

Smoke in Our Hair

By Ofelia Zepeda

The scent of burning wood holds
the strongest memory.
Mesquite, cedar, piñon, juniper,
all are distinct.
Mesquite is dry desert air and mild winter.
Cedar and piñon are colder places.
Winter air in our hair is pulled away,
and scent of smoke settles in its place.
We walk around the rest of the day
with the aroma resting on our shoulders.
The sweet smell holds the strongest memory.
We stand around the fire.
The sound of the crackle of wood and spark
is ephemeral.
Smoke, like memories, permeates our hair,
our clothing, our layers of skin.
The smoke travels deep
to the seat of memory.
We walk away from the fire;
no matter how far we walk,
we carry this scent with us.
New York City, France, Germany—
we catch the scent of burning wood;
we are brought home.

Ofelia Zepeda, "Smoke in Our Hair" from *Where Clouds Are Formed*. Copyright © 2008 by Ofelia Zepeda. Reprinted by permission of University of Arizona Press.
Source: *Where Clouds Are Formed* (University of Arizona Press, 2008)