

George Ella Lyon | WRITER & TEACHER

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Where I'm From

As Kentucky's 2015-2016 poet laureate, George Ella wants to collect a "Where I'm From" poem [from every county in Kentucky](#).

Kentucky's "Where I'm From": A Poetry of Place" is the central theme of a project that will touch all 120 of Kentucky's counties. Find more information, and how to submit poems, [on the Kentucky Arts Council website](#).



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.

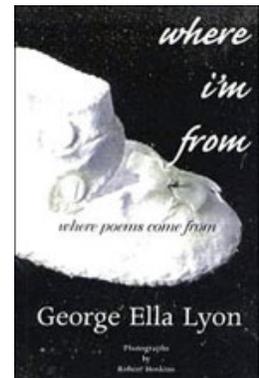
"Where I'm From" grew out of my response to a poem from *Stories I Ain't Told Nobody Yet* (Orchard Books, 1989; Theater Communications Group, 1991) by my friend, Tennessee writer Jo Carson. All of the People Pieces, as Jo calls them, are based on things folks actually said, and number 22 begins, "I want 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.

[Listen to George Ella](#) read the poem.



Check out the book [Where I'm From, Where Poems Come From](#).



[Click here to see an inventive video](#) featuring George Ella's reading of "Where I'm From" on *The United States of Poetry* episode "The Land and the People."