

# Poetry Porch: Poetry

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## **An All-American Girl, for Gwendolyn Brooks**

By Beth Brown Preston

*Topeka, Kansas, June 7th, 1917*

Keziah:

Our baby girl's birth was not an easy one. She lingered low  
inside my womb for days and nights. Stubborn. Defiant even.  
Willful against a world she someday would come to know.  
The midwife and her sister arrived to comfort me, singing  
the sweet gospel hymns recalled from those church Sundays.  
"Push. Push." My baby girl loosened her grip upon my womb  
and entered this world squealing up a storm, telling us of her own pain.  
David and I, we named our baby Gwendolyn Elizabeth, the tigress, the fierce.

David:

I heard Gwendolyn's voice at birth coming on strong.  
We wanted her to absorb her mother's gift for music  
while she floated in the waters of her belly,  
hoped for the songs to take root inside her as she heard the sound  
of Kezzie playing Mozart or Hayden on our old upright piano.  
My poppa never lived to greet his grandbaby. My father:  
the brave man who fled his destiny of chains and slavery  
to join the Union Army and fight in the Civil War.  
Poppa would have been so proud of our infant girl.

Keziah:

Washed clean of my blood, she nursed at my swollen breast,  
lapped the milk of our songs. Baptized in holy and sanctifying grace,  
sleeping in my arms at home, she seemed to know all wisdom.  
Gifted of a thought deep and wide as the waters of the Kaw  
or the watershed of Sunganunga Creek, she was moistened  
with our kisses as we celebrated her born day, already aware of  
the one she might become, so beautiful of regard, so righteous of language.