

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 492

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

Faith Shearin's poetry is conversational while moving gracefully and almost effortlessly toward conclusions that really have some punch to them. This one is a good example of that. Shearin lives in Maryland.

Music at My Mother's Funeral

During the weeks when we all believed my mother was likely to die she began to plan her funeral and she wanted us, her children, to consider the music we would play there. We remembered the soundtrack of my mother's life: the years when she swept the floors to the tunes of an eight track cassette called Feelings, the Christmas when she bought a Bing Crosby album about a Bright Hawaiian Christmas Day. She got Stravinsky's Rite of Spring stuck in the tape deck of her car and for months each errand was accompanied by some kind of dramatic movement. After my brother was born, there was a period during which she wore a muumuu and devoted herself to King Sunny Ade and his African beats. She ironed and wept to Evita, painted to Italian opera. Then, older and heavier, she refused to fasten her seatbelt and there was the music of an automated bell going off every few minutes, which annoyed the rest of us but did not seem to matter to my mother who ignored its relentless disapproval, its insistence that someone was unsafe.

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