

# 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 177

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

Kristen Tracy is a poet from San Francisco who here captures a moment at a zoo. It's the falling rain, don't you think, that makes the experience of observing the animals seem so perfectly truthful and vivid?

### Rain at the Zoo

A giraffe presented its head to me, tilting it  
sideways, reaching out its long gray tongue.  
I gave it my wheat cracker while small drops  
of rain pounded us both. Lightning cracked open  
the sky. Zebras zipped across the field.  
It was springtime in Michigan. I watched  
the giraffe shuffle itself backwards, toward  
the herd, its bone- and rust-colored fur beading  
with water. The entire mix of animals stood  
away from the trees. A lone emu shook  
its round body hard and squawked. It ran  
along the fence line, jerking open its wings.  
Perhaps it was trying to shake away the burden  
of water or indulging an urge to fly. I can't know.  
I have no idea what about their lives these animals  
love or abhor. They are captured or born here for us,  
and we come. It's true. This is my favorite field.

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