

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006
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BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

There's nothing that can't be a good subject for a poem. The hard part is to capture something in such a way that it becomes engaging and meaningful. Here's a poem from the Summer 2018 issue of *Rattle*, by Peg Duthie of Tennessee, in which two very different experiences are pushed up side by side. Her most recent book of poetry is *Measured Extravagance*, (Upper Rubber Boot, 2012).

Decorating a Cake While Listening to Tennis

The commentator's rabbiting on and on
about how it's so easy for Roger, resentment
thick as butter still in a box. Yet word
from those who've done their homework
is how the man loves to train—how much
he relishes putting in the hours
just as magicians shuffle card after card,
countless to mere humans
but carefully all accounted for.
At hearing "luck" again, I stop
until my hands relax their clutch
on the cone from which a dozen more
peonies are to materialize. I make it look easy
to grow a garden on top of a sheet
of fondant, and that's how it should appear:
as natural and as meant-to-be
as the spin of a ball from the sweetest spot
of a racquet whisked through the air like a wand.

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