

# 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 160

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

I've mentioned how important close observation is in composing a vivid poem. In this scene by Arizona poet, Steve Orlen, the details not only help us to see the girls clearly, but the last detail is loaded with suggestion. The poem closes with the car door shutting, and we readers are shut out of what will happen, though we can guess.

### Three Teenage Girls: 1956

Three teenage girls in tight red sleeveless blouses and black Capri pants  
And colorful headscarves secured in a knot to their chins  
Are walking down the hill, chatting, laughing,  
Cupping their cigarettes against the light rain,  
The closest to the road with her left thumb stuck out  
Not looking at the cars going past.

Every Friday night to the dance, and wet or dry  
They get where they're going, walk two miles or get a ride,  
And now the two-door 1950 Dodge, dark green  
Darkening as evening falls, stops, they nudge  
Each other, peer in, shrug, two scramble into the back seat,  
And the third, the boldest, famous  
For twice running away from home, slides in front with the man  
Who reaches across her body and pulls the door shut.

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