

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 231

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

This column originates on the campus of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and at the beginning of each semester, we see parents helping their children move into their dorm rooms and apartments and looking a little shaken by the process. This wonderful poem by Sue Ellen Thompson of Maryland captures not only a moment like that, but a mother's feelings as well.

Helping My Daughter Move into Her First Apartment

This is all I am to her now:
a pair of legs in running shoes,

two arms strung with braided wire.
She heaves a carton sagging with CDs

at me and I accept it gladly, lifting
with my legs, not bending over,

raising each foot high enough
to clear the step. Fortunate to be

of any use to her at all,
I wrestle, stooped and single-handed,

with her mattress in the stairwell,
saying nothing as it pins me,

sweating, to the wall. Vacuum cleaner,
spiny cactus, five-pound sacks

of rice and lentils slumped
against my heart: up one flight

of stairs and then another,
down again with nothing in my arms.

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