

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 130

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

A number of American poets are adept at describing places and the people who inhabit them. Galway Kinnell's great poem, "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World" is one of those masterpieces, and there are many others. Here Anne Pierson Wiese, winner of the Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets, adds to that tradition.

Columbus Park

Down at the end of Baxter Street, where Five Points
slum used to be, just north of Tombs, is a pocket park.
On these summer days the green plane trees' leaves
linger heavy as a noon mist above
the men playing mah jongg—more Chinese
in the air than English. The city's composed
of village greens; we rely on the Thai
place on the corner: Tom Kha for a cold,
jasmine tea for fever, squid for love, Duck Yum
for loneliness. Outside, the grove of heat,
narrow streets where people wrestle rash and unseen
angels; inside, the coolness of a glen and the wait staff
in their pale blue collars offering ice water.
Whatever you've done or undone, there's a dish for you
to take out or eat in: spice for courage, sweet for chagrin.

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