

WHERE I'M FROM

Collective Book of Poems

By the

Participants

In the class

Poetry and Drama for Children
And Young Adults

International and Multicultural Program
School of Education
University of San Francisco

1998

CONTENTS

Introduction

Individual Poems

I'm from sanctuaries bathed in dusty hues	Peter Baird
I am from	Jon Bendich
I Am From. . .	Meredith Danson
I am from...	Sally Gelardin
The Rose	Rita Kanell
Roots, Wings	Catherine Johnston
I am from. . .	Jackie Rush
Where I am from	María Victoria Torrey
I am from. . .	Deborah Ramírez Lango

CLASSROOM SUGGESTIONS

INTRODUCTION

The poems in this book were created based on a Creative Expression Activity developed by Linda Christensen, inspired by the poem “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyon and published in *Rethinking Schools*.

The poets participating in the class Poetry and Drama for Children and Young Adults took the invitation to look inside and share the experiences that have given shape to who they are.

Their authenticity has produced these extraordinary poems each of which represents a personal response to the human adventure of developing a unique being.

May their words inspire the reader to rediscover experiences from the past and to rejoice looking in the mirror of the soul and welcoming a radiant self.

WHERE I'M FROM

Peter Baird

I am from sanctuaries bathed in dusty hues
From stain-glassed windows.
I am from church potlucks on Sunday afternoons,
Shepherd's Pie and jello
Ancient faces with ruby smiles
I am from faith so as to move mountains
And bewilder young children.

I am from hell-raising rebellion generation
Make your own way or be swallowed
I am from you can make a difference
But beware the warnings of Rap and Eldridge
Malcom and Franz –be no colonizer,
Destroy that part self/past.
I am from dreams lost with Jack, Martin and Bobby,
Even when imagined

I am from quinceañeras and Coyoacán,
Realismo mágico y el saber gozar la vida
I am from an emigrants discovery of new worlds
And insight of the old
I am bicultural, bilingual, bewildered
Stretched between worlds that offer par
Not whole, yet so much.

WHERE I'M FROM

Jon Bendich

Where I'm from there was no peace
so I craved it
A middle child sometimes lost in the shuffle, I wanted to feel special
I yearned to find the place where I belonged
I'm still searching...

Where I'm from
only one person could be right
and everyone else was wrong
so I became contrary
always looking for another angle

I loved the sound of my grandparents' thick Jewish accent
I loved laughing with my father at Marx brothers movies
and at Lenny Bruce records
it transcended pop culture
so I knew it was real

I am from the house across the street from the hamburger stand
whose smoke my father hated
but whose hamburgers and milkshakes I loved
I hadn't yet learned how precious the veranicas and knishes were
that my grandmother used to bake

On the corner there was a laundry, and a liquor store around the block
my friend Barry Huey worked there with his family after school
whenever we would try and sneak some candy
Barry took delight in watching the fear from our faces
when their big German shepherd would jump up on the counter and snarl

I am from the era of an innocence lost early
to drugs, sex, and rock'n'roll
'cept I licked r&b, soul, and afro-cuban
the sound of the drum called to me
and pulled at my soul like a spiritual magnet

I've spent my whole life trying to follow that rhythm
it spoke of a place I knew had to exist, somewhere
a place where I could be different and still accepted
I wonder if I'll ever find that place
where I'm from

I Am From...

Meredith Danson

I am from Adventure people, no bake cookies, monkey grass and the Russian olive

I am from Vicksburg Avenue, Kennedy Elementary and the creek shortcut where we could always find crawdads...

I am from Sugie, Mumsie, Daddy John. Kay and Joe, Brian and Michelle, Kristen and Karmen, Mrs. Timble... I am from those beautiful friends who became our family...

I am from "Nonie Lee" and "Angel"...

I am from "I'm not mad at you, I'm mad at what you did"...

I am from "I love you"...

I am from peanut butter and jelly sandwiches with chocolate milk, macaroni and cheese and cheese and Christmas fondue...

I am from the slides my dad loved to take, and those square Kodak 110 photographs ...

I am from the flowered photo album I compiled when I was 8...

I am from a shoe box of memories still waiting to happen...

I am from
Sally Gelardin

I am from
Cranberry jello mold
Shaped and refrigerated
Until Mom is ready
To serve me
Pretty and tasty
Perfectly formed
To our guests.

I am from
Uncle Ben's
Cluttered music shop
Where ideas
Mixed with Mozart
And Beethoven
Fill the cramped space
Passionately.

I am from
Lively family gatherings
Overflowing
With good humored egos.
Congratulations
Charlie

On the publicity
Of your new book.
Hear you bought
A house in Florida
Rick.
How was your trip
To Australia,
Bruce?

Then
In whispered tones
Poor Fred
So much worry
With his
Adopted daughter
Mariana.
Don't say anything
To him
He's doing
The best
He can.

I am from
My sunlit room
Up in the trees
Where stories about
Romance and heroines
Take me
To exotic places
Where I can
Dream.

THE ROSE
Rita Kanell

Solitary and dignified
Traces of color fading away
Watching over a life that was.

Floating memories of yesterday
Slowly fading away today.

Soft petals still retain
Fragrant remnants of better days.

Lingering caresses of loved ones
Floating in the air
As a sunset's glow warms the sky.

And I, a glorious rose that was,
Still watches over you.

ROOTS, WINGS

Catherine Johnston

In the dank coolness of the basement
I had a basket of personalities.

Butterscotch prom gown
with flower-embroidery applique,
prickly crinoline sewn into the full skirt,
wires in the bodice creating two empty spaces over my little
girl-chest.

White altar-boy smocks
from the church rummage sale.

Real fur stoles, wigs, hats and hats and hats;
glamorous, strappy, impractical shoes (the kind I grew up to avoid)
raggedy, slippery slippers of all colors,
pink pajamas, old musty dresses of grandmothers,
and a tomato-hued polyester coat with huge gold buttons.

In the backyard I had my own little shed,
the playhouse it was called.

Scraps of beige semi-soft carpeting, a small wooden table and chair,
A bookshelf,
The occasional wasp's nest,
Many spiders,
And doors to close.

The sandbox was surrounded by thick stumps

Placed upright
Like tables
For making mud pies
Or displaying good rocks, the kind you can write with.

I gave the dress-up basket to the kids I babysat
The playhouse was sold for \$20.00 at a garage sale
And in the sandbox's spot now is tall, sickly lilac bush
And I live in another place
Enacting the age-old cycle of replacement, reciprocity, renewal.

I AM FROM Jackie Rush

I am from a cozy family room
With a fireplace and a sleeping cat.
Where homemade soup would sit cooking in the stove
And my mom would watch "the Guiding Light"
And iron my dad's dress shirts for work.

I am from a lawn surrounded by huge trees
With a swing hanging down.
The smell of Daphne lingering in the air,
While rose bushes rimmed the walkway to the front door.

I am from two small lanes,
Separated by a creek lined with big Walnut trees.
My neighbors, the Peacocks
And the huge hill behind their house which we had to ask permission to go on to.

I am from Jack and Jo Evans
Dave and Beth Rush
Bud and Charlie
Patti and Duke
And my brother David.

I am from
"be nice to your brother"
"don't go past the yellow mailbox"
"what time do you have practice?"

I am from barbecued chicken and hamburgers,
Corned beef and cabbage
Pot roast and stews.

I am from old pictures in photo albums,
A display of swimming medals and ribbons,
Cherished memories,
Kept in storage boxes at my parents new house.

I AM FROM

by

Deborah Ramirez Lango

I am from the smell of a fresh pot of frijoles;
tortillas cooking on the comal.

I am from the corner of a busy street where neighbors
see me speed by on my green stingray bike.

I am from a rich tradition of joyful carefree love.

I am from Grandpa Tom, Nana, Tía Martina,
Welita, Welito, my mom Mary and my dad Dan.

I am from a belief, “un día el gato come sandía.”

I am from the yellow room with orange shelves
and a twin bed where underneath my stories are kept.

WHERE I'M FROM
María Victoria Torrey

I am from the fifth floor apartment
With the window facing the courtyard,
Where my mother sits by the window
Staring out the window.

I am from getting out, going down
The elevator and landing on the
Bright red stoop where people are
Sitting around and talking about people.

I am from the family where the 7 kids
Have a father they call by name who
Walks down the courtyard always heading
To the Bowery - no one ever talks to him.

I am from words that are English but
Come out differently like "going to the
Bafroom" and "axxing your mother"
For something.

I am from "arroz con habichuelas y bistec"
I am from a place in my mind where the
Memories of the projects are kept.

CLASSROOM SUGGESTIONS

1. Choose the phrase I'm from to begin each stanza, or choose a similar phrase that will help structure the poem.
2. Imagine yourself at a particular childhood age, being 6, or 7, 9 or 10.
3. List the items that you would see around your house, during your childhood
4. Step outside. List what you see, on your front yard, your sidewalk, the street, the neighborhood.
5. State the names of relatives, particularly those who link you to the past.
6. Sayings, expressions. What are some of the phrases you hear over and over again. Those which would distinguish your family among others.
7. Names of foods and dishes that recall family gatherings, both daily meals and special treats.
8. Name the place where your childhood memories are kept: either realistically (photo albums, diaries, boxes) or metaphorically (the branches of a particular tree, the shadow of a particular porch)
9. Think about the beginning and ending of your poem, where you are from, who you are, where you are going.

ENJOY!