

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

Memories have a way of attaching themselves to objects, to details, to physical tasks, and here, George Bilgere, an Ohio poet, happens upon mixed feelings about his mother while slicing a head of cabbage.

Corned Beef and Cabbage

I can see her in the kitchen,
Cooking up, for the hundredth time,
A little something from her
Limited Midwestern repertoire.
Cigarette going in the ashtray,
The red wine pulsing in its glass,
A warning light meaning
Everything was simmering
Just below the steel lid
Of her smile, as she boiled
The beef into submission,
Chopped her way
Through the vegetable kingdom
With the broken-handled knife
I use tonight, feeling her
Anger rising from the dark
Chambers of the head
Of cabbage I slice through,
Missing her, wanting
To chew things over
With my mother again.

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