

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 165

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

In “The Moose,” a poem much too long to print here, the late Elizabeth Bishop was able to show a community being created from a group of strangers on a bus who come in contact with a moose on the highway. They watch it together and become one. Here Robert Bly of Minnesota assembles a similar community, around an eclipse. Notice how the experience happens to “we,” the group, not just to “me,” the poet.

Seeing the Eclipse in Maine

It started about noon. On top of Mount Batte,
We were all exclaiming. Someone had a cardboard
And a pin, and we all cried out when the sun
Appeared in tiny form on the notebook cover.

It was hard to believe. The high school teacher
We’d met called it a pinhole camera,
People in the Renaissance loved to do that.
And when the moon had passed partly through

We saw on a rock underneath a fir tree,
Dozens of crescents—made the same way—
Thousands! Even our straw hats produced
A few as we moved them over the bare granite.

We shared chocolate, and one man from Maine
Told a joke. Suns were everywhere—at our feet.

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