

# 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 730

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

Is it worse to live in a city where you can't see a big storm coming until it's right on top of you, or to be out on the plains where you can see it coming for almost too long? I like this long look at an approaching and then passing storm by Max Garland, who lives in Wisconsin. It's from his fine book, *The Word We Used For It*, from the University of Wisconsin Press.

## Happiness

The storm was headed in our direction—  
big loom of gray like the absolute West  
leaned over us. Reports of damage  
in the neighboring counties—a silo unfurled  
and took wing, a house trailer  
twisted loose. On the Doppler screen  
the storm looked alive, yellow and green  
at the fringes, with a fierce red heart  
trending to violet. Sirens swept over  
to scare it away, like songbirds  
grow strident, circle and bluff  
at the sight of an owl.

When the rain came in sheets,  
I regretted my sins. When lightning  
cracked the red pine's half-rotted heart,  
I wished the world more joy  
in general. When the worst was over  
and the grass lay flat, but alive,  
and the sky was a waning bruise,  
I thought of that silo, how it wasn't mine,  
and all that grain cast back into the world's  
wind, maybe some of it still flying.

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