

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