

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 258

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

This marks the fourth time we've published a poem by David Baker, one of my favorite writers. Baker lives in Granville, Ohio, and teaches at Denison University. He is also the poetry editor for the distinguished Kenyon Review.

Old Man Throwing a Ball

He is tight at first, stiff, stands there atilt
tossing the green fluff tennis ball down
the side alley, but soon he's limber,
he's letting it fly and the black lab

lops back each time. These are the true lovers,
this dog, this man, and when the dog stops
to pee, the old guy hurries him back, then
hurls the ball farther away. Now his mother

dodders out, she's old as the sky, wheeling
her green tank with its sweet vein, breath.
She tips down the path he's made for her,
grass rippling but trim, soft underfoot,

to survey the yard, every inch of it
in fine blossom, set-stone, pruned miniature,
split rails docked along the front walk,
antique watering cans down-spread—up

huffs the dog again with his mouthy ball—
so flowers seem to spill out, red geraniums,
grand blue asters, and something I have
no name for, wild elsewhere in our world

but here a thing to tend. To call for, and it comes.

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