

Charlotte F. Otten

Ghouls

This multicultural stuff?—
we lived it on 104th Place.

Louie-across-the-street
named Reese but was

Eye-talian, Joey-down
the-block a Bohunk,

Alberta-who-turned-cartwheels-
on-the-sidewalk

half-Indian on Relief,
they called me

wooden shoes, names
that identified

but did not separate,
we multiculturalured

when we played
kick-the-can

or hide-and-GO-seeek
under the street lights

on an August night,
hid under ethnic

porches or in bushes,
not necessarily ours,

named the "It"
without consideration

of our mothers'
birthplace, we spoke

the language of the
all, counted to 500

with our eyes
closed, yelled from

our hand-cupped lips
"All around GOOL is It,"

fracturing grammar, mispronouncing
joyfully, not one

knowing what GOOL
really meant.

Now the word
means Louie, Joey,

and Alberta,
ghouls all,

and I alone
am "It" forever.

Charlotte F. Otten, a retired Professor of English, is the editor of The Book of Birth Poetry (Virago/Bantam). Her poems have appeared in many journals, including those in medicine, where her poem "On His Blindness" appeared in the Yale Journal for Humanities in Medicine.