

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006
AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY © 2006 THE POETRY FOUNDATION WEBSITE: WWW.AMERICANLIFEINPOETRY.ORG CONTACT: ALP@POETRYFOUNDATION.ORG

American Life in Poetry: Column 634

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

During the twelve years we've been doing this weekly column, today's poem will be the first time I've offered you a plane ride. It's just one of a number of fine poems from Patricia Hooper's book, *Separate Flights*, from the University of Tampa Press. Hooper lives in North Carolina.

Sunday Flying

Sometimes after the flight show when my father
flew in formation with the other pilots,
diving and somersaulting in his Cessna,
he took us up. The crowd was driving off,
the windsocks disappeared. We flew above
the empty air strip, past the silver hangar,
the ballpark, then the bridge, beyond the school;

and then, if there was fuel enough, we flew
to Hidden Lake where, just below us, Grandpa
was fishing in his rowboat, looking up,
waving his hat, and Grandma hurried out,
wearing her yellow apron. Oh, if only
we could go down and fish for perch with Grandpa!
But it was nearly sunset, and we flew

back over woods and highways toward the town,
and finally there we were above our block,
our house, my Kool-Aid stand, my brother's blue
two-wheeler in the drive. How small it was—
how strange it seemed to look down on your life
from somewhere else. And suddenly I was sick
with loneliness. But we were all together:

my brother with my father up in front,
Mother beside me in the back. And yet
we must be small from *there*: our empty yard,
the Thompsons on their porch, the Barton's Airedale
trying to climb the fence, and Mother's clothesline,
my sweater hung to dry. Just then, if I had seen
myself on the swing set, I would not have been surprised.

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 ©2016 by Patricia Hooper, "Sunday Flying," from *Separate Flights*, (University of Tampa Press, 2016). Poem reprinted by permission of Patricia Hooper and the publisher. Introduction copyright ©2017 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.

American Life in Poetry ©2006 The Poetry Foundation
Contact: alp@poetryfoundation.org
This column does not accept unsolicited poetry.