

Where I'm From

by Elaine Akin
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I'm from clean plates, wiped with a slice
of bought bread. *Here, Mother*, my father
would say, *No need to wash this one.*

I'm from the Great Depression, marked by invisible tattoos
that cannot be erased. Posters in World War II
exhorted us to USE IT UP, WEAR IT OUT,
MAKE IT DO OR DO WITHOUT!
That was already a way of life for us. Air Raid Wardens,
blackouts, scrap iron drives were sort of fun until
the casualties started coming in.

I'm from an uneasy coupling of North and South—
father from Pennsylvania and mother
from Kentucky—agreeing on one thing,
their only child would go to college.

I'm from LaRue, County of Lincoln,
born just two short miles from his place of birth.
We picnicked at the Lincoln Farm and drank
from the spring before they posted the
DO NOT DRINK sign (and after).

I'm from a brick building on a hill in Hodgenville
where I walked past a statue of Old Abe
on my way to school for twelve years.

I'm from glass-faced bookcases, filled with books
bought from door-to-door salesmen—
the Harvard Classics, World Encyclopedia,
a giant-size Family Bible.

I'm from Stevenson's iambic beat and word games,
the country of marriage where no girl felt
fulfilled without a *Mrs.* before her name.

From church choirs and girls' trios, I happily
backslid into boogie-woogie, then mended
my ways with jazz standards and gospel.

I come from a community that appreciated my rhymed
verses for special occasions, assuring me they
were better than store-bought cards any day.