

# 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 224

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

When we're young, it seems there are endless possibilities for lives we might lead, and then as we grow older and the opportunities get fewer we begin to realize that the life we've been given is the only one we're likely to get. Here's Jean Nordhaus, of the Washington, D.C. area, exploring this process.

### I Was Always Leaving

I was always leaving, I was  
about to get up and go, I was  
on my way, not sure where.  
Somewhere else. Not here.  
Nothing here was good enough.

It would be better there, where I  
was going. Not sure how or why.  
The dome I cowered under  
would be raised, and I would be released  
into my true life. I would meet there

the ones I was destined to meet.  
They would make an opening for me  
among the flutes and boulders,  
and I would be taken up. That this  
might be a form of death

did not occur to me. I only know  
that something held me back,  
a doubt, a debt, a face I could not  
leave behind. When the door  
fell open, I did not go through.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation ([www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org)), publisher of *Poetry* magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Poem copyright ©2008 by Jean Nordhaus, whose most recent book of poems is "Innocence," Ohio State University Press, 2006. Poem reprinted from "The Gettysburg Review," Vol. 21, no. 4, Winter, 2008, by permission of Jean Nordhaus and the publisher. Introduction copyright © 2009 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. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

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