

# 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 741

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

When I was a nasty little kid I once made fun of a girl in my school because her father worked cutting up dead animals at a rendering plant. My mother sat me down and said, "Ted, all work is honorable." I've never forgotten that. Here's a fine poem about the nobility of work by Sally Bliumis-Dunn, from her book *Echolocation*, published by Plume Editions, Asheville, NC. The poet lives in Armonk, New York.

### Work

I could tell they were father and son,  
the air between them slack, as though  
they hardly noticed one another.

The father sanded the gunwales,  
the boy coiled the lines.  
And I admired them there, each to his task

in the quiet of the long familiar.  
The sawdust coated the father's arms  
like dusk coats grass in a field.

The boy worked next on the oarlocks  
polishing the brass until it gleamed,  
as though he could harness the sun.

Who cares what they were thinking,  
lucky in their lives  
that the spin of the genetic wheel

slowed twice to a stop  
and landed each of them here.

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