

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 101

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

Those big cherry flavored wax lips that my friends and I used to buy when I was a boy, well, how could I resist this poem by Cynthia Rylant of Oregon?

Wax Lips

Todd's Hardware was dust and a monkey—
a real one, on the second floor—
and Mrs. Todd there behind the glass cases.
We stepped over buckets of nails and lawnmowers
to get to the candy counter in the back,
and pointed at the red wax lips,
and Mary Janes,
and straws full of purple sugar.
Said goodbye to Mrs. Todd, she white-faced and silent,
and walked the streets of Beaver,
our teeth sunk hard in the wax,
and big red lips worth kissing.

"Wax Lips" by Cynthia Rylant from WAITING TO WALTZ. Copyright © 2001 by Cynthia Rylant. Reprinted with permission of the author, whose most recent book of poetry is "Ludie's Life," Harcourt, 2006. This weekly column is supported by The Poetry Foundation, The Library of Congress and the Department of English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. We do not accept unsolicited poetry.

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