

# 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 703

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

It's been a very long time since I was young, but I remember the giddiness of first love, and David Steingass, a Wisconsin poet, shows us in this poem how poetry can both recall and reflect that kind of emotional excitement. This is from his book, *Hunt & Gather*, from Red Dragonfly Press.

### Youth

I vowed I'd quit ciggies on the heel of the mother  
Of all hangovers. The world at noon pulsed a first

Columbus Ohio spring day. I'd fallen in love  
Of course, as recently as chem lab and held

The ghost of her smell  
In my clothes. Or lips

If I'd been lucky. My blood *thunk*  
*Thunk-thunked*, the way a cut feels

As you bend to tie shoes. The way life  
Tingles the first day it breaks loose

To crawl your skin. Dizzy,  
I ran through milky sap and

Sycamore-leafed streets, mixing the smells  
Of just-thawed earth with essence of girl

My blood steamed. I understood lost-at-sea as glamorous  
Isolation, the way a hummingbird's movement through two

Eye blinks allows it to vanish and  
Re-appear. My wings blurred hinges

Among worlds. Nothing held me. Nothing  
Could catch me. I'd run this way forever.

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