

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

Some of us will be eating ham on Easter, and I thought I'd offer you a poem about a champion pig, by Jill Breckenridge, a Minnesotan who has written a series of poems based on that state's fair. Her most recent book of poems is *Sometimes*, Nodin Press, 2015.

Pretty Ricky

He's 1200 pounds of pink pork covered by black
bristles stiff enough to needle and sew with,
Pretty Ricky, all six feet of him spread
out, asleep, no fancy dancer, neither twirler
nor prancer, just eats and sleeps, the biggest
boar at the Fair, oblivious to gawkers, smirkers,
cholesterol, or weight watchers, fat off the hoof,
fat lying flat, good only for breeding and eating,
he won't even stand to show off all the pork cuts
displayed on the poster behind him: ham, it says,
from the butt, oldest meat of civilized man;
kabobs from the shoulder, roasted on swords
by early Asian nomads; spareribs, sausage,
and bacon from the belly. Pretty Ricky urges
me to swear off pork, but it's lunchtime and my
stomach wanders off to a foot-long or a brat with
'kraut. I think twice, three times, waffle back
and forth between meat and a veggie wrap, as,
in front of me, many meals stretch out, dozing.

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