

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

Despite having once been bitten by a rabid bat, and survived, much to the disappointment of my critics, I find bats fascinating, and Peggy Shumaker of Alaska has written a fine poem about them. I am especially fond of her perfect verb, “snick,” for the way they snatch insects out of the air.

Spirit of the Bat

Hair rush, low swoop—
so those of us

stuck here on earth
know—you must be gods.

Or friends of gods,
granted chances

to push off into sky,
granted chances

to hear so well
your own voice bounced

back to you
maps the night.

Each hinge
in your wing's

an act of creation.
Each insect

you snick out of air
a witness.

You transform
obstacles

into sounds,
then dodge them.

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