

## **“Where I’m From” (Bell County)**

by Kimbra Wilder Gish

I’m from tree-covered mountains  
blazing crimson, gold, and orange  
in the autumn sun.

I’m from behind the table, in front of the dryer  
where my cousin and I stand when we eat Sunday dinner,  
because there aren’t chairs enough for all to sit at once  
and the adults deserve respect.

I’m from tomatoes out of my uncle’s garden,  
cucumbers, corn, white half-runner green beans.  
From soup beans (pintos, of course)  
and cornbread, and the tart dirt-sweet tang  
of Aunt Nellie’s brand pickled beets.

I’m from Mamaw’s chicken and dumplings, milky-white, golden,  
And soft thumpy biscuits setting in a pot on the back of the stove  
“in case anybody was to get hungry or stop by.”  
I’m from apple stack cake and fried potatoes with fatback.

I’m from well-oiled wooden floors, scents of old wood, new leather,  
tall shelves filled with boxes of new shoes.

I’m from cold white or chocolate milk  
and fresh donut holes from the bakery,  
breakfast and a book while Mom has her bus duty.

I’m from playing teacher after school with other teachers’ daughters,  
from rolling down awnings with Daddy on Sundays.

I’m from my Mamaw’s creaky green porch swing,

Swaying back and forth as I push off each time,  
My cousin beside me, telling me spooky tales.

I'm from Girl Scouts, cookie sales, hiking in the mountains.  
From adventures with Mom, picking up a thin and crispy sausage pizza  
and a jug of cold Pepsi, then off to pick up my cousin, the storyteller,  
then to the park, to feast in the shadows of trees  
where bears and snakes might lurk.

I'm from soft, greasy grilled cheese sandwiches,  
bowls of chili, carrot and celery sticks,  
and wet chocolate cake for dessert if I'm lucky.

I'm from new crayons, sharp pencils, wood and lead shavings  
curling into a sawdust pile in the sharpener where it came apart in my hands,  
from hobbit-holes filled with seed-cakes, pipe-weed, tea, and cheer,  
to a track worn in the carpet, diagonal path marched out by my small feet.

I'm from Holy Spirit baptism, faltering through stammering lips.

I'm from "Gone with the Wind," and birthday treats,  
and a phone call to rock the hope out of my parents.

Alcohol smells, butterfly needles, and words ending in -oma.

From the pungent aroma of orange-brownish-burgundy Betadine,  
cherry Life Savers, scent of Dial Gold bar soap.

From orange juice, saltines, yellow bile, urine the color of blood.

I'm from writing – from novel fragments, character sketches,  
from 808s, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence,  
and Flannery O'Connor, textbooks on AIDS nursing and clinical toxicology  
to books on plot and writer quotes. I'm from the magic of purple pens,

sharp pencils, clean white or peach narrow-ruled notebook pages,  
the comfort of a soft pink binder.

I'm from faith as big as a mustard seed. I'm from survivor guilt.

From nightmares so real I wake sweating, hallucinating.

I'm from the after, from what happened next.

I'm from this is NOT how the story is going to end.