

# 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 057

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE

Midwestern poet Richard Newman traces the imaginary life of coins as a connection between people. The coins--seemingly of little value--become a ceremonial and communal currency.

### Coins

My change: a nickel caked with finger grime;  
two nicked quarters not long for this life, worth  
more for keeping dead eyes shut than bus fare;  
a dime, shining in sunshine like a new dime;  
grubby pennies, one stamped the year of my birth,  
no brighter than I from 40 years of wear.

What purses, piggy banks, and window sills  
have these coins known, their presidential heads  
pinched into what beggar's chalky palm--  
they circulate like tarnished red blood cells,  
all of us exchanging the merest film  
of our lives, and the lives of those long dead.

And now my turn in the convenience store,  
I hand over my fist of change, still warm,  
to the bored, lip-pierced check-out girl, once more  
to be spun down cigarette machines, hurled  
in fountains, flipped for luck--these dirty charms  
chiming in the dark pockets of the world.

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