

I am from Miami

Cara Turner

I am from sea breezes and bikinis,
From Coppertone and aloe cream.
I am from the sand stuck between my toes
(Gritty, irritating as
it settles in the bottom of my bathing suit)
I am from the Royal Palm,
The Ficus tree
Whose canopied leaves dwarf houses,
Whose roots buckle roads,
Whose branches hold the tree fort in my back yard,
Like a grandfather delicately and firmly holds his baby granddaughter.

I am from arroz con pollo and yucca,
From abuelita y Gloria Estefan.
I am from too-busy-to-chat,
Can't-be-bothered-to-listen,
And, hurry-up and move-it-mister.
I am from Hail Mary, Full of Grace
And the sound of the noon time Angelus Bells.

I am from Matheson Hammock Beach and Sunset Avenue,
Espresso and plantains.
From the soft touch of my mama's tan hands,
The wrinkled smile of Deda's round face,
The giantness of my father's frame as he lifted me to heavens.
On the shelf in my childhood closet,
Is a hodgepodge of untossable memories staring at me blankly—
Christopher Robin doll, Shawn Cassidy albums, diplomas and certificates
I am from those mementos,
Although they often feel as intangible as a faint waft of perfume
From someone who has just left the room.



Gram's Kitchen

By Cara L. Turner



The center of Gram's kitchen
Was a yellow honeycomb sugar bowl; perched on top was a ceramic bee.
It's broken wing a metaphor for the chaos it had observed through the years.
Like the motionless bee, the bowl itself never moved
From the center of Gram's brown Formica kitchen tabletop—a perfect view.

If alive, the bee would have buzzed, participating in
Aunt Eleanor's tall tales,
Aunt Tootie's bursts of song,
Cousin Rita's irreverent jokes,
The family audience of grown ups drinking black coffee;
The kids—who sat on the wooden bench over the ancient radiator—
Sipping cold Pepsis and chiming in with well timed cackles and giggles—
We grandkids were seen *and* heard!

The bee would have taken particular notice of Gram,
How she leaned her hunched body against the kitchen sink,
How she rubbed her gnarled foot against her leg to shoo away a fly,
How her laugh lines creased into crevices
When she snickered aloud at Cousin Tony's antics or Jimmy's outlandish tales.

If the bee could have flown,
He surely would have fluttered his wings at the jarring
CLUNK, CLUNK, CLOP, CLOP, CLUNK
Of a newcomer walking down the warped hardwood stairs.
Like the rest of us,
Bee would have fixed his bug eyes on the last step: Wondering,
"Who could it be? Cousin Ann? Little Bill? Uncle Jack?
Would Uncle Don return from reading on the porch to antagonize us with his jokes?"
All holding our breath, delighting in the anticipation.

From his porcelain branch, the bee would learn that
This time the mystery guest would be Uncle Bill—
Looking like a cross between Abe Lincoln and Mark Twain.

Bee would have heard the familiar softly spoken,
“Well, howdy. Anyone want to go down to the river?”
And it would have witnessed how the quiet invitation turned into a ruckus,
As six (or was it eight?) little ones barreled past Gram, flew up the stairs, and
Landed in the old Ford pickup.
The bee, like Gram and Aunt Tootie and Aunt Eleanor—
Those so easily left behind—
Would have felt jostled, but would recover to hear Tootie ask,
“You don’t want to go, Gram?”

“Good Fathers, no!” she exclaimed
The bee would settle into his comfortable stillness,
As Gram poured herself another cup of coffee,
Pulled out the yellow plastic and chrome kitchen chair to sit,
Took gentle hold of her broken-winged companion,
Lifted the lid off the worn golden bowl, and
Absentmindedly scooped two spoonfuls into her mug.



Lady of Leisure

By Cara L. Turner



“Have fun, Lady of Leisure. See you in five days,” Mike said,
Before a final 5 a.m. kiss,
Before he gracefully stepped in a jam-packed van,
Before one-year-old Katie waved wildly, and
Before two-year-old Annie whispered, “Bye-bye, Mommy!”

Once the van rounded the corner out of sight,
Once I gulped back flooding emotions,
Once I stepped back into the silent, dark house, and
Once I headed back to bed, I smirked—“Lady of Leisure indeed!”

I had such leisurely plans—plans minus the bon-bons:
Soaking in a whirlpool tub with fragrant bath salts,
Scouring my pregnant body with Herbal Serenity body scrubs,
Stripping away impurities with a chemical peel, and
Scraping away calluses with a soothing foot elixir.

My plans bordered on the dirty and the decadent:
Lounging in my PJs until 4 p.m.,
Losing myself in a five hour Lifetime movie marathon,
Licking fudge bars for breakfast, crunching cereal for dinner, and
Letting the answering machine screen my calls.

“I deserve it,” I reasoned.
Twenty-four months and nine days had passed,
Since I had procured a day off—time for only me,
To selfishly ignore the realities of wifedom and mommyhood.

No thoughts of diapers and Pull-ups
No cleaning of bottles and sippy cups,
No frustrating potty training set-backs, and
No manipulating playtime for perfectly timed naps.

No making ruffled, nearly sheetless beds,
No sorting piles of lights and darks,
No planning and shopping and cooking three squares, and
No mopping sticky residue off kitchen floors.

A fantasy became a reality,
A dream came true for this Cinderella mom,
Handel's "Halleluiah Chorus" blared in my sleepy head,
As I drifted off to dream of self-indulgence.

Something must have happened in my sleep, for
When I awoke, I instinctually tiptoed to the nursery.
The room was in slight disarray from frantic packing, and
Frenetic playing.

I casually picked up Katie's Madam Alexander doll,
Pulled her dangling shoe around the plastic pink ankle,
Straightened her matching pastel hat, and
Placed her on the bookcase next to Raggedy Ann.

Plastic figurines from a Noah's Ark set were strewn over the bunny embroidered rug.
As I bent to pick and place each one—giraffe, lion, bear, and zebra—
I heard voices echo in my head:
"Katie, what does a lion say?" "Argggh!" "Yes!"

Books of all shapes and sizes littered the area besides Annie's crib—
Good Night Moon, Brown Bear Brown Bear, The Very Busy Spider—
Each waited for me to open their worn covers and tattered pages,
Inviting me to delight in their devices of poetic sound.

When I crouched on my hands and knees to gather petite nursery rhyme books,
I spied a lost pacifier under Annie's crib and against the wall.
I wondered, "Does she have enough pacis?" and
"Will she be the only one in kindergarten in a Paci 12 Step Program?"

The rest of my day I spent fingering Annie and Katie's toys.
Occasionally, I held a doll or two and wept.
Once I even sang "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star"
Just to feel close to my daughters hundreds of miles away.

And though I never did make it into the whirlpool tub,
And though the scrubs and peels remained in the cabinets untouched,
My soul received a thorough cleansing,
As I reflected on what's most important in life.

That evening Mike called to check on me:
"Well, how is my Lady of Leisure?" he asked. "What did you do today?"
"Oh, this and that," I replied. I couldn't tell him that my day off from the girls,
Was spent closer to them than all the days of their lives.

Writing Marathon: A Fieldtrip for Teachers

Cara L. Turner

Buzz, buzz

Chitter chatter, chitter chatter

Buzz, buzz, snort

Frenzy over field trip

“What’d you do?”

“Where’d you go?”

“Show them your what?”

“Tatoo!”

“You went where?”

“Crazy Mitch’s!”

“The store for...?”

“Exactly!”

“What’d you think of the New River Gorge?”

“Amazing, inspiring, humbling.”

“What’s the Mystery Hole?”

“Can’t say—it’s a mystery.”

“Starbucks—good idea.”

“You went to Ellen’s Ice Cream? Lucky ducks!”

“Piles of broken colored glass? Oh...Blenko’s, I see.”

“Did you go swimming in the Wave Pool?”

“First date was Rocky IV?”

“Where do the homeless sleep?”

“Meth lab materials at a garage sale? Pretty bold.”

“No one should give Beth Henry a gun...or Lou Chafin a chainsaw!”

“Books are my world.”

“Support local music—those are my CDs.”

“My student’s first installation at the Museum in the Community.”

Buzz, buzz

Chatter, chatter

Yawn, yawn, hum

The fieldtrip fades away...