

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 663

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

At a friend's wedding, as she stood in her reception line, an older woman leaned in and whispered, "Always rinse your dishrag in cold water so it won't stink." Advice! Christine Stewart-Nuñez lives and teaches in South Dakota, and the following poem capturing her grandmother's witty advice is from her book *Untrussed*, from the University of New Mexico Press.

For Elizabeth, Who Loved to Square Dance

I wore Grandma Liz's pearls
for play, a plastic strand long
enough to pool on the carpet
over my stubbed toes. When I pull
them over my head now, I smell
phantoms: cigarettes, Estée
Lauder. I don't smoke or spritz
on perfume. I don't layer polyester
or perm my hair. I've slipped off
my wedding ring as she did, signed
divorce. What advice would she offer
for life between husbands? *Wear red
lipstick and always leave it behind.*

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