

## Where I was From

I was from Green-Miller,  
Where the fragrant chill met you at the door  
On hot summer days,  
And you could drink fountain Cokes,  
Or coffee, with lemon icebox pie,  
Waiting for your prescription.

I was from Cumberland Valley,  
Where you listened to jazz albums  
In hushed booths,  
Deciding what to buy—  
A Miles Davis, perhaps,  
Or a Steinway  
Or a Frigidaire stove.

I was from the Court Café,  
With fried chicken every Monday,  
And club steaks every day,  
And free meals for preachers,  
And petite portions of cherry cobbler  
Arrayed for the rush  
At Sunday noon.

I was from Harlan Hardware,  
Where thatching rakes were sold  
Alongside Gorham sterling and Lenox china

And rat traps.

I was from Newberry's,  
With its candy and nuts  
And sewing thread and goldfish  
And capguns and canaries,  
And its lunch counter with swiveling chairs.

I was from Bowers,  
With its Boy Scout handbooks and knives  
And Buster Brown shoes,  
With the boy and his dog inside;

From Freed's Jewelers with free engraving,  
From Pennington's Gro., who carried your order  
Right into your kitchen;  
From the dime board  
Of the Salvation Army  
Selling clear consciences at Christmastime  
On Main Street, on the cheap.

I'm now from mostly empty streets  
With paycheck loans and pawn shops,  
Dollar Stores and consignments,  
And that strange feeling of happiness  
On a foulweather day  
In your free parking space  
No farther than sixty yards

From the double doors  
Of the Walmart.

Robert V. Hoskins III

## Where I'm From

Bethany Aslinger, Harlan County

I am from mountains and minnows,  
chasing the creatures of the creek bed with reckless abandon.

I am from dandelion bracelets,  
wrapped around tiny wrists  
and knotted in golden hair.

I am from coal dust and counted blessings,  
from the musty smell that lingered beneath the pews,  
creeping into my skin while I napped,  
wishing not to hear The Word preached.

I am from the scent of baby powder and strong perfume  
as I rifled through my grandmother's cabinets.

I'm from crisp rain and rolling thunder,  
bathing in the mountain runoff  
to wash away sins of the summer heat  
that made the cicadas sing.

I am from too quiet and too loud,  
from stand up and sit back down,  
from scraped knees and broken promises.

From the words my parents gave,  
never kept,  
and poured down the sink  
like alcohol during revival and Revelations.

I'm from tribulation and trial,

from the freedom of gripping handlebars too tight  
and singing songs to myself  
as I danced alone.

I am from the calling and the falling out  
of faith and family—  
kites stuck in trees  
flown from too-small hands.

I am from gravy and biscuit  
cooked at night with tired eyes  
and smiles.

I am from books devoured  
and old lessons for a new soul,  
learned too young.