

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006
AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY © 2006 THE POETRY FOUNDATION WEBSITE: WWW.AMERICANLIFEINPOETRY.ORG CONTACT: ALP@POETRYFOUNDATION.ORG

American Life in Poetry: Column 117

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

The subdivision; it's all around us. Here Nancy Botkin of Indiana presents a telling picture of life in such a neighborhood, the parents downstairs in their stultifying dailiness, the children enjoying their youth under the eaves before the passing years force them to join the adults.

Geometry

All the roofs sloped at the same angle.
The distance between the houses was the same.
There were so many feet from each front door
to the curb. My father mowed the lawn
straight up and down and then diagonally.
And then he lined up beer bottles on the kitchen table.

We knew them only in summer when the air
passed through the screens. The neighbor girls
talked to us across the great divide: attic window
to attic window. We started with our names.
Our whispers wobbled along a tightrope,
and below was the rest of our lives.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation (www.poetryfoundation.org), publisher of *Poetry* magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Poem copyright © 2006 by Nancy Botkin. Reprinted from "Poetry East," Spring, 2006, by permission of the author, whose full-length book of poems, "Parts That Were Once Whole," is available from Mayapple Press, 2007. Introduction copyright © 2006 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006.

American Life in Poetry ©2006 The Poetry Foundation
Contact: alp@poetryfoundation.org
This column does not accept unsolicited poetry.