

Timbuktu Will Have to Do by Connie Befus

“Where are you from?” you glibly ask
Where am I from? I slightly frown...

That depends...

On how much you want to know
How long your attention span
On whether you care
Or just need something to say...

It depends

Also

On how I feel today
-Sure of myself or hesitant
-Competent or lonely
-Cynical or wanting to belong

Should I say-

Your eyes give me no clue-
The last place I lived?
Or where I lived longest?
Or where my parents live now?
Or where I was born?
Should I tell you all the places I've lived?
In order? and how long? and why?
Or shall I pick a name out of the blue
Timbuktu
And see how you respond?

I am from God's earth-just now
A sojourner and wanderer
And you cannot put what I know
Or who I am
Into a box
By thinking you know “where I am from.”

The question poses an enormous problem for me
Yet it is understandable that you ask
It is not wrong of you to ask...
People ask it every day...
But you stand there awaiting my answer
Hesitancy forming in your eyes
And I should not be uncivil
After all, you asked...
I think, today, I will say
“Timbuktu”
And see what you do.