

# 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 202

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

David Wagoner, who lives in Washington state, is one of our country's most distinguished poets and the author of many wonderful books. He is also one of our best at writing about nature, from which we learn so much. Here is a recent poem by Wagoner that speaks to perseverance.

### The Cherry Tree

Out of the nursery and into the garden  
where it rooted and survived its first hard winter,  
then a few years of freedom while it blossomed,  
put out its first tentative branches, withstood  
the insects and the poisons for insects,  
developed strange ideas about its height  
and suffered the pruning of its quirks and clutters,  
its self-indulgent thrusts  
and the infighting of stems at cross purposes  
year after year. Each April it forgot  
why it couldn't do what it had to do,  
and always after blossoms, fruit, and leaf-fall,  
was shown once more what simply couldn't happen.

Its oldest branches now, the survivors carved  
by knife blades, rain, and wind, are sending shoots  
straight up, blood red, into the light again.

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