

# AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006  
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## American Life in Poetry: Column 089

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

Loss can defeat us or serve as the impetus for positive change. Here, Sue Ellen Thompson of Connecticut shows us how to mourn inevitable changes, tuck the memories away, then go on to see the possibility of a new and promising chapter in one's life.

### No Children, No Pets

I bring the cat's body home from the vet's  
in a running-shoe box held shut  
with elastic bands. Then I clean  
the corners where she has eaten and  
slept, scrubbing the hard bits of food  
from the baseboard, dumping the litter  
and blasting the pan with a hose. The plastic  
dishes I hide in the basement, the pee-  
soaked towel I put in the trash. I put  
the catnip mouse in the box and I put  
the box away, too, in a deep  
dirt drawer in the earth.

When the death-energy leaves me,  
I go to the room where my daughter slept  
in nursery school, grammar school, high school,  
I lie on her milky bedspread and think  
of the day I left her at college, how nothing  
could keep me from gouging the melted candle-wax  
out from between her floorboards,  
or taking a razor blade to the decal  
that said to the firemen, "Break  
this window first." I close my eyes now  
and enter a place that's clearly  
expecting me, swaddled in loss  
and then losing that, too, as I move  
from room to bone-white room  
in the house of the rest of my life.

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