

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

Ibbetson Street is a journal that comes out twice a year and does a fine job selecting its poems. I like this one by Kenneth Lee, a gynecological pathologist in Boston, whose most recent book is *Gravity Waves*. TV commercial producers have learned that it's effective to put a dog in with the people, and here we have dogs and their friends in a poem. And this week you get a new word, "aliquot," to go with your coffee.

Symbiosis

I sit with my thermos of coffee on the mall:
a mile-long promenade, arcades of elms
flanking a generous aliquot of benches.

But at this early hour it starts to dawn:
I am the only one without a dog.
So, a witness to an ancient symbiosis,
as it's evolved within a modern city:

The dogs, I note, are smaller, the owners
less ferocious. The former sniff then poop,
the latter, like potty-training parents, pat their heads,
gather it in plastic doggy-bags.

It's no longer for the hunt or for protection;
both species have adapted to survive
hard loneliness inside a small apartment.

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