

# 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 148

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

I've written about the pleasures of poetry that offers us vivid scenes but which lets us draw our own conclusions about the implications of what we're being shown. The poet can steer us a little by the selection of details, but a lot of the effect of the poem is in what is not said, in what we deduce. Lee McCarthy is a California poet, and here is something seen from across the street, something quite ordinary yet packed with life.

### Santa Paula

There's a woman kissing a cowboy  
across the street. His eight-year-old son  
watches from the bus stop bench.  
She's really planting one on him,  
his Stetson in danger.  
It must have been some weekend.  
Seeing no room in that embrace for himself,  
the boy measures his future, legs  
straight out in front of him.  
Both hands hold onto a suitcase handle,  
thin arms ready to prove themselves.

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