

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 061

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE

Everywhere I travel I meet people who want to write poetry but worry that what they write won't be "any good." No one can judge the worth of a poem before it's been written, and setting high standards for yourself can keep you from writing. And if you don't write you'll miss out on the pleasure of making something from words, of seeing your thoughts on a page. Here Leslie Monsour offers a concise snapshot of a self-censoring poet.

The Education of a Poet

Her pencil poised, she's ready to create,
Then listens to her mind's perverse debate
On whether what she does serves any use;
And that is all she needs for an excuse
To spend all afternoon and half the night
Enjoying poems other people write.

Leslie Monsour's newest book of poetry is "The Alarming Beauty of the Sky" (2005) published by Red Hen Press. Poem copyright © 2000 by Leslie Monsour and reprinted from "The Formalist," Vol. 11, by permission of the author. This weekly column is supported by The Poetry Foundation, The Library of Congress, and the Department of English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The column does not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

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