

Three Poems · Sandra Nelson

EAST GRANDVILLE SCHOOL

A narrow two story red brick house
that looked like it expected company.
When we puked, they put dust on it
sweeping it into a pan.
Indoor toilets, cool and dim
with stone floors and walls that shouted
to everyone exactly what you were doing.
Teachers were old fat ladies. Miss Ehlert
would take her teeth out after lunch to rest them.
Her chair had a big seat and a bad smell.
The basement took turns,
being the auditorium, gym, and lunchroom, corn,
we ate corn and soft peas with warm milk;
all rotten potatoes and two prunes, carrots
cut in tiny squares, old, older, oldest spinach,
white and brown pudding, igloo rice piles,
gravy every day, we were the lucky ones.
Every fifth child born in the world is Chinese.
Our family is lucky to have only four kids.
Volks and Gessells each had six children.
Neither Rosy or Janie was Chinese because God
made them Catholic instead.
We made the world out of play dough. The land
was green, mountains brown and all water
blue. Baghdad, Mozambique,
rubber, diamonds, chinchilla, steel,
all with printed names. Flies,
we caught a lot of flies, or if a dog got in
that was good, or if your nose
bled giant red spots on the *Weekly Reader*.
I see you've been picking it again.
Miss Ehlert had to go to the hospital

to have her toe cut off cause it made
one of her legs too fat. Everyone wrote
her sick letters.
We were shot by the nurses, polio,
T.B. you had a scab as big as a nickel.
Nurses took Darlene away before summer
because of her scab. Sandy
ate all the paste again. I will not eat
art supplies. With huge round brushes
we painted a green stripe for the earth,
near the top a blue one for the sky. The sun,
one fourth of a lemon pie, always upper left.
Snow was a rain of white mice, puffy and big.
We liked to make red mittens and coats.
Robert Davis was my square dance mate.
When it came time to swing your partner,
we went real fast and then let go. Wow.
On days when we played ball, they gave us
soft balls so big like you couldn't see or something.
Thock, plump, bop, then the strings hung out,
so you threw it by its tongue,
till it was a hairball. You had to sing
about ducks, beavers, bees, dogs, and row boats;
teapots and tulips, courting frogs,
and purple mountain magic trees.
Diane was extra fat and her hands cracked,
flaking away from eczema. She wore three sweaters
because she had a chest and knew where babies
came from. We listened, but knew we didn't come
from down there. You were lucky
if you were adopted. The blue sky rolled
down like a shade touching the green earth. The sun
traded corners and cooled in a tree. You could paint
a person behind a person. More people
fit in your pictures so
they gave you more colors.