

Name

Teacher

Class

Date

# WHERE I'm From

**By George Ella Lyon**

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 am 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 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.

# Background Information

“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.

# WHERE

## Are You From?

<b>Smells</b> from your childhood	<b>Places</b> in your home and neighborhood
Close <b>Family</b> members and <b>Friends</b>	<b>Activities</b> and <b>Hobbies</b> from childhood
<b>Personal Style</b> or <b>Unique Interests</b>	<b>Songs/Stories</b> your family sings/tells
Special <b>Memories</b> or <b>Regrets</b>	<b>Tastes</b> from your childhood

# STUDENT

## Examples

### Where I'm From.... by Lauren

I'm from baths in the kitchen sink,  
From Downy and Mom's perfume  
I am from flowers by the fence (yellow and springy  
they tasted like crayons).  
I am from the ivy crawling up the house,  
The baby tree whose sturdy trunk shot from the ground  
A mirror image of my planted feet.

I'm from sprinkles and plastic table donut shops  
From Bert and Ernie  
I'm from stupid heads and dot dot I got my cootie shot  
From don't touch this and don't touch that.  
I'm from Hymn No. 96 and why is this piece of bread so small?  
And bible crafts made from neon pipe cleaners.

I'm from Bill and Darlene's branch  
From hot soup and freshly baked corn bread  
From the Well, when I was little's and the snowy games  
Told to me by Green Bay Packer season ticket holders  
In the storage room are boxes  
Overflowing with shiny, color-coated memories  
Bundles of dreams kept alive  
To ask my mother about.

I am from those moments  
A leaf changing color with the weather  
Time only strengthens the branch that holds me.

I am from hairspray  
From braces and rubberbands.  
I am from lightning bugs  
Fluttering in the summer night sky.

I am from Belle  
The cute little puppy  
We rescued from the pound  
And Smoky the cat  
Whose death still touches my heart.

I am from Papaw's goulash  
And Momma's pumpkin pie  
From Dad's overbearing  
Protectiveness of his little girl.

I am from outrageous  
Eleven foot Christmas trees  
And joyous Thanksgiving feasts.

I am from French immigrants  
From 1692 and New Paltz, New York

I am from Louis Bevier and Marie Le Blanc.

I am from the American dream  
From broken despair and gained hope  
I am the present, past, and future,  
History in the making.