

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 105

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

I've talked often in this column about how poetry can hold a mirror up to life, and I'm especially fond of poems that hold those mirrors up to our most ordinary activities, showing them at their best and brightest. Here Ruth Moose hangs out some laundry and, in an instant, an everyday chore that might have seemed to us to be quite plain is fresh and lovely.

Laundry

All our life
so much laundry;
each day's doing or not
comes clean,
flows off and away
to blend with other sins
of this world. Each day
begins in new skin,
blessed by the elements
charged to take us
out again to do or undo
what's been assigned.
From socks to shirts
the selves we shed
lift off the line
as if they own
a life apart
from the one we offer.
There is joy in clean laundry.
All is forgiven in water, sun
and air. We offer our day's deeds
to the blue-eyed sky, with soap and prayer,
our arms up, then lowered in supplication.

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