

I am from windswept moors wet from frequent rain, a land of mists  
Where threads of vapor rise like smoke then disperse in a stiff south westerly breeze  
Towering sea cliffs pounded by relentless ocean waves  
And pure, green glens bathed in sunshine  
I walk there often in my mind

I am from the daughters, wives, mothers of hard-working men who carved a living from  
land and sea  
Equally hard-working, largely unlettered, women  
Productive in every waking moment so that even when at rest  
With clicking needles made of bone, and an understanding of mathematics to rival that of  
any educated man, they created for their families garments both practical and  
uncommonly beautiful  
I think of them often as I pick up my own knitting

I am from a long line of learned folk  
Studying philosophy and mathematics, and later psychology  
Intelligence of the academic sort prized above all else  
Evidenced by the number of PhDs awarded to my family  
The academy was their comfort zone, more contentment there than when at home  
More at ease with colleagues and graduate students than with their own children  
I remember that often as I purposefully leave my ivory tower on the hill to spend time  
with my own child

I am from bread baked fresh in a wood fired oven  
From sun-baked shoulders and dirty fingers stained red from picking strawberries for  
hours  
Those strawberries then washed, hulled, and made into jam and canned in a pressure  
cooker in my grandmother's kitchen  
Jar after jar put up in the cellar to last all winter  
Sticky, sweet, and delicious jam spread on that luscious, hot, fresh bread  
I often try to recreate both when I am hungry for the simplicity of childhood

I am from cancer  
An aggressive tumor in my breast and lymph nodes, an 11 on a scale of 1 to 10  
That soon spread to my sternum—diagnosis: Stage 4, terminal breast cancer  
Fast forward through 10 years of surgery, chemo, and radiation and I'm still here, against  
all odds  
I am from indomitable spirit, from force of will, from "just stay alive and they will find  
some other treatment for you to try"  
I am changed in cancer's aftermath  
Clearer, more direct, more patient with those earnestly struggling or truly suffering  
But less patient too—especially with those who waste time—both time that is given to  
them and to others  
I contemplate often what it would be like to be unaware that the clock of your life is  
ticking and I'm grateful that I know

I am from the Old World and the New  
From people who labored hard to live off the land and sea and those who studied the  
ideas of others until they came up with their own  
From the privileged and the oppressed; all strong, industrious, indefatigable  
I can be like adamant, like Boudicca, or flexible and easy-going  
I am more than the sum of where I am from