

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 249

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

One of the wonderful things about small children is the way in which they cause us to explain the world. "What's that?" they ask, and we have to come up with an answer. Here Christine Stewart-Nunez, who lives and teaches in South Dakota, tries to teach her son a new word only to hear it come back transformed.

Convergence

Through the bedroom window
a February sunrise, fog suspended
between pines. Intricate crystals—
hoarfrost lace on a cherry tree.
My son calls out, awake. We sway,
blanket-wrapped, his head nuzzling
my neck. Hoarfrost, tree—I point,
shaping each word. Favorable
conditions: a toddler's brain, hard
data-mining, a system's approach.
Hoar, he hears. His hand reaches
to the wallpaper lion. Phenomena
converge: warmth, humidity,
temperature's sudden plunge;
a child's brain, objects, sound.
Eyes widening, he opens his mouth
and roars.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation (www.poetryfoundation.org), publisher of *Poetry* magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Poem copyright ©2009 by Christine Stewart-Nunez, whose most recent book of poems is "Postcard on Parchment," ABZ Press, 2008. Poem reprinted from "The Briar Cliff Review," 2009, by permission of Christine Stewart-Nunez and the publisher. Introduction copyright © 2009 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

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