

# AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

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

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## American Life in Poetry: Column 079

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

The news coverage of Hurricane Katrina gave America a vivid look at our poor and powerless neighbors. Here Alex Phillips of Massachusetts condenses his observations of our country's underclass into a wise, tough little poem.

### Work Shy

To be poor and raise skinny children.  
To own nothing but skinny clothing.  
Skinny food falls in between cracks.  
Friends cannot visit your skinny home.  
They cannot fit through the door.  
Your skinny thoughts evaporate into  
the day or the night that you cannot  
see with your tiny eyes.

God sticks you with the smallest pins  
and your blood, the red is diluted.  
Imagine a tiny hole, the other side  
of which is a fat world and how  
lost you would feel. Of course,  
I'm speaking to myself.  
How lost I would feel, and how dangerous.

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