

*Anti-Belle...Um*  
by Gina Ashline

I never quite developed a  
Taste for turnip greens,  
Okra breaded in cornmeal and fried,  
Sage dressing with giblet gravy,  
Smokehouse pork

Like the aunt who cussed and  
Praised the Lord in one breath,  
Made me sandwiches of smashed  
Banana and peanut butter,  
Shampooed my hair in the kitchen sink,  
Drank Calvert hidden in her  
Big white pocketbook, with a  
Little Co'-Cola.

I never quite figured how to  
Match my purse to every pair of shoes,  
Get my hair done on Friday afternoon,  
Make an insult sound sweet with the  
Most gentle of drawls

Like the mother who rocked me,  
Hummed hymns under her breath,  
Played "trot a little horsie go downtown,"  
Made me banana puddin'  
Poured over vanilla wafers in the  
Chipped big red Pyrex bowl  
Because it was all I ever wanted  
For my birthdays.

I never quite learned to know  
When potatoes could be dug,  
The difference between beet tops  
And carrot tops or how to best  
Test a muskmelon.

Like the father who warmed my feet  
In his hands when I came inside,  
Took me fishing for Mississippi cat,  
Sat at the kitchen counter late-night,  
Eating cornbread and milk with a spoon  
From a worn Tupperware glass;  
His only reading material the newspaper  
And the Bible.

It wasn't for lack of trying.  
Two weeks and I pick up the accent.  
Read Grisham, Bragg and Harper Lee.  
I can pick the winner in any  
Miss America Pageant.

But I don't voice a sincere "Bless her heart,"  
Can't make my mother's biscuits  
(I can *eat* a whole tray of them, and not  
butter a single one or dip them in  
Sorghum molasses).  
When I tried to bake them in my own oven,  
I burned them and they turned to stones, so  
I left them to smolder.