

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

Family life can shove one up against another, and here's a poem by Jeffrey Harrison that gets to that. It was originally published in *Five Points*, one of our most respected literary journals. Harrison's most recent book is *Into Daylight* (Tupelo Press), and he makes his home in Massachusetts.

How It Worked

It was hard to sit there with my father,
watching one of my sister's girls playing
a set of tennis against my son or daughter
because he'd forget himself and with a groan
of disappointment or a grunt
of sympathetic exertion make it clear
that he was rooting for my sister's child
and against mine. There was no use
calling him on it, because he'd deny it
and get angry. So I would get angry
but try not to show it, until I couldn't
stand it any longer and would get up
and walk away. That was how it worked
between us, the unspoken building up
like thunderheads above the tennis court,
where the kids played on, not caring who won
and hardly noticing the sky had darkened.

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