

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 384

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

It would be nice if we could all get one last ride through a part of our lives we'd left behind.
Patrick Phillips, who lives in Brooklyn, is our guide and pilot in this fine poem.

Elegy with Oil in the Bilge

By the time we got out on the water
the sun was so low, it wasn't like water

but a field of gray snow that we plowed
in one endless white furrow of water

as I skirted the rocks and wrecked trawlers
and abandoned old jetties just under the water,

while you moaned in the bow, slick with fever,
whispering back to whatever the water

chattered and hissed through the hull—
until at last there were lights on the water

and I let the old Mercury rattle and sputter
its steaming gray rainbows out onto the water

as we drifted, at idle, for the last time in your life,
through that beloved, indifferent harbor.

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 ©2011 by Patrick Phillips, whose most recent book of poems is *Boy*, VQR Poetry Series, 2008. Poem reprinted from the *New England Review*, Vol. 32, no. 2, 2011, by permission of Patrick Phillips and the publisher. Introduction copyright 2012 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
This column does not accept unsolicited poetry.