

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 194

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

Father and child doing a little math homework together; it's an everyday occurrence, but here, Russell Libby, a poet who writes from Three Sisters Farm in central Maine, presents it in a way that makes it feel deep and magical.

Applied Geometry

Applied geometry,
measuring the height
of a pine from
like triangles,
Rosa's shadow stretches
seven paces in
low-slanting light of
late Christmas afternoon.
One hundred thirty nine steps
up the hill until the sun is
finally caught at the top of the tree,
let's see,
twenty to one,
one hundred feet plus a few to adjust
for climbing uphill,
and her hands barely reach mine
as we encircle the trunk,
almost eleven feet around.
Back to the lumber tables.
That one tree might make
three thousand feet of boards
if our hearts could stand
the sound of its fall.

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