

Where I'm From

by Robert Buckman

I am from the Shore, long days fishing on jetties, absorbed in the pulsing of the water, deep green, crashing on the rocks.

I am from wonder, honeysuckle forts in the woods, wild raspberries, climbing trees, bees in jars, fireflies at night, sleeping under the stars, walking the Appalachian Trail, and reading "Ripley's Believe it or Not" over and over til the cover fell off.

I am from a free-range childhood.

from the stories of old men sitting on beer kegs on the pier.

from stories of Benny, Iowa, Hickey, Beansie and Butch: men with no names; survivors, unknown to my closest friends, or my Mom

from jumping off a moving train.

from Liberty Street, Sylvan Avenue, and The Track: places unknown to my closest friends, or my Mom. I made friends there.

from some things I am still ashamed of, something Pinsky and I did, that was NOT getting drunk on Staten Island, peeing in someone's yard and the high-speed chase to the bridge, or beating out the fire with our coats at the field we set on fire. And definitely not that thing in the East Village either.

I am from "be sure you are home for supper."

I am from mom and dad, and my dog Prince to whom I snuck the liver and chicken with too much paprika.

I am from softball games and pizza at Freddie's after football games.

I am from those wonderful Sunday drives in our 1946 Dodge, family crabbing on the Navisink River, and fishing from the row boat with my dad and sister.

I am from Temple Beth Miriam and Bar Mitzvah.

I am from "If there weren't a law against it, we would be hanging from telephone poles."

I am from good books, lots of them.

I am from absorbing into my consciousness when I was 13 or 14 the depiction of grinding poverty and the injustice of it all in Daumier's painting Third Class Carriage—Google it.

I am from not being waited on at Moul's restaurant when I double-dated with Dave Ingram, my Black fraternity brother.

I am from Marx, Massing, Martin, Malcolm, Alinsky, and now Rohr.

I am from wanting 15 minutes now with my father who died too soon when I was 19. There is so much I would want to ask; there is so much I don't know.

I am from people who loved me; Julius and Hannah, and Albert, Jane's dad who embraced me as a son.

I am from spending days in the Village, talking over coffee, sleeping in Penn Station and taking the first train in the morning and running up the hill to my first class.

I am from thanking my mother as she lay dying for letting me learn early on and on my own about who I am, about life, the world as it is, and injustice. I don't remember her asking me many questions, not even on that bright morning in Asbury Park, when Iowa spilled out of a bar and embraced me.

I am from Every Thing Really is a Miracle.

I am from skate keys, dialing 0 to get the operator, 5-cent bus rides, 25-cent double features with cartoons and newsreels, nickel ice cream cones, asking for 25 cents worth at the gas station, ice boxes, and soap operas on the radio with the sound turned low when I was supposed to be sleeping.

I am from Chaim and Rebecca. I am from Anatevka.

—Robert Buckman