

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 445

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

Sit for an hour in any national airport and you'll see how each of us differs from others in a million ways, and of course that includes not only our physical appearances but our perceptions and opinions. Here's a poem by Ada Limón, who lives in Kentucky, about difference and the difficulty of resolution.

What It Looks Like To Us and the Words We Use

All these great barns out here in the outskirts,
black creosote boards knee-deep in the bluegrass.
They look so beautifully abandoned, even in use.
You say they look like arks after the sea's
dried up, I say they look like pirate ships,
and I think of that walk in the valley where
J said, You don't believe in God? And I said,
No. I believe in this connection we all have
to nature, to each other, to the universe.
And she said, Yeah, God. And how we stood there,
low beasts among the white oaks, Spanish moss,
and spider webs, obsidian shards stuck in our pockets,
woodpecker flurry, and I refused to call it so.
So instead, we looked up at the unruly sky,
its clouds in simple animal shapes we could name
though we knew they were really just clouds—
disorderly, and marvelous, and ours.

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 ©2012 by Ada Limón, whose most recent book of poems is *Sharks in the Rivers*, Milkweed Editions, 2010. Poem reprinted from *Poecology*, Issue 1, 2011, by permission of Ada Limón and the publisher. Introduction copyright 2013 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.