

# 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 090**

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

Anyone can write a poem that nobody can understand, but poetry is a means of communication, and this column specializes in poems that communicate. What comes more naturally to us than to instruct someone in how to do something? Here the Minnesota poet and essayist Bill Holm, who is of Icelandic parentage, shows us how to make something delicious to eat.

### **Bread Soup: An Old Icelandic Recipe**

Start with the square heavy loaf  
steamed a whole day in a hot spring  
until the coarse rye, sugar, yeast  
grow dense as a black hole of bread.  
Let it age and dry a little,  
then soak the old loaf for a day  
in warm water flavored  
with raisins and lemon slices.  
Boil it until it is thick as molasses.  
Pour it in a flat white bowl.  
Ladle a good dollop of whipped cream  
to melt in its brown belly.  
This soup is alive as any animal,  
and the yeast and cream and rye  
will sing inside you after eating  
for a long time.

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