

# AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

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

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## American Life in Poetry: Column 041

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE

Those photos in family albums, what do they show us about the lives of people, and what don't they tell? What are they holding back? Here Diane Thiel, who teaches in New Mexico, peers into one of those pictures.

### Family Album

I like old photographs of relatives  
in black and white, their faces set like stone.  
They knew this was serious business.  
My favorite album is the one that's filled  
with people none of us can even name.

I find the recent ones more difficult.  
I wonder, now, if anyone remembers  
how fiercely I refused even to stand  
beside him for this picture — how I shrank  
back from his hand and found the other side.

Forever now, for future family,  
we will be framed like this, although no one  
will wonder at the way we are arranged.  
No one will ever wonder, since we'll be  
forever smiling there — our mouths all teeth.

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