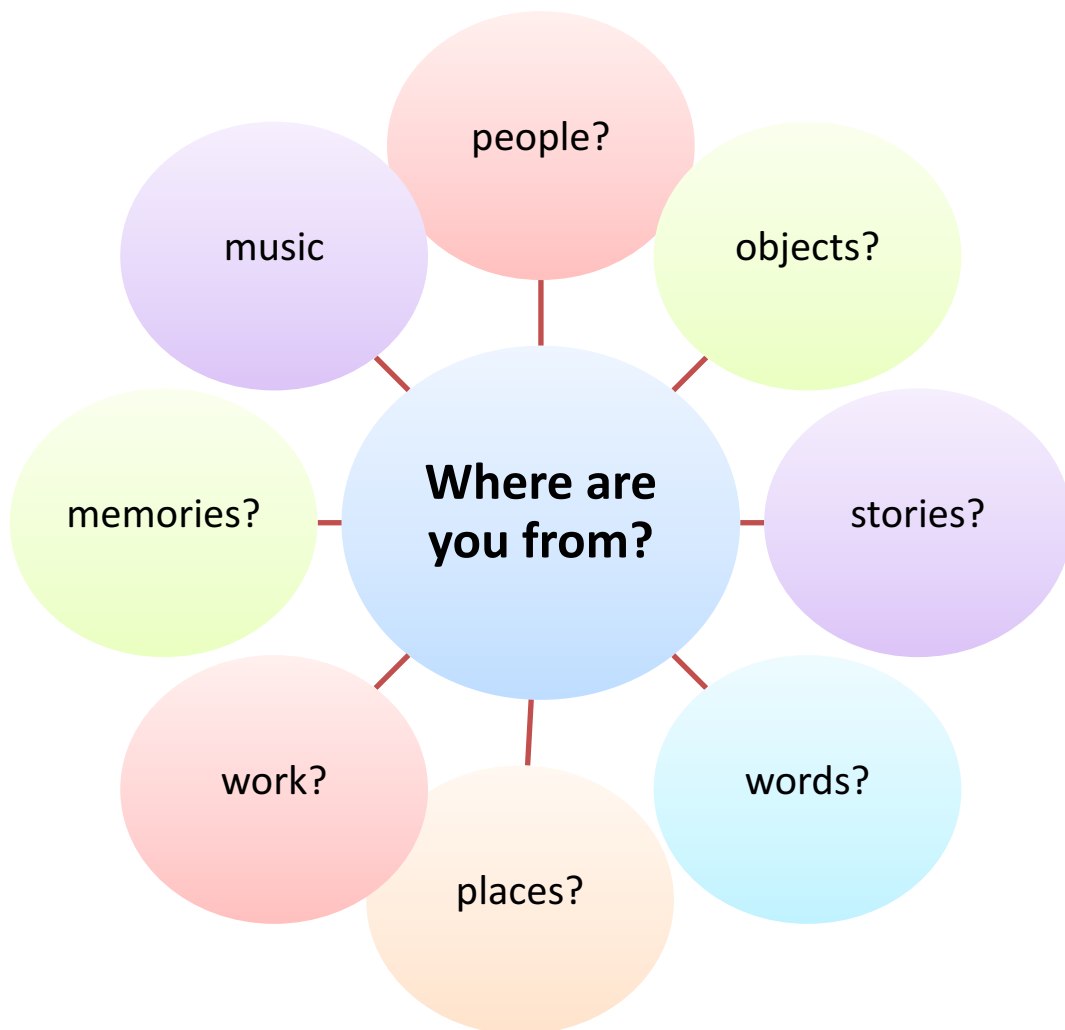
George Ella Lyon's statement about her poem:

"Where I'm From" grew out of my response to a poem from **Stories I Ain't Told Nobody Yet** (Orchard Books, 1989; Theater Communications Group, 1991) by my friend, Tennessee writer Jo Carson. All of the People Pieces, as Jo calls them, are based on things folks actually said, and number 22 begins, "I want to know when you get to be from a place." Jo's speaker, one of those people "that doesn't have roots like trees," tells us "I am from Interstate 40" and "I am from the work my father did."

In the summer of 1993, I decided to see what would happen if I made my own where-I'm-from lists, which I did, in a black and white speckled composition book. I edited them into a poem — not my usual way of working — but even when that was done I kept on making the lists. The process was too rich and too much fun to give up after only one poem. Realizing this, I decided to try it as an exercise with other writers, and it immediately took off. The list form is simple and familiar, and the question of where you are from reaches deep.

Since then, the poem as a writing prompt has traveled in amazing ways. People have used it at their family reunions, teachers have used it with kids all over the United States, in Ecuador and China; they have taken it to girls in juvenile detention, to men in prison for life, and to refugees in a camp in the Sudan. Its life beyond my notebook is a testimony to the power of poetry, of roots, and of teachers. My thanks to all of you who have taken it to heart and handed it on. It's a thrill to read the poems you send me, to have a window into that many young souls.

<http://www.georgeallayon.com/where.html>



Where I'm From

I am from _____
from _____ and _____

I am from the _____.
(_____.)

I am from the _____
the _____
whose _____ I remember
_____.

I'm from _____,
from _____.

I'm from the _____
and the _____,
from _____ and _____

I'm from _____

I'm from _____,
_____.

From the _____,
the _____.

Under my bed was _____,
_____.

I am from _____

_____.

shelby's Cancer

"Lips of Jesus smile at me..."
Over spilled Bud & cigarette butts.

I'm from country music and her wasted tuition.
I'm from tiger meat and pizza crust.

From a broken branch
Burning in the stone fireplace,
Destroyed by flames in nightmares
of hoods with red eyes.

I'm from "Is your mom there?" phone calls
And 3 new siblings
Blended like orange julius
By Supermom ("think outside the box")
and a Sheep Grower ("hurry every chance you get").
I'm from "Nip it in the bud" (whatever that meant)
And an old tree, full with new growth—
the Too Too Cool Stubby Little Tree.
Plus 2 baby siblings brought by social workers—
"Hands of Jesus bless me,"

In a hood with red eyes.

I am Eva's precious cargo;
She carried Neil's broken body
And taught me that the *"arms of Jesus hold me,"*
So many hoods with red eyes.
and the heart of Jesus loves me."

I'm from Bonnie, a writer
And shelby's Cancer.
I'm from untold stories
And my unplayed guitar.

i'm from blue eyes staring through fire
into Sunshine.

Sami Peil