

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 750

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

There are so many delightful poems by Faith Shearin that it can be difficult to select just one to show you. This one is from her sixth book, *Darwin's Daughter*, published in 2017 by Stephen F. Austin State University Press. Faith Shearin lives in West Virginia.

Blue Elvis

It was August 1977 when Elvis Presley fell
face down on his Graceland bathroom floor;
by the time paramedics arrived, he was

cold and blue. I knew this because I was with
my grandmother, Belle, who called her sister,
Geraldine, who came over at once so we

could watch the news. My grandmother knew
Elvis liked peanut butter on white bread
with American cheese, eaten in his jungle room

which had Tiki chairs, fur lampshades,
a waterfall. Other neighbors arrived:
women in short skirts, women who

brought with them more of the food Elvis
loved: coconut cakes, fried chicken, bacon.
Elvis was dead, and summer had been so

hot the things we touched burned our hands:
handles of garden hoses, car doors,
the metal swing set my grandfather

built for me on the back lawn. I listened
to the sound of southern women's voices
expressing disbelief; they said *I swan*

and I pictured something rippling
and solitary; they said *Well, shut my mouth* and
I saw blue Elvis, falling.

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