

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

Jim Daniels lives and teaches in Pittsburgh. I love this poem from *Street Calligraphy*, from Steel Toe Books, of Western Kentucky University, Daniels' seventeenth book. A young father and his two small children, tucked into a comfortable old chair at the end of a day. What could feel better than that?

Talking About the Day

Each night after reading three books to my two children—
we each picked one—to unwind them into dreamland,
I'd turn off the light and sit between their beds
in the wide junk-shop rocker I'd reupholstered blue,
still feeling the close-reading warmth of their bodies beside me,
and ask them to talk about the day—we *did this*,
we did that, sometimes leading somewhere, sometimes
not, but always ending up at the happy ending of *now*.
Now, in still darkness, listening to their breath slow and ease
into sleep's regular rhythm.

Grown now, you might've guessed.

The past tense solid, unyielding, against the acidic drip
of recent years. But how it calmed us then, rewinding
the gentle loop, and in the trusting darkness, pressing *play*.

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