

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

Stories read to us as children can stay with us all our lives. Robert McCloskey's *Lentil* was especially influential for me, and other books have helped to shape you. Here's Matt Mason, who lives in Omaha, with a book that many of you will remember.

The Story of Ferdinand the Bull

Dad would come home after too long at work
and I'd sit on his lap to hear
the story of Ferdinand the Bull; every night,
me handing him the red book until I knew
every word, couldn't read,
just recite along with drawings
of a gentle bull, frustrated matadors,
the all-important bee, and flowers—
flowers in meadows and flowers
thrown by the Spanish ladies.
Its lesson, really,
about not being what you're born into
but what you're born to be,
even if that means
not caring about the capes they wave in your face
or the spears they cut into your shoulders.
And Dad, wonderful Dad, came home
after too long at work
and read to me
the same story every night
until I knew every word, couldn't read,

just recite.

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