Leadership North Carolina
Class 34

2026-27

Where I'm From

a poetry collection

Where I'm From

by Analisa Sorrells Archer

I am from frying pans,
from sunscreen and hair ties
I am from the swimming pool in our backyard,
bright blue, inviting, warmed from the sun
I am from mangrove trees,
whose tangled roots reached for the salty water like my own limbs
I'm from long road trips and expressive faces,
From Mansour and Lola Jean
I'm from talking over each other around the dinner table
and fighting for the last bite of dessert,
from 'always look out for your sisters' and 'never show up empty-handed'
I'm from church pews on Christmas Eve,
my grandfather's Quran, my grandmother's Jewish roots
I'm from rural Tennessee and ancient Persia,
pulled pork barbeque and lamb kebabs,
From the long journey my grandfather took across the Atlantic
to seek opportunity in the United States,
The tractor dealership my other grandfather owned,
where everyone was on a first-name basis,
In my garage is a dusty bin, filled with knick-knacks, photos, and scraps
carefully collected by my parents throughout my childhood
I am from all of those little moments,
captured before my memories begin,
connecting me deeply to my roots.

Where I'm From

by Anne Bacon

I am from number 2 pencils,
from bicycles and leotards.

I am from the house on the periwinkle hill.
(Modern, weathered, camouflaged in the grays of bark and pavement.)

I am from magnolia trees—
    The one towering over my childhood home, the
    other growing in the imagination of a daughter.

I'm from dinnertime debates and thorough consideration,
from the strong-willed Libby and Celia Ray.
From milestone celebrations and friendly interrogations,
from "You learn by asking questions" and "Hold your horses!"

I'm from cross, star, and a family tree pruned by history,
    star-crossed.
I'm from Reston and the Scharffs of Deutschland, warmly welcomed and
"deportiert."

I'm from Chicken-Rice Roger and Cowboy Cookies,
from Pops selling groceries for promises during the Depression,
from Mom and Aunt Vicki's Boston roommate dating that future astronaut.

Albums and genealogy binders on shelves, in attics;
framed photos on the walls of the family home soon to be sold.
I visit to celebrate happy endings and the rhythms of life, mourn those
lost too soon, bear witness to history

...And find my own story and values in the intersection.

Where I'm From

by Ronnie Devine

I am from mixing bowl
From Tupperware and Corning
I am from the kept up house at the end of the street
Neat, pristine, with a leafy yard in the fall and green in the summer
I am from pine and oak trees
Where the pines got sticky and the oak leaves took days to rake
I'm from crafty cooks and refined palates
From Mary Elizabeth and Ellen Ruth
I'm from the polite manners and hard-workers
From where the "chester drawers" are really chest-of-drawers
and "Are you ready?" for any journey in the car
I'm from the Quaker Society of Friends with my Mom, and my Dad being a part of
gospel music with family members serving as musicians and radio DJs
I'm from Forsyth by the way of Yadkin, Stokes, New Hanover, and
Durham/Orange/Chatham
Homemade pound cakes, chicken pie with green beans & corn
From the broken handle on the long knife Granny used to cut many cakes
The curio type cabinets in which my Mom displays family artifacts
Family pictures displayed in the hallway and with the buffet table
Brings back so many fond memories of fun, laughter, and fantastic times together.

Where I'm From

by Ronnie Devine

I am from paper
From Kleenex and Purell
I am from the Library on the 3rd Floor of my house
Brown, Orange, Smell like toothpaste
I am from a Rose
A Purple rose
I'm from Sunday Dinner and Always Smiling/Happy
From Ronnie Sr. and Fannie Hill
I'm from being outside and raking the yard
From "Always do your Best" and "Be respectful"
I'm from Spirit
I'm from North Augusta, SC and Charlotte, NC (England)
Beans, Plums
From the Father who is a Brick Mason & encourages me to learn a trade
My mother always pushes us to be better individuals in this world
The Family Library/Den area
Family memories are the glue to connections and purpose

Where I'm From

by Orlando Dobbin

I am from country roads,
From brown sugar and Cinnamon Toast Crunch.

I am from the cozy fireplace,
Warm, comforting, it was mesmerizing.

I am from poison ivy,
That my friends and I tried to wash off
after going too deep in the bushes again.

I'm from family dinners and educators,
From the Dobbins and Williams.

I'm from the love for all and generous,
From sporty and into everything.

I'm from being in church all the time.

I'm from Bertie and Elizabeth City,
Fish fries and banana pudding.

From the late nights at school events with my dad.

The big smile of my mother,
On the walls of our living room.

From the items and stories that hold it all.

Where I'm From

by Veronica Getz

I am from rice cookers on the counter,
from Vicks VapoRub and a pot of rice always warm.

I am from South Texas,
from hot afternoons and Gulf Coast air,
bare feet by the pool and long days at the beach.

I am from a neighborhood where family was never far -
where I could walk to my cousins' house or my grandparents',
where aunties and uncles were everywhere,
and growing up meant being surrounded by people who knew you
and loved you enough to tell you what to do.

I am from my grandpa's hands,
watching him turn string into something beautiful -
nets we would take crabbing, kites we would send into the sky,
or a net stretched across the ceiling,
filled with balloons waiting to fall at midnight.

I'm from family gatherings that didn't need an occasion,
from food on the table and always enough for one more.
From "Eat more, you're too skinny,"
no matter how much I had already eaten.

I'm from pancit and adobo,
from lumpia disappearing almost as quickly as it could be fried,
and rice with nearly everything.

I'm from parents who crossed an ocean and built a life in America -
a mother who came at twenty to become a nurse,
and a father whose journey here came through the Navy.

I'm from working hard and taking care of people.
From showing up for family because that is simply what you do.

I'm from prayers before meals, Sunday Mass,
and a faith that has grown with me -
one I now get to watch take root in my own children.

I'm from South Texas and the Philippines before me,
and now North Carolina, too.

I am from the things my family made by hand, the meals we shared,
cousins just down the street, aunties and uncles always nearby,
and sacrifices I understood only when I got older.

I am from nets strong enough to hold crabs, balloons, and memories.
From roots that stretch across an ocean
and a family that has always taught me that life is better when
we stay connected -

holding on to where we came from
while making room for what comes next.

Where I'm From

by Todd Godbey

I am from tobacco leaves,
From Kidder skis and Nautique boats.
I am from the red clay, split level of the foothills.
(Avocado green, burnt orange and the softness and dirtiness of shag carpet that always smelled like the family dog and cigarette smoke).
I am from the magnolia blooms
And the maple trees
that provided hours of entertainment – chasing smells and helicopter leaves all over the neighborhood.
I'm from White Lake summers and strong women,
From Granddad and Mother.
I'm from the civic minded and workaholics,
From "always check the oil" and "yes you can"!
I'm from "you're going to hell for that"
– with all the hypocrisy of the rural Southern Baptist tradition.
I'm from King, NC and the Godbey/Hall lineage,
Spaghetti and handmade biscuits.
From driving my mama's Cadillac from the middle at age 10, while she did crosswords in the driver's seat,
The entrepreneurship of my mother starting a business in our living room when I was 9.
In nearly every room of my adult home –
where photos, paintings, dishes and family treasures live –
serving as the only companionship and story survival in the life of an only child.

Where I'm From

by Molly Goldwasser

I am from cornfields
From super computers and farmers' markets
I am from the heart of Big Ten Country
Orange, blue, and flat for as far as the eye can see.
I am from soy beans,
Fields geometric and bilaterally symmetric.
I'm from euchre games and trail runs
From Joe and from Joe
I'm from the outspoken and the gesticulators
From "knee high by the Fourth of July" and "it's better to do it right once than wrong twice"
I'm from mismatched shoes during festive seders
I'm from materially impoverished and culturally affluent Eastern and Southern Europe,
Spaghetti and ravioli and matzoh ball soup,
From morning Turkey Trots at Crystal Lake and afternoon snow football games at the park,
The wall of wedding photos,
Photographic evidence of immigrant love and success.

Where I'm From

by AJ Grube

I am from pine trees,
from Coca-Cola and goober peas.
I am from the deep red brick house with a baseball field in the back yard,
lively, fun, with friends all around.
I am from cotton and peanuts, soft in the truck and boiled on weekends.
I'm from homemade ice cream for dinner on Sunday nights and
July church revivals that mimicked the heat of the third rung of hell,
from Larry and Mary Evelyn.
I'm from the practical jokers and football lovers,
from "You need to put on your beige dress and sit in the corner" and "Don't ever congratulate a lady on her engagement. Brides always receive your best wishes. Otherwise, you might as well say, Thank God you finally caught one.",
from a lineage of church tombstones.
I'm from Warrenton, GA, England, Scotland and Ireland,
with barbeque, country ham, grits and peaches,
from the great grandmother who saved the family farm with her 13 children and
the mother who was a first-generation college student and
elementary school teacher.
The photos throughout my parents' home vividly displayed our happy, full lives and guided our growth to independence, while providing warm memories of the people who shaped me most.

Where I'm From

by Doug Harrison

I am from car,

From Chevy and Toyota,

I am from the construction zone that my wife has been wanting to add on for years,

(Spacious, country charm, aroma of family meals every Sunday after church.)

I am from hydrangea, tulip,

Where the fresh fragrances are matched by the variety of colors that contrast with the soft grasses surrounding them.

I'm from Christmas Day Crab Boil in our pajamas and athletic,

From Edward and the Johnsons.

I'm from the competitive with love to win at games and fans of ECU Pirates,

From "quit climbing trees" and making sure your brothers don't do something to get into trouble.

I'm from Mt Nelson Baptist Church where "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13) in the big town of Eureka,

I'm from Dowagiac, MI and Irish/Creek Indian,

Hand-tossed Pizza, ballgame concession stand hotdogs,

From the Papa who rode bulls on Florida Rodeo when he was 19 while working on a cattle ranch with his uncle that I was named after.

The Granny Frances who drove her car in her 80s like Dale Earnhardt,

In a box upstairs in the hall closet,

Memories in time that are fainting glimpses into the past that shared love for one another.

Where I'm From

by Beth Heile

I am from bare feet,
from Velveeta and Fab.

I am from clean, orderly, spotless—
the chemical smell was surely good for you.

I am from the creek—
cool, refreshing, always moving,
full of life, full of fun, full of critters.

I am from picnics on the Parkway
and self-reliance.

From Patricia and Glenn,
I'm from always working and always serving.
From "stand up straight"
and "you're not better than anybody else."

I am from Sundays with big homemade breakfasts,
church, Sunday lunch out,
an afternoon at the grandparents
with aunts, uncles, and cousins, homemade cake,
and home together for 60 Minutes to unwind.

I am from Valdese
and the Waldensians of Italy.

I am from meat and three every evening,
weekend homemade ice cream.

From my dad bringing home escaped prisoners,
broken-down buses of gospel singers,
to whoever else he found on the side of the road.

From my mom,
who walked in the shadow
but was the strength, the calm, the everything.

On the bottom shelf behind doors to hide the mess,
in the only-for-guests living room.

I am inspired by all the positive,
and wiser for all the bad.

I am not better than anybody else,
but I am better for where I'm from.

Where I'm From

by Melissa Huffman

I am from the farm
From sunscreen and moisturizer
I am from the place of love
    inviting, sheltering, glow of sunlight
I am from tobacco
    green, yellow, brown, and white tips
I'm from Sunday lunches and long days
From Irene and Wiley
I'm from the tractor and combine
From "Be Kind" and "Help Others"
I'm from small family church
I'm from Winston & Germany
    Farm veggies, blackberries and blueberries
From the one who cared for others her entire life
The family of seven siblings who served globally
    iPads, phones, and closets
reminding me of who I am

Where I'm From

by Rachael Klayman

I am from trees
from Pecan and Sycamore
I am from wide fields with no fences
green, open, full of warmth and mystery
I am from Texas paintbrushes,
red and brilliant, dotted with dazzling sunlight
I'm from dreidels and hugs
from Lana and Margaret
I'm from loud laughter and strong opinions
from walk it off and go read a book
I'm from Shabbat candles and 'do justice now, love mercy now, walk humbly now'
I'm from small town and big town, from concentration camp tattoos and darning socks,
from dreamers and survivors
I am from silence, and holding each other close
from challah and dilly bread
from my grandmother's kitchen counter covered in pink boxes from Canter's
my grandfather's carpet samples and gentle hands
I am from the green box of photos in my closet – holding love and pain, and the girl standing on
the back of a pony
I am from tarnished hopes and brilliant dreams, I am from fields which span the globe,
I am from memories and ancient prayers

Where I'm From

by Shelita Lee

I am from a table lamp
From bubbly sparkling water and shea butter
I am from the office chair in the Diva Den
chaotic, optimistic, peace found in the rhythmic clicks of the keyboard
I am from sunflowers,
brilliant and bright
I'm from Sowers and reapers
From Pam and Chestley
I'm from "when the music drops we dance"
and "what's an event without good food and fellowship"
From "wash your hands before you go into the refrigerator"
and "be inside before the streetlights come on"
I'm from Christian
I'm from Rockingham County
Collards, MacNChz, and Yams
From in the country we learn to drive on the back roads well before we get a license
The day Austin almost choked on spaghetti
Lining the walls of the living room and stairs
Keeping our legacy and love in full view.

Where I'm From

by Rodney McCrowre

I am from the worn notebook, the open classroom door,
and the seat pulled out for someone who still needs a place at the table.

From Bronco blue and calendars crowded with possibility,
from early mornings, late evenings,
and the quiet belief that preparation creates opportunity.

I am from a home where education was never just about a degree—
it was about what you could do with what you learned,
who you could help,
and how far you could carry others with you.

I am from Carolina soil,
steady beneath my feet,
where roots run deeper than what can be seen
and growth often happens long before anyone notices.

I'm from showing up and giving back,
from Mary Leak and Gaston Leak,
from people who taught me that character is revealed
not when everyone is watching,
but when no one is.

I'm from the "finish what you start"
and the "remember where you came from" kind of people.

From "your word is your bond"
and "never become too important to serve."

I'm from strong faith tradition/God fearing foundation,
where faith was not simply something spoken on Sunday,
but something carried into Monday—
into how you treated people,
how you responded to difficulty,
and how you used what you had been given.

I'm from Robeson County,
with family roots reaching through NC to SC,
from grandma's biscuits filling the kitchen
and pear preserve that never tasted quite right
unless family made it.

From the story of sharecroppers,
whose perseverance looked ordinary at the time
but became extraordinary with distance.

From my mother and father
who taught me hard work
without a title, a textbook, or a podium.

I am from photographs kept in home/workplace,
from names, faces, certificates, keepsakes, and stories
that quietly remind me:

You did not get here by yourself.

I am from Fayetteville State University—
as a first-generation student learning what might be possible,
then as a professional helping others discover
what could be possible for them.

I am from Upward Bound hallways, advising offices, classrooms,
leadership tables, faculty meetings, student conversations,
and doors that need opening.

I am from learning that leadership is not standing in front
so others can see you.

Leadership is standing beside people
until they can see themselves.

I am from classrooms where management becomes personal,
where strategy meets people,
where theory has to survive the real world,
and where leadership begins with listening.

I am from mentorship—
not simply as a research question,
but as a lived experience.

From people who saw something in me,
challenged something in me,
and sometimes opened a door
before I knew I was ready to walk through it.

And now,
I am from the responsibility
to do the same for someone else.

I am from students who became graduates,
interns who became professionals,
mentees who became leaders,
and moments when someone finally realized:

I belong here too.

I am from questions about opportunity,
workforce readiness, fit, belonging, and access—
because talent has never been the scarce resource.

Opportunity has.

I am from service
that does not require applause.

From brotherhood.
From community.
From university.
From responsibility.

From the lesson that titles can tell people what position you hold,
but service tells them what you stand for.

I am from the professor,
the advisor,
the administrator,
the researcher,
the mentor,
the representative—

but I am not from titles alone.

I am from purpose.

From doors that were opened for me
and the conviction that I should never walk through one
without considering who else might need it open.

I am from a journey
from student to teacher,
from mentee to mentor,
from participant to leader—

yet every step forward has taught me
that leadership is not really about arriving.

It is about remembering.

Remembering the people who poured into you.

Remembering the places that shaped you.

Remember the lessons that steadied you.

Remembering that success means more
when someone else can rise because you did.

So, wherever this journey takes me next,
I carry where I'm from with me.

The roots.
The lessons.
The people.
The responsibility.

And if I lead well,
the measure will not simply be how far I traveled—

but whether I left the road
wider, stronger, and more possible
for the people coming behind me.

Where I'm From

by Zaire Monteith

I am from #2 pencils,

from Pine-Sol and Vaseline.

I am from the creaky stairs and floor boards

(Rickety, timeworn, making sounds that never let you sneak pass Mom.)

I am from lilies,

Whose soft petals unfold in the sunlight and fills the air with a sweet fragrance.

I'm from game nights and almond shaped eyes

From Susan Smith and Susanne Montieth

I'm from the sarcasm and dark humor

From "I brought you into this world and I'll take you out" and "I'm not one of your little friends"

I'm from "go in peace and sin no more"

I'm from Jacksonville, with roots stretching from the Philippines.

Rice and Eastern Carolina BBQ

From my mother's adoption papers, where incorrect details crossed an ocean and left questions that can never be answered.

To me playing tricks on my siblings, making them think someone broke in the house while I was babysitting so they'd be quiet.

Scrapbooks and binders on the shelf in the family room and photo albums saved in the cloud.

Holding on to the faces, the places, and the stories that has shaped who I am.

Where I'm From

by Adam Olls

I am from the hallway,
from Dr. Pepper and taut DR 10 strings.
I am from the backyard treehouse constructed with possibly purloined telephone poles.
(Light, layered in pollen, raindrops eliding the tin roof to explode on my cheek.)
I am from the blooming dogwood erupting above the squirrel defenses,
announcing spring, soon summer, and profound, nourishing boredom.
I'm from pig pickins at Grandaddy's and competitive thrift, where tiny threats of
store brand retirement homes inspired delight, not pause,
    from Uncle Booty and Big Brenda.
I'm from the quiet and gregarious
    and sweaty heads
from You are a miracle baby and Sweet dreams.
I'm from communion wafers accepted in spirit though spat out in body.
I'm from Raleigh and the Cales,
Oyster dressing, gross and welcomed, sweet potatoes my Dad loved to hate.
From the cross-country dognapping cousin Jaron earnestly believed a feat of rescue,
The church parking police's most wanted.
In a cabinet adjacent the fireplace, fading pictures enrapture with
stories odd, ordinary and mesmerizing to my children, rippling onward and like me
joining anew.

Where I'm From

by Meg Robertson

I am from Football

From down filled coats and gore tex winter gloves.

I am from the City of Good Neighbors.

Majestic, 6 foot, chilly snowfalls.

I am from snow country.

Snowfalls as tall or taller than most people and icicles that hang down several feet.

I'm from tobogganing, seating 8 to a sled and coming in to warm up and play backgammon and read books by the fireplace.

From Beatrice and Mildred.

I'm from meals at long tables with dozens of cousins and creating homemade gingerbread houses and christmas cookies while all the women speak at the same time.

From "Be kind, you don't know what someone's going through" and "If you don't have anything nice to say don't say anything at all.

I'm from Catholic guilt, "you shouldn't do this, that and the other thing."

I'm from Buffalo Bills. Chicken wings and Beef on Weck.

From the homemade gifts Aunt Mary made everyone for Christmas when she couldn't afford to buy them, they are in fact, the gifts we have 5 decades later.

The teddy bear Aunt Mary sewed for me when I was born and the homemade ornaments for her on our christmas tree.

On the bookshelves in my parents home remain scrapbooks filled with photos of family that cared enough to create. Even if they don't remember creating some of my most prized possessions, I will never forget the hands that made and gifted it to me.

Where I'm From

by Pamela Shortt

I am from paper plates.
From lemon-scented Pledge and Lysol.
I am from the aluminum siding and tin roof,
manufactures, anchored to the dirt, sweltering from the high-noon sun.
I am from dogwood,
young and tender, but growing to withstand shock without shattering.
I'm from Sunday dinners and freckles.
From the Bentons and the Cribbs.
I'm from the church goers and the loud mouths.
From "cross your legs" and "it builds character."
I'm from Sunday school to preacher's wife.
I'm from Tarheel Blue and SC beaches, too.
Potato salad and crockpot roast.
From the mother who dropped out of school.
The grandmother who prayes.
Shoeboxes stacked neatly in my mother's closet.
I am from silent photos where old stories stay, whispering of traditions that slowly fade away.

Where I'm From

by Donia Simmons

I am from eternity,
suspended into time,
revealed to the earth on the 8th day of August
from the seed of Donnie Simmons,
through the womb of Vanessa Brooks,
arriving in the city of New York, bureau of Manhattan
I am from poverty passed down from generation to generation,
hand-me-down clothes and thrift store shopping,
single mother raised, women of strength,
what goes on in this house stays in this house,
I'm from the "Do what I say, Not what I do",
take off your good clothes to go outside to play,
be in the house before the porch light comes on,
From toe-tapping, handclapping, choir singing, Sunday morning preaching
gathering at the table, grace before eating, prayer before sleeping,
I am from carefully crafted art, paint brushes and colored pencils
coloring across trauma, designing a beautiful future,
etching new lines, connecting community,
I am from these moments, memories,
Taught from my past, living in my present, and effectuating purpose-fulfilled
dreams and plans for my future.

Where I'm From

by Vanessa Watson

I am from fuzzy socks,
from Pine-Sol and a Swiffer.
I am from the brick house on the corner.
(Friendly, small, where you can hear
the whistling trains on the tracks.)
I am from the big oak tree,
shading my bedroom window.
I am from the birthday calls and midnight
and the small brown eyes.
from Ressie and Ruth.
I'm from the Saturday morning hair day
and trips to the library.
From "you're the big little sister" and
"I'll love you forever and like
you for always."
I'm from the rare blended Pentecostal and
Baptist household.
I'm from JoCo and Brooklyn,
'Cho-Nilla' cakes and Christmas Ham.
From the high school my father helped to integrate
in the community he became a legend in.
And the Michael Jackson concert my mother missed
because of her rolling stone father's funeral.
On the bookshelf in my parents' den
sits thousands of photos
of recent and distant memories.
Memories of the people who hoped to create a better
future for the generations to come.

Where I'm From

by Meredith Weatherman

I am from a fluffy blanket.
From Lavender Body Scrub and Milky Way.
I am from the house with blue shutters,
plain, suburban, smelling of cinnamon.
I am from hydrangea bushes,
which bloom fullest after warm days and cool nights.
I'm from pink fluffy stuff at Thanksgiving dinner that no one really knows what it is.
And loud laughter in the kitchen.
From Jon and Renee.
I'm from the always hungry and burning the bread.
From "the glass is half full" and "don't forget to check the oil in your car."
I'm from Greensboro, NC, and the Dixons.
Homemade pasta sauce, and hamburgers on the grill.
From the Christmas tree that my dad thought would fit in the living room...
that definitely did not fit in our living room.
The crystal white hair of my Nana.
The old wooden bookcase full of sticky-page photo albums
That store photos of a large family tree, each branch charting its own unique journey but never forgetting their roots, and never losing sight of the other limbs.