

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 192

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

Class, status, privilege; despite all our talk about equality, they're with us wherever we go. In this poem, Pat Mora, who grew up in a Spanish speaking home in El Paso, Texas, contrasts the lives of rich tourists with the less fortunate people who serve them. The titles of poems are often among the most important elements, and this one is loaded with implication.

Fences

Mouths full of laughter,
the *turistas* come to the tall hotel
with suitcases full of dollars.

Every morning my brother makes
the cool beach new for them.
With a wooden board he smooths
away all footprints.

I peek through the cactus fence
and watch the women rub oil
sweeter than honey into their arms and legs
while their children jump waves
or sip drinks from long straws,
coconut white, mango yellow.

Once my little sister
ran barefoot across the hot sand
for a taste.

My mother roared like the ocean,
"No. No. It's their beach.
It's their beach."

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