

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 732

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

Ezra Pound commanded America's poets to "Make it new." And here's a good example. Has there ever been another poem written, and written beautifully, about children playing among laundry drying on a line? Thomas Reiter, who lives in New Jersey, is a poet whose work I've followed for many years. His most recent book is *Catchment*. This poem appeared in the *Tampa Review*.

Pinned in Place

A bed sheet hung out to dry
became a screen for shadow animals.
But of all laundry days in the neighborhood
the windy ones were best,
the clothespins like little men riding
lines that tried to buck them off.
One at a time we ran down the aisles
between snapping sheets
that wanted to put us in our place.
Timing them, you faked and cut
like famous halfbacks. But if a sheet
tagged you it put you down, pinned
by the whiteness floating
against a sky washed by the bluing
our mothers added to the wash water.
Could anyone make it through those days
untouched? You waited for
your chance, then jumped up and finished
the course, rising if you fell again.
Later, let the sky darken suddenly
and we'd be sent out to empty the lines.
All up and down the block, kids
running with bed sheets in their arms,
running like firemen rescuing children.
All night those sheets lay draped
over furniture, as though we were leaving
and would not return for a long time.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation (www.poetryfoundation.org), publisher of *Poetry* magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of

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