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Where I’m From

I am from Velveeta,
from the scum of simmering Catalina dressing and hot dogs.
I am from the sun-scorched grass,
mangetic and thirsty.
(It looked like the faded fatigues of my forefathers.)
I am from the Buckeye tree,
the gray Ohio skies
and the glacier-pressed earth that made sledding extinct.

I am from the night moves of Bob Seger,
from diaper pails, Tonka trucks, personal pan pizzas, and shin guards
that depended on not being washed.
From “turtles in a half shell” and
“Won’t you be my neighbor?”
From throwing monkey balls, fallen off the Sweetgum tree, in the front yard,
throwing green tomatoes, leftover from the summer, into the side fence, and
throwing Nerf balls, in a homemade version of American Gladiator, in the back.

I am from bad knees, blackjack, and excess melanin,
from Gabriel and Rose,
Catholics and carriage makers,
From “Eat your crust – it will help you whistle”
and “Rub-a-dub dub, thanks for the grub, yay God!”
I am from the zerbert-givers – you don’t know what that is?
Come closer, and I’ll show you…

I am from the maraschino cherry in my grandpa’s whisky sour,
And my brother’s feet that “smelled” like cherry pies.
From annual dunkings in ice-cold coca-cola lake water,
and “Hartke-house rules”
and nail gashes and smashed fingers –
battle scars from endless rounds of Quadruple Solitaire and Egyptian Ratscrew.
I’m from the smell of Smarties in brown-paper sacks, waiting on the car seat, building
enthusiasm for the 10-hour car-ride ahead.

From Scrabble queens
and jolly green giants,
I am from an aerie of people,
perched in all corners of the world,
who are always “only a heartbeat away.”