

“Where I am From” – writing a poem to share.

Inspired by Appalachian poet George Ella Lyon (see their poem at the end of this).

To write this poem – even for those of you who aren’t so-called “poets” – you will have to search your memories. Follow the 6 steps down memory land below, and put your writings together to make a “Where I am From” poem. Feel free to add ore if you wish and don’t over-think it. Write down what comes to mind, no need to fret about making a “poem”, the exercise is more of an introduction to you that we hope you will share with us.

If you do share this poem with us, let us know if you would like us to read it on air. If you would like to share it in the class/during the radio show, you could also send us a recording of you reading it. You can do this using a phone. Just record a voice memo and then text it to us at 586-709-5472. You could also email us a recording at hum101@ualberta.ca

Just a reminder, you do NOT have to share this poem with us or on air. You can also share it with us and not the rest of the class.

Directions (well more like suggestions):

1) Think about the house or apartment you grew up in. Think about objects that were around your home: dvds, ashtrays, books, what posters were on your bedroom walls or what music was on your shelf?

Write down a few details.

Lisa’s example: “. . . *I am from shared bedrooms and carpeted kitchens. I am from listening to mice run above my head in the ceiling and finding frog carcasses in the basement. I am from a house where the outdoors could find its way indoors, but not out again . . .* “

MorningStar’s example: “. . . *I am from crowded living rooms with half full cups of coffee, cigarette smoke lingering around windows, and the sounds of chickadees in the morning . . .* “

2) Think about the food you ate as a kid what you loved to eat, or what you had to eat often, that you remember very vividly.

Kendra’s example: “. . . *I am from Nesquik and cinnamon toast, stew but only with a pickle, and Sunday roast beef, mash-potatoes and gravy. I am from yeast meets flour and lard is still okay, dinner rolls and cinnamon buns, banana bread and the best chocolate cake in the world. I am from chocolate bards hidden but always found . . .* “

MorningStar’s example: “. . . *I am from the tenderness of fried moose meat with onions and the toughness of cold toast that is left on the counter . . .* “

3) What did adults in your home used to say to you? Were there phrases that they would say over and over?

Lisa's example: ". . . I am from frustrated "like tits on a boar" and gentle, loving "slap kindja slaps" . . . "

Kendra's example: ". . . I am from triple f*ck and I am proud of you . . . "

4) What music played in your childhood home? Can you remember one or two song lyrics? Write those down.

MorningStar's example: ". . . I am from the soft sound of my Kokom's voice and the comforting twang of a slightly out-of-tune, old acoustic guitar . . . "

Lisa's example: ". . . I am from saccharine, soft Christian rock "friends are friends forever if the Lord's the Lord of them, and a friend will not say never 'cause the welcome will not end" . . . "

5) Think about the adults and kids in your home. What specific physical features do you remember from them? Long grey hair, jingly earrings, thick eyeliner? What clothes did they wear, and write down a physical detail of one of those.

Kendra's example: ". . . I am from prairie kid appropriate snowmobile gear, read is a power colour and, don't forget, "always wear lipstick" . . . "

MorningStar's example: ". . . I am from old cowboy boots and thin aprons; I am from the smell of deer-hide work gloves and white pooka shell necklace paired with low-rise blue jeans . . . "

6) Write down a few details of the neighbourhood or land around where you lived – the colours, the way the space felt, the smells, the sounds . . .

Kendra's example: ". . . I am from watching the seasons change in the ripples on the lake, intergenerational dinner parties and beaver booby-traps. I am from let's light a fire and late night swims . . . "

Then, put it all together, and voila! you have a poem.

*see the next page for the final Kendra's, MorningStar's, and Lisa's final poems

Where I am From

Kendra

I am from *the cabin* -- last day of school til the first, kind of cabin. Bare feet and dinner bells kind of cabin. I am from sandcastles and mermaid dreams, smoke stained curtains and box wine under the bed. I am from weekly sleepovers with the aunties, abundant gardens and creaky staircases.

I am from Nesquik and cinnamon toast, stew but only with a pickle, and Sunday roast beef, mash-potatoes and gravy. I am from yeast meets flour and lard is still okay, dinner rolls and cinnamon buns, banana bread and the best chocolate cake in the world. I am from chocolate bars hidden but always found.

I am from the triple f*ck *and* I am proud of you.

I am from Starbucks compilations, dock rock and Lucinda Williams. I am from campfire sing-alongs and failed guitar lessons.

I am from “never leave the house without lipstick”.

I am from prairie kid appropriate and snowmobile gear, red is a power color and, don’t forget, “always wear lipstick”.

I am from watching the seasons change in the ripples on the lake, intergenerational dinner parties and beaver booby-traps. I am from let’s light a fire and late night swims.

Where I am From

MorningStar

I am from crowded living rooms with half full cups of coffee, cigarette smoke lingering around windows and the sound of chickadees in the morning. I am from the tenderness of fried moose meat with onions and the toughness of cold toast that was left on the counter. I am from the place of eavesdropping on adult conversations, being called a magpie for hanging around spaces I shouldn’t. I am from the soft sound of my Kokom’s voice and the comforting twang of a slightly out-of-tune, old acoustic guitar. I am from old cowboy boots and thin aprons; I am from the smell of deer-hide work gloves and white pooka shell necklace paired with low-rise blue jeans.

Where I am From

Lisa

I am from shared bedrooms and carpeted kitchens. I am from listening to mice run above my head in the ceiling and finding frog carcasses in the basement. I am from a house where the outdoors could find its way indoors, but not out again.

I am from stampopot boerenkool met rookworst and lumpy oatmeal because it was left on the stove too long, again, because there was never enough time in the morning and always too many kids.

I am from frustrated “like tits on a boar” and gentle, loving “slap kindja slaps”.

I am from saccharine, soft Christian rock “friends are friends forever if the Lord’s the Lord of them, and a friend will not say never ‘cause the welcome will not end”.

I am from busy mornings and no time for makeup or hair you could always see the dark circles under my mom’s eyes. I am from homemade clothes and bolts of on-sale fabric, on pattern in many sizes, on fabric for many garments. I am from all the girls matching.

I am from long, scratchy grasses and dodging cow pies. From dugouts that smelled like all the things that flowed into them, but despite the gross we would always end up playing in the grey water. I am from the acres of lawn that needed to be mowed with a push mower, in the sun, battling bugs and dodging frogs. I am from the most vibrant sunrises and sunsets, and the darkest nights.

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'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 boxspilling old pictures,
a sift of lost facesto drift beneath my dreams.
I am from those moments –
snapped before I budded –
leaf-fall from the family tree*

*<http://teacher.scholastic.com/writeit/PDF/lyon.pdf>