

# 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 185

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

When I was a boy, there were still a few veterans of the Spanish American War, and more of The Great War, or World War I, and now all those have died and those who served in World War II are passing from us, too. Robert Hedin, a Minnesota poet, has written a fine poem about these people.

### The Old Liberators

Of all the people in the mornings at the mall,  
it's the old liberators I like best,  
those veterans of the Bulge, Anzio, or Monte Cassino  
I see lost in Automotive or back in Home Repair,  
bored among the paints and power tools.  
Or the really old ones, the ones who are going fast,  
who keep dozing off in the little orchards  
of shade under the distant skylights.  
All around, from one bright rack to another,  
their wives stride big as generals,  
their handbags bulging like ripe fruit.  
They are almost all gone now,  
and with them they are taking the flak  
and fire storms, the names of the old bombing runs.  
Each day a little more of their memory goes out,  
darkens the way a house darkens,  
its rooms quietly filling with evening,  
until nothing but the wind lifts the lace curtains,  
the wind bearing through the empty rooms  
the rich far off scent of gardens  
where just now, this morning,  
light is falling on the wild philodendrons.

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