

# 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 600

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

Nick Norwood's most recent book is *Gravel and Hawk*, published by Ohio University Press. This poem has sorrow at the top and happiness at the bottom, which means there's a lot of living in between. It's from the quarterly journal *Five Points*. Norwood lives and teaches in Georgia.

### Ronnie's

Dad dead, Mom—back in the bank, tattering—  
started dressing in cute skirts and pants suits  
she sewed herself from onionskin patterns  
and bright-colored knits picked up at Cloth World.  
Got her dark brunette hair cut in a shag.  
And she and her single girlfriends from work  
on a weekday night would leave me to "Love  
American Style" or Mary Tyler Moore  
and step out to hear the country house band  
or now-and-then headliners like Ray Price  
and Merle Haggard. Mom's blue Buick Wildcat  
shoulder to shoulder with the other Detroit  
behemoths in the dim lot around back.  
Wind skittering trash along the street. Bass  
notes thumping through the sheet-metal walls  
and the full swinging sound suddenly blaring  
when a couple came in or out the door.  
I know because I'm there, now, in the lot,  
crouched behind the fender of a Skylark  
or Riviera, in the weird green glow  
of the rooftop *Ronnie's* sign, not keeping tabs  
on Mom, not watching out, just keeping time  
with the band and sipping a Slurpee  
while she dances through this two-year window  
before getting re-hitched, settling back down.  
Just twenty-seven, twenty-eight years old,  
looking pretty, having the time of her life.

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