

ELIZABETH STRAIGHT

first of fourteen

“I came from what they *called* a broken home, but if they ever really called at our house, they would have known how wrong they were.”

Gil Scott Heron, *On Coming from a Broken Home*

She was the first of
fourteen
The oldest
The example
Mamma when her mamma died
Using any and all means
to keep Sunday morning mass routine
Children fed and clean
Disposition and diction pristine
Full of grace Mother Mary
Cuss you out Magdalene
Straight hair yella Creole
No lightening cream
Coulda passed
Never tried
Rode to the back of the streetcar
up and down St. Charles
Grit in her glare
Legs closed at the knees
Every breath every bone
All New Orleans
Moved to Mississippi
to Biloxi
right there in between
Gulfport and Ocean Springs
Elliot's daughter
married Turner Eugene
had ten of her own
babies then
grandbabies started filling
the home

And I was one of them
Fortunate for the type of rearing
I could never repay
in a poem
She is 79
in the prime of her life

Son
Husband
Two brothers
and a sister have died
She still sits upright
in the driver's seat
Goes to daily mass and
AA meetings
YWCA for water aerobics
Focused on living
not on the pain that's been given
Watches *Wheel of Fortune*
Loves the Celtics and
her Saints
Alphonsus and Brees
Don't bake no cookies
She throws screamin'
crabs in the
gumbo pot
with some bay leaves
She cuts us with the truth
Then slaps you on the back of the head with
your own dumb-assness
Teaching lessons you can't learn
in no classes
Always makes you laugh
Feel privileged when it's your turn
to rub her feet and
her back
The underpinning of everything
of which I am proud
Mamma when my mamma
or my daddy wasn't around
The oldest
My example
for shit talkin' and
stature
The bullshit butcher
Pecan pie baker
Christmas play costume maker
Can't stand an excuse maker
and can always spot a faker
My soul could never hold all the
sorrow she knows
She was the oldest of fourteen
She is my grandma June Rose