

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006
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BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

It's a difficult task to accurately imagine one's self back into childhood. Maybe we can get the physical details right, but it's very hard to recapture the innocence and wonder. Maureen Ash, who lives in Wisconsin, gets it right in this poem.

Church Basement

The church knelt heavy
above us as we attended Sunday School,
circled by age group and hunkered
on little wood folding chairs
where we gave our nickels, said
our verses, heard the stories, sang
the solid, swinging songs.

It could have been God above
in the pews, His restless love sifting
with dust from the joists. We little
seeds swelled in the stone cellar, bursting
to grow toward the light.

Maybe it was that I liked how, upstairs, outside,
an avid sun stormed down, burning the sharp-
edged shadows back to their buildings, or
how the winter air knifed
after the dreamy basement.

Maybe the day we learned whatever
would have kept me believing
I was just watching light
poke from the high, small window
and tilt to the floor where I could make it
a gold strap on my shoe, wrap
my ankle, embrace
any part of me.

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