

## Where I'm From

By Secilia Corona

I'm from a chest of too many Barbie dolls and an empty room with just me.

I'm from the undeserving life my shuffling feet stole from the night lurking cockroaches, for I was Godzilla! One by one, they crunched and I smiled.

I'm from the salty taste of mercy that ran down one cheek, for together we saved mice from the sticky glue traps mom would stash in the kitchen corners.

From running loose outside, through the fog of my grandpa's cigarette; chasing butterflies and falling firm enough to catch several cuts.

From "keep it up and The Cucuy will get you!" to "I can make it to the gate faster than last time, I bet you!"

I'm from smog colored skies; traffic on the 405 and bums waiting on the corner as we get off on Central.

I'm from the deafening police sirens and powerful helicopter wings that would leave a rushing, ring in my ears. Circling above and around gunshot fire and consuming cries; from the ambulance parked at the corner of Evers, directly across the street from Nickerson Gardens, to the coroner van that would soon after, uncomplainingly, drive away.

I'm from fallen women accustomed to the fight; from their cracked heels, aching feet, their shredded tops, and a hunger they cannot defeat; from their sedated minds to their overburdened bodies –dazed, drifting into the night.

I'm from Saint Lawrence's church almost twice a month, whispered invocations dedicated to the cross above my headboard – to *this* faith – that like a flame kindles and then suffocates.

I'm from Snoop Dogg and Cypress Hill, Tiger Army to Atmosphere, Jack Johnson and Bob Marley, to Adventure Time and Tom N' Jerry.

I'm from a day's stress that is easily washed away with water. From singing along to my jams in the shower, with the conditioner bottle to my mouth, lip syncing an hour away, while simultaneously, busting an amateur, power combination of the running man plus the sprinkler. Pretending to be the goddess of *Funk* is usually enough for me to wind up with a sprained ankle.

I'm from The Power Puff Girls to MTV; the pink, glittery bicycle handles to a black, rubber steering wheel, gashes from hitting the ground to razor wounds; from a flat chest to all these years of still, waiting for a fully matured bust.

I'm from the three miserable steps in Proactive, day and night, to the 30 second carb diets.

From Auntie Quitta's, Pollyanna, contagious, attitude, Big Momma's tough love and funny moods, Uncle Chucko's passionate hugs on Christmas mornings, grandma's dance floor kitchen and Aunt Liz's stashed candy drawers.

I'm from Uncle Edgar's fried shrimp, on Sunday cookouts, grilled shrimp, baked shrimped, Nina's giant glass bowls of shrimp cocktails and more shrimp galore.

I'm from pounds of beans in the cart, beans with a glass of milk for breakfast, beans with tortilla for lunch, beans with cheese, La Loteria with beans, beans that would just make me fart.

I'm from long, humiliating periods of time spent facing the board in front of the class, during math lecture, with a chalk in hand and no answer.

I'm from the missing pages in my English book; page twenty-one which redirected me to page five; page five that led to the mustache drawn above Mona Lisa's smile. From the carved barrio names beneath my white, blank sheet of paper and the rainbow of chewed up gum under my desk.

I'm from the discord of black and brown color that interlocked in a ring around a brother and his enemy. From our dishonorable arrogance as we chanted for his victory, because when he bled – he did not spill blood – he shed our pride; he held the fate of our place, the fate of our rank; how they perceived us.

I'm from castles in the air and no barriers to protect them. From the charcoal, fragments of the American Dream my grandparents so passionately awaited.

From the written statement that emphasized equality, established in our Declaration of Independence, for us the people of this country; we the Caucasian people, the Latino, African, Hawaiian, Native, Asian and Indian people. Written words in a powerless document – the promising call for social parity became nothing more, nothing less than ink stained on paper.

I'm from a ghetto, an area unspoken of, and left untouched; my ghetto is no topic for discussion. It is a startled look with raised eyebrows. It is an abrupt change in the atmosphere; from what was a mere second ago laughter to a born sense of fear. It is an uneasy vibe that slaps the smiles off their pampered faces; a sudden insecurity draws her classy type back, like the awkward grin he tried so hard to maintain, we repel. It is painted black and brown. It is heavy with hindering oppression and it is unwanted.

I'm from grimy gutters that occupy each day with our screwed up, demented waste that clogs the sewers of our city. Just like the bare bodies that rest on the filthy sidewalks and rancid street of Wilmington, the crack *feens* that itch to their bone for another hit of a dose that will passionately, suffuse through their veins, gently draining the misery out of reality.

I'm from the little purity that conceives from adoration. From corruption as it claims the innocent for its own, exposing the young to the cruel ways of life; the pot-heads who take their smoke sessions to Ted Wilkins Park by the swing set and the cluck houses across from Flournoy Elementary School.

I'm from the nine year old sharing stories with his friends about the bumps that went on through the night – a thief outside the window, another drive-by, his mother and a stranger in ecstasy, her broken nose and blood stained t-shirt, the ice cold shower his step father gave him as his mother watched, an empty fridge accompanied by the rumble of his empty stomach. From the dope dealer he robbed for money, the liquor store he ran out of, missing the cashier, with snacks to feed his younger sister and brother, the couches he would scavenge for change to buy bread from the Paneria; from the family he created for when love and support were essential to his survival, to their evolution of the barrios new locos.

I'm from a "Good morning" from Tip Toe, every Friday as he searches through our trash bins for empty cans and plastic bottles, unaware that I have already beat him to it. From a good night I cannot wish him before he disappears at dusk, tiptoeing his way to the toe' up, stanky mattress in a corner, under the 105 freeway that is his refuge.