

# 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 481

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

One of the wonders of poetry is a good poet's ability to compress a great deal of life into a few words. Here's a life story told small, by Ivan Hobson, who lives in California.

### Our Neighbor:

Every family that lived in our court  
had an American truck  
with a union sticker on the back

and as a kid I admired them  
the way I thought our soldiers  
must have admired Patton  
and Sherman tanks.

You once told me  
that the Russians couldn't take us,  
not with towns like ours  
full of iron, full of workers tempered  
by the fires of foundries and mills.

It wasn't the Russians that came;  
it was the contract, the strike,  
the rounds of layoffs that blistered  
until your number was called.

I still remember you loading up  
to leave for the last time,  
the union sticker scraped off  
with a putty knife,

the end of the white tarp draped  
over your truck bed  
flapping as you drove away.

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Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

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