

# 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 706

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

I love this short poem, which collects a fried chicken bucket of all too many dreary details and dresses them out in graceful formal rhyme. It's by Matthew Buckley Smith, who lives in North Carolina, and is from the Fall, 2017, issue of *Rattle*, one of the best of the contemporary literary journals. His most recent book of poems is *Dirge for an Imaginary World*, published by Able Muse Press.

### Undergrads

The place we lived was only an idea,  
Nothing to do with the failed cotton mill town  
Where a record shop, some bars, and a pizzeria  
Were all we ever cared to call our own.

From nightmares of a happy life with kids  
We'd wake in boozy sweat to find the floor  
Still cobbled with bottle caps and take-out lids,  
Our twenties crumpled safely in a drawer,

Unspent like all the hours ahead that night  
We met each other in the common room  
And found somehow without the help of light  
Our way across the river by the time

Dawn spilled down from the campus to the banks  
We'd come to, single, sobered-up again,  
To see the morning glories give their thanks  
For things we had, and hardly noticed, then.

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