

A new book. No, not by me.

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I got back late last night from Savannah, Georgia, where I had spent all day yesterday at the outdoor Savannah Book Festival. Savannah is a gorgeous city which I have not visited often enough, so I had been happy to accept that invitation. But who knew that the internet weather forecast would lie as profoundly as it did when it said the day of the festival would be 75 degrees? I loved heading toward that forecast when I left my Maine home in snow on Friday morning...heading south, smugly taking with me a cotton sweater and a lightweight jacket. OMG, I was cold in Savannah!!!! As was the audience, whom I had to try to entertain during two different one-hour events. Me on a wooden platform, shivering, they unable to sit on the grass as planned...instead, standing, hands in armpits, attentive but miserable. Then two hours of sitting at a table, signing books...my hands went numb. Temperature? I'm guessing 48? The warmth of the people involved...festival organizers, volunteers, and attendees ALMOST made up for it. And Savannah, dear beautiful city, I do hope to see you again, but please, on a warmer day!

Several things warmed me mightily when I got home. The cat, left alone, was very happy to have me back. And the dog, when I picked him up from the kennel this morning, was friskily delighted to come home. The NY Times crossword puzzle was fairly easy today, and fun. I still had some homemade chicken soup in the fridge and have just made my lunch from it. And in the waiting mail was a book that is making my day and will make my month and year. It is a new collection of poems..."Splitting an Order" by Ted Kooser, Nebraska poet, former US poet laureate.

I love his work. I have met him only once, at a dinner in Nebraska where I was the speaker and he was in the audience, and it was one of those ignominious times when one's Power Point doesn't work. He was gentle and forgiving of that, and later sent me a book of his poems, and I sent him a thank you note, but he would remember neither that nor me and it doesn't matter.

Kooser collects the tiny quotidian details of life and then presents them in a way that both heightens your own awareness and also creates a significance, a greater and more universal context. A poem called "Swinging from Parents" describes a child between mother and father, swinging from their hands—and it so brilliantly creates both the present and the future of the child..I wish I could copy the whole poem here but it would violate copyright law. Go buy the

book.

That particluar poem followed immediately after the one called "Bad News" which sent an ice pick into my gut with its familiarity. The familiarity of the phone call that comes in the night..."In the flare of the light you've snapped on"...and brings the news that is "thrown over your shoulders like a threadbare robe."...most of us have experienced such a call. It is oddly comforting to be reminded of that; he shapes it into a familiar form.



ways to the story, and a whole lot of other things that are not in the book. But the original part of the book is still there.