

Where Are You From?

"If you don't know where you're from, you'll have a hard time saying where you're going." Wendell Berry, among others, has voiced this idea that we need to understand our roots to know our place in the world.

Give it a try. The prompts have a way of drawing out memories of the smells of attics and bottom-drawer keepsakes; the faces of long-departed kin, the sound of their voices you still hold some deep place in memory. You'll be surprised that, when you're done, you will have said things about the sources of your unique you-ness that you'd never considered before. What's more, you will have created something of yourself to share--with your children, spouse, siblings--that will be very unique, very personal and a very special gift.

Brainstorm a list

Brainstorm a list of places that stick in your mind.

Next, go beyond places. Describe colors, people, and objects

Then, try to remember sayings from parents/friends

Keep going:

Items from around the house

Items from the yard

Items found in the neighborhood

Names of relatives

Names of foods, dishes that recall family gatherings

Organize some of them into a form, starting with the WHERE I'M FROM Template:

1. I am from _____ (specific ordinary item), from _____ (product name) and _____.
2. I am from the _____ (home description... adjective, adjective, sensory detail).
3. I am from the _____ (plant, flower, natural item), the _____ (plant, flower, natural detail)
4. I am from _____ (family tradition) and _____ (family trait), from _____ (name of family member) and _____ (another family name) and _____ (family name).
5. I am from the _____ (description of family tendency) and _____ (another one).
6. From _____ (something you were told as a child) and _____ (another).
7. I am from (representation of religion, or lack of it). Further description.
8. I'm from _____ (place of birth and family ancestry), _____ (two food items representing your family).
9. From the _____ (specific family story about a specific person and detail), the _____ (another detail, and the _____ (another detail about another family member).
10. I am from _____ (location of family pictures, mementos, archives and several more lines indicating their worth).