

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 131

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

Sometimes beginning writers tell me they get discouraged because it seems that everything has already been written about. But every experience, however commonplace, is unique to he or she who seizes it. There have undoubtedly been many poems about how dandelions pass from yellow to wind-borne gossamer, but this one by the Maryland poet, Jean Nordhaus, offers an experience that was unique to her and is a gift to us.

A Dandelion for My Mother

How I loved those spiky suns,
rooted stubborn as childhood
in the grass, tough as the farmer's
big-headed children—the mats
of yellow hair, the bowl-cut fringe.
How sturdy they were and how
slowly they turned themselves
into galaxies, domes of ghost stars
barely visible by day, pale
cerebrums clinging to life
on tough green stems. Like you.
Like you, in the end. If you were here,
I'd pluck this trembling globe to show
how beautiful a thing can be
a breath will tear away.

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