

# 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 453

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

The bread of life, well, what is it, anyway? Family, community, faith? Here's a lovely reminiscence about the way in which bread brings us together, by Richard Levine, who lives in Brooklyn.

### Bread

Each night, in a space he'd make  
between waking and purpose,  
my grandfather donned his one  
suit, in our still dark house, and drove  
through Brooklyn's deserted streets  
following trolley tracks to the bakery.

There he'd change into white  
linen work clothes and cap,  
and in the absence of women,  
his hands were both loving, well  
into dawn and throughout the day—  
kneading, rolling out, shaping

each astonishing moment  
of yeasty predictability  
in that windowless world lit  
by slightly swaying naked bulbs,  
where the shadows staggered, woozy  
with the aromatic warmth of the work.

Then, the suit and drive, again.  
At our table, graced by a loaf  
that steamed when we sliced it,  
softened the butter and leavened  
the very air we'd breathe,  
he'd count us blessed.

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