

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006
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American Life in Poetry: Column 421

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

This column originates in Nebraska, and our office is about two hours' drive from that stretch of the Platte River where thousands of sandhill cranes stop for a few weeks each year. Linda Hogan, one of our most respected Native writers and Writer in Residence for The Chickasaw Nation, perfectly captures their magic and mystery in this fine poem.

The Sandhills

The language of cranes
we once were told
is the wind. The wind
is their method,
their current, the translated story
of life they write across the sky.
Millions of years
they have blown here
on ancestral longing,
their wings of wide arrival,
necks long, legs stretched out
above strands of earth
where they arrive
with the shine of water,
stories, interminable
language of exchanges
descended from the sky
and then they stand,
earth made only of crane
from bank to bank of the river
as far as you can see
the ancient story made new.

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