

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

Here's a fine poem by Chris Forhan of Indiana, about surviving the loss of a parent, and that celebrates the lives that survive it, that go on. I especially like the parachute floating up and away, just as the lost father has gone up and away.

What My Father Left Behind

Jam jar of cigarette ends and ashes on his workbench,
hammer he nailed our address to a stump with,
balsa wood steamship, half-finished—

is that him, waving from the stern? Well, good luck to him.
Slur of sunlight filling the backyard, August's high wattage,
white blossoming, it's a curve, it comes back. My mother

in a patio chair, leaning forward, squinting, threading
her needle again, her eye lifts to the roof, to my brother,
who stands and jerks his arm upward—he might be

insulting the sky, but he's only letting go
a bit of green, a molded plastic soldier
tied to a parachute, thin as a bread bag, it rises, it arcs

against the blue—good luck to it—my sister and I below,
heads tilted back as we stand in the grass, good
luck to all of us, still here, still in love with it.

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