

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

Music lessons, well, maybe 80 out of every 100 of us had them, once, and a few of us went on to play our chosen instruments all our lives. But the rest of us? I still own a set of red John Thompson piano books that haven't been opened since about 1950. Here Jill Bialosky, who lives in New York City, captures the atmosphere of one of those lessons.

Music Is Time

*Music is time, said the violin master.
You can't miss the stop or you'll miss the train.
One, two, three, four, one, two, three, four,
one, two, three, four.*

She clapped her hands together
as the boy moved the bow across the strings.
*One, two, three, four, one, two, three, four,
one, two, three, four,* the violin master shouted,

louder and more shrill so that her voice
traveled through the house like a metronome,
guiding him, commanding him to translate the beat,
to trust his own internal rhythm.

*Good boy, she said.
See how hard you have to be on yourself?
How will your violin know who you are
unless you make it speak?*

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