

# 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 753

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

I once wrote of Marge Saiser's poetry that she writes better poems about love than anyone I know. In this poem the love is standing off to the side, looking on, but it's there. Marge Saiser lives in Nebraska, and her most recent book of poetry is *The Woman in the Moon* (The Backwaters Press, 2018).

### He Taught Me to Drive

The road wasn't a proper road; it was  
two ruts across a pasture and down  
into a dry creek bed and up

the other side, a cow path really,  
soft sand up to the hub caps.  
*You didn't gun it at the right time,*

he said. I knew that before he  
said it, but I didn't know how to get  
the old Chevrolet out of the crevice

I had wedged it into. *You'll figure it out,*  
he said, and then he took a walk,  
left me to my own devices, which until

that moment had included tears.  
My face remained nearly dry,  
as was the gas tank when he finally

returned, took a shovel out of the trunk,  
and moved enough sand from around  
the rear tires so he could rock

back and forth and get a little traction.  
That country had very little traction;  
it had mourning doves, which lay their eggs

on the ground, a few twigs for a nest,  
no fluff. Mourning dove. Even the name  
sounds soft. Even the notes they coo,

perched on a fence wire. But they are  
hatched on the dirt. When they leave the shell,  
the wind is already blowing their feathers dry.

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