Where I'm From

Penny Kittle

I'm from Belmont Street in Portland
just an alley away
from tall evergreens and vine raspberries in Mt. Tabor Park.
I'm from skinned knees and stubbed toes,
shooting hoops until the streetlight came on above the backboard
to call us home.

I'm from the pussywillow tree that draped long, spindly branches over the
greenhouse roof creating a fort for me in the shelter of green.
I'm from "Time for dinner!" and "What can I get you to eat?"
lump-free mashed potatoes and gravy
roast beef and whole turkeys
bloated brussels sprouts and waxy limas I hid in my napkin
because the dog wouldn't eat 'em.

I'm from sugar cookies with elaborate icing
and cakes with multi-tiered roses.

I'm from homemade jams and donuts boiling in oil
then shook in a brown paper bag a quarter-full of cinnamon sugar
when friends spent the night.

I'm from a double bed I shared with my sister
whispering secrets across the covers
giggling in unison
until she went to high school.

I'm from Elton John records on a plastic orange record player
I'm from the Beach Boys
the Jackson Five
the Beatles
and always Elton
until I grew tougher and taller and discovered heavy metal.

I'm from an abandoned black cat we named Mickey Finn
stretching and purring on my head while I slept.

I'm from Holly the Christmas calico
and Butchie our scruffy mutt
who caught whole rocks between his teeth
and was dead to cancer before any of us were ready.

I'm from casting beside Dad on small, quiet streams
or near the roar of Bonneville Dam
steelhead and sturgeon and shad we caught in the ocean's surf.

I'm from grandpa's wood shop of toys and puzzles and bird mansions
dusty shelves and triangle mounds of sawdust
large hands holding tools in the light from tiny windows
teaching me.

I am from teaching
and tennis
and my silver Mini Cooper.

I'm from twenty years of marriage to a man I still adore
and children so marvelous and funny I can't believe they're mine.
I'm from reading and writing and reading some more
with a large mug of coffee in one hand
and my favorite cartridge pen in the other.

I'm from the mountains of Oregon and the green of Washington state,
endless beaches in California
the hills near Cincinnati
the windy, cold winters of Michigan
to the wildlife in the mountains of New Hampshire.

I'm from here.
Now.
Teaching writing.