

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, THE POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES

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BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE

Many of us keep journals, but while doing so few of us pay much attention to selecting the most precise words, to determining their most effective order, to working with effective pauses and breath-like pacing, to presenting an engaging impression of a single, unique day. This poem by Nebraskan Nancy McCleery is a good example of one poet's carefully recorded observations.

December Notes

The backyard is one white sheet
Where we read in the bird tracks

The songs we hear. Delicate
Sparrow, heavier cardinal,

Filigree threads of chickadee.
And wing patterns where one flew

Low, then up and away, gone
To the woods but calling out

Clearly its bright epigrams.
More snow promised for tonight.

The postal van is stalled
In the road again, the mail

Will be late and any good news
Will reach us by hand.

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