

# 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 655

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

Grace Cavalieri, who lives in Washington, DC, has performed a great service for American poetry over the past forty years with her public radio show, "The Poet and the Poem." She's also a playwright and a fine poet. Here's a "field trip" poem from her book *With*, from Somondoco Press. *The Grace Cavalieri Reader* is available this month from Alan Squire Publications.

### The Hot Dog Factory (1937)

Of course now children take it for granted but once  
we watched boxes on a conveyor belt, sliding by,  
magically filled and closed, packed and wrapped.  
We couldn't get enough of it, running alongside the machine.  
In kindergarten Miss Haynes walked our class down  
Stuyvesant Avenue, then up Prospect Street  
to the hot dog factory. Only the girls got to go  
as the boys were too wild.  
We stood in line, wiggling with excitement as the man  
talked about how they made hot dogs, then he handed us  
one, and Jan dropped hers, so I broke mine in half.  
This was the happiest day of our lives,  
children whose mothers didn't drive, and had nowhere  
to go but school and home, to be taken to that street  
to watch the glittering steel and shining rubber belts moving,  
moving meats, readymade. I wish I could talk with Jan,  
recalling the miracle and thrill of the hot dog factory,  
when she was alive, before it all stopped—  
bright lights, glistening motors, spinning wheels.

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