

# 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 441

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

April Lindner is a poet living in Pennsylvania who has written a number of fine poems about parenting. Here's an example that shows us just one of the many hazards of raising a child.

### Dog Bite

The worst for him was his friend turned wolf,  
and the blood that splattered as he ran. The worst  
for us: the hospital, his upper lip tugged back  
to show the gash—the flesh halved deeply,  
cleanly—while I hold him for the needle  
that rubs pain out. He submits  
to the quick stitch, the thread black  
against pink skin, calm now he sees  
the doctor can be trusted, his voice  
soothing, his face clean shaven,  
the clues that signal kindness to a child.  
He's worried, though, about his pet  
who *didn't mean it, Mom*. His voice is flat.  
He knows the months he's tried to woo this dog  
were over when it leapt for his throat  
and caught his mouth. The scars, at least,  
will be invisible. At home, he'll sleep,  
big boy between his parents, till he's sure  
no beast will tear into his dreams. And we  
will want him there, our bodies makeshift walls.  
We who led the stranger to our home,  
fixed him a bowl, taught him to sleep  
under our blankets, we who taught our son  
to rub the muzzle that sheathes the teeth.

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