

# 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 648

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

Just as I prefer to read good travel writing more than I like to travel, I look to poems to offer me experiences I'm quite likely never to have. Here's a poem by Rebecca Macijeski, a native New Englander, about just such an experience, and a poignant one, too. I'll never disassemble a piano, but I've experienced doing it, here.

### Taking Apart My Childhood Piano

My mother and I sit on the back porch,  
bare feet in summer grass  
as we take the upright down to pieces,  
breeze humming through its strings.

I extract each melodic tooth and sort them  
in octaves for rinsing, tidy enclosure in boxes,  
remembering in each how my young fingers  
rioted over them searching for sound

and the way it grows like its own  
unruly animal. The old piano  
lies open to Sunday morning sun,  
swallowing blossoms that drift over like stars

from the apple tree I climbed as a girl.  
My mother and I sit here in a quiet  
usually reserved for churches,  
hands moving slowly over what we gather

—piles of soft hammers, odd coils of wire.  
We take up wet rags and wash each wooden key  
down its surface, wet music  
pooling onto our skin.

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