

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 557

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

Debra Marquart, who teaches at Iowa State, is a poet, a memoirist, a writer of stories and a singer with her own R & B group, The Bone People. She knows the musician's life, and here's a road poem from her most recent book from New Rivers Press, *Small Buried Things*.

Traveling with Guitar

For you can travel with a screaming red rolling bag
and float unnoticed on conveyors, through terminals

or you can lug half a moose rack from Maine
to Minnesota, carry it like a broken wing through airports

as my friend Gro did, and draw only the curious touches
of children waiting at gates. But dare to travel with a guitar

and invite confessions from strangers in pinstripe suits
of garage band summers, invite winks, *gotcha* smiles,

and devil's horns *rock on* gestures. Invite finger points
and winks, the long tongue licks, and the rubberneck glance

to check if you are someone famous. To dare to travel
with a guitar is to mark yourself charismatic megafauna

of the airport terminal. Old friend, what else could I do
but carry you? I have stored you in closets, propped you

in corners, hunched over you late-nights, staring perplexed
at the mysteries of your neck. Body of my body, string

of my strings, see how the world began to hum and sing
that day at thirteen when I opened the big birthday box.

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