

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 742

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

Here's a fine poem about a loving, attentive father, by Elise Hempel, who lives in Illinois. Notice how deftly she's placed her rhymes so that we scarcely notice them as the words flow on. Ms. Hempel's latest book, *Today's Mail*, is forthcoming from Jacar Press.

His New Twin Daughters

Even now, after all
these years, my father, 89,
still uncertain when I call
whose voice it is—Ann's or mine—

saying *Hi, Dad*, and from where,
the next town or a different state,
still pausing in that powdered air,
this little silence as he waits

at the nursery door, discerning tone
and pitch, listening hard to know
which way to bend, which crib, the one
against the wall or by the window,

still concentrating, trying to keep
us separate, our needs, do what
she would, letting my mother sleep,
this moment's blank as he's about

to choose between us, make some shift
in the soft-lit dark, decide whose cry
it is tonight, which girl to lift,
to whisper or hum, which lullaby.

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