

# AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006  
AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY © 2006 THE POETRY FOUNDATION WEBSITE: WWW.AMERICANLIFEINPOETRY.ORG CONTACT: ALP@POETRYFOUNDATION.ORG

## American Life in Poetry: Column 171

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

Sometimes I think that people are at their happiest when they're engaged in activities close to the work of the earliest humans: telling stories around a fire, taking care of children, hunting, making clothes. Here an Iowan, Ann Struthers, speaks of one of those original tasks, digging in the dirt.

### Planting the Sand Cherry

Today I planted the sand cherry with red leaves—  
and hope that I can go on digging in this yard,  
pruning the grape vine, twisting the silver lace  
on its trellis, the one that bloomed  
just before the frost flowered over all the garden.  
Next spring I will plant more zinnias, marigolds,  
straw flowers, pearly everlasting, and bleeding heart.  
I plant that for you, old love, old friend,  
and lilacs for remembering. The lily-of-the-valley  
with cream-colored bells, bent over slightly, bowing  
to the inevitable, flowers for a few days, a week.  
Now its broad blade leaves are streaked with brown  
and the stem dried to a pale hair.  
In place of the silent bells, red berries  
like rose hips blaze close to the ground.  
It is important for me to be down on my knees,  
my fingers sifting the black earth,  
making those things grow which will grow.  
Sometimes I save a weed if its leaves  
are spread fern-like, hand-like,  
or if it grows with a certain impertinence.  
I let the goldenrod stay and the wild asters.  
I save the violets in spring. People who kill violets  
will do anything.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation ([www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org)), publisher of *Poetry* magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Poem copyright © 2004 by Ann Struthers, whose most recent book of poetry is "What You Try To Tame," The Coe Review Press, 2004. Poem reprinted from "Stoneboat & Other Poems," by Ann Struthers, Iowa Poets Series, The Pterodactyl Press, 1988, by permission of the writer. Introduction copyright © 2008 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

American Life in Poetry ©2006 The Poetry Foundation  
Contact: [alp@poetryfoundation.org](mailto:alp@poetryfoundation.org)  
This column does not accept unsolicited poetry.

