

## **In Memory of My Giants** **by Amy Woodland**

I was molded and formed, carved out of  
a mix of embryonic fluid, Southern gumption, and Protestant persistence  
by women with backbones of steel,  
welded together with screws and seams,  
marionettes made of muscle and moxie and maternity.

Women whose lives were never lauded  
in picture books or billboards on highways.  
Women who thought of laundry lists and Sunday lunches after church  
where they bowed their heads and prayed silent pleas  
between the bars of an amen's refrain.

Women who did not shatter rooftops  
but who quietly climbed fire escape ladders.  
Women who never sought to become role models  
but whose dignified grace and larger-than-life laughter cast wider shadows than  
the branches outside the old kitchen's window.

Women who buried their sons, their husbands and brothers.  
My father.  
Women who stood at sinks drying dishes  
hours after laying flowers on graves  
because someone still needed to feed the babies.

I belong to a long line of left-behind women  
who relied on their own calloused hands, aching backs, hungry minds.  
Women whose whispers and whimpers  
built unintentional legacies that are passed down  
through mother's milk and DNA.

I was raised in a family of women  
who do not bow or break in public.  
Women who, in stolen moments,  
silenced screams and heaves and sobs  
their breath muffled by dish rags and quilts and feed bags on farms.

I am a woman who stands  
on the shoulders of sisters and seamstresses and spinsters.  
Women whose names and faces will fade out of memories, but  
—these women—  
their bodies birthed nations.

