

# AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, THE POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY © 2005 THE POETRY FOUNDATION WEBSITE: WWW.AMERICANLIFEINPOETRY.ORG CONTACT: ALP@POETRYFOUNDATION.ORG

## American Life in Poetry: Column 015

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE

Many of us are collectors, attaching special meaning to the inanimate objects we acquire. Here, Texas poet Janet McCann gives us insight into the significance of one woman's collection. The abundance and variety of detail suggest the clutter of such a life.

### The Woman Who Collects Noah's Arks

Has them in every room of her house,  
wall hangings, statues, paintings, quilts and blankets,  
ark lampshades, mobiles, Christmas tree ornaments,  
t-shirts, sweaters, necklaces, books,  
comics, a creamer, a sugar bowl, candles, napkins,  
tea-towels and tea-tray, nightgown, pillow, lamp.

Animals two-by-two in plaster, wood,  
fabric, oil paint, copper, glass, plastic, paper,  
tinfoil, leather, mother-of-pearl, styrofoam,  
clay, steel, rubber, wax, soap.

Why I cannot ask, though I would like  
to know, the answer has to be simply  
*because*. Because at night when she lies  
with her husband in bed, the house rocks out  
into the bay, the one that cuts in here to the flatlands  
at the center of Texas. Because the whole wood structure  
drifts off, out under the stars, beyond the last  
lights, the two of them pitching and rolling  
as it all heads seaward. Because they hear  
trumpets and bellows from the farther rooms.  
Because the sky blackens, but morning finds them always  
safe on the raindrenched land,  
bird on the windowsill.

Reprinted from PoemMemoirStory by permission of the author. Janet McCann's most recent book is *Emily's Dress* (Pecan Grove Press, 2005). Poem copyright © 2003 by Janet McCann. This weekly column is supported by The Poetry Foundation, The Library of Congress and the Department of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

American Life in Poetry ©2005 The Poetry Foundation

Contact: alp@poetryfoundation.org

This column does not accept unsolicited poetry.