

I Am From

I am from a family where the best compliment was,  
“she’s a good knife and fork girl.”

I am from biscuits rolled out on the floured wooden board, served with molasses as  
dessert every now and then.

I am from collards and fatback.

I am from Aunt Marie’s chocolate cake.

I am from a mama who cooked because we were hungry and a daddy who cooked  
because he wanted to.

I am from creek fish caught before breakfast and fried within minutes so crispy we ate  
them bones and all.

I am from swimming in the river all morning and coming in ravenous for BLTs day after  
day after day.

I am from herring roe cooked into scrambled eggs those few weeks when the herrings  
were running in the Roanoke River.

I am from bourbon over tinkling ice in parents’ glasses on the porch on hot summer  
afternoons.

I am from barbecued coon when a hunting pal dropped off the coon to my daddy, known  
as an adventurous cook, and he said, why not?

I am from home-grown tomatoes that tasted like God meant for them to taste.

I am from corn harvested on the 3rd of July for the feast on the 4th.

I am from walks through the pig pen to see the baby piglets after church, still in my little  
white socks, Mother in high heels.

I am from the steamy kitchen surrounded by bushels of corn in the heat of July, kernels  
being cut from the cobs, making their way to the freezer to reappear at Thanksgiving and  
Christmas dinners.

I am from country ham, always on hand in payment for Daddy keeping somebody out of  
jail - Daddy who looked a lot like Atticus Finch in action.

I am from steak and French fries every Saturday night.

I am from a town too small to have ever seen broccoli from anywhere but the freezer  
section in the grocery store until the 70s. Wonder why no one grew it around there? Too  
exotic, I suppose.

I am from fried peanuts, harvested within a couple of miles from where they met the frying pan, Mother with slotted spoon in hand, knowing when the exact color of golden had been achieved.

I am from RC Colas placed on the freezer element for just the right amount of time to make them slushy on a hot summer's day.

I am from pig's feet on New Years Day.

I am from black-eyed peas many days of every year.

I am from dinner on the grounds – a feast of unfathomable plenty served under the shade trees at church on plywood sheets set on saw horses covered in white tablecloths. Deviled eggs, ham, fried chicken, and cakes and pies, oh the cakes and pies.

I am from a place where the smell of the soil being turned in summer still evokes a sense of well-being like nothing else on earth.

I Am From, Part 2

I am from a life where I spent summers on the river an hour from home, where days were made up of swimming and water skiing, playing Crazy Eights, Old Maid and Chinese Checkers, and eating the freshest fare summer had to offer.

I am from a life where in my 11th year, my daddy was not with us at the river as much as usual, and it wasn't clear why.

Because I am from a place where in the summer of 1963 while I swam in the river and played on the porch an hour away, people in town were experiencing fear because our small hamlet of 6,000 was chosen as a "hotspot" of the civil rights movement, where 32 straight days of peaceful protest took place, placing us at the center of national news.

I am from a town where the Southern Christian Leadership Conference held biweekly nonviolence training sessions at the church where the marches originated daily, and my father was town attorney and had to advise the town leaders whether any laws were being broken - a father who was called names by racist whites because he couldn't find any laws being broken.

I am from a life all these many years later where I would give anything to be able to ask my father what that summer was like for him. Being an hour away might as well have been across the Milky Way for all we were told, instead being fed eggs and bacon, fresh tomatoes, string beans, corn, peaches and homemade ice cream by my mother between all the fun and games.