

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006
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BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

This week's poem is by a high school student, Michelle Bennett, who lives in Tukwila, Washington, and here she is taking a look at what comes next, Western Washington University in Bellingham, with everything new about it, including opportunity.

Western

You find yourself in a narrow bed you've never slept in,
on a tree-lined grassy field you've never walked upon,
on a cold toilet seat you have not sat on,
in a place you now call your home, your learning, your future.
Red stone pathways expose the buildings that will house
the knowledge you seek,
and the information you want to gather.

You crane your neck to look up
at the 13-story brick tower rising from the ground,
looming over you as you walk past. The melodies
and beats of different songs mix,
create a sound of their own,
flow from open windows. Crushed leeks
Top Ramen noodles ground into a blue
and speckled carpet attract armies of ants
to the communal kitchen on the sixth floor.

You pull your jacket tighter against your body,
strong, salty wind whips off the Sound,
and up the hill as you walk through
Red Square toward the clatter of knives,
forks and digesting bellies.

Finally, you are released like a white dove
from the hands of its owner, allowed to fly
discovering your dreams,
discovering what you are made of.

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