

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 755

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If at times your world seems flat and uninteresting, I recommend making a cardboard viewfinder with a postage-stamp sized window. Then look at what's around you through that. I think you'll be pleased and surprised by how much you can see when the rest is pushed outside of the frame. This poem is from my book *Kindest Regards*, published by Copper Canyon Press.

Passing Through

I had driven into one side of a city,
and through it, and was on the way out
on a four-lane, caught up in the traffic,
when I happened to glance to my right
where a man stood alone smoking,
fixed in the shade of a windowless
warehouse, leaning back into a wall
with one shoe cocked against it,
the other one flat on the pavement.
He was beside me for only an instant,
wearing a short-sleeved yellow shirt
and gray work pants, as the hand
that held the cigarette swept out
and away, and he turned to watch it
as with the tip of a finger he tapped
once at the ash, which began to drift
into that moment already behind us,
as I, with the others, sped on.

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