

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 201

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

Don Welch lives in Nebraska and is one of those many talented American poets who have never received as much attention as they deserve. His poems are distinguished by the meticulous care he puts into writing them, and by their deep intelligence. Here is Welch's picture of a 14-year-old, captured at that awkward and painfully vulnerable step on the way to adulthood.

At 14

To be shy,
to lower your eyes
after making a greeting.

to know
wherever you go
you'll be called on,

to fear
whoever you're near
will ask you,

to wear
the softer sides of the air
in rooms filled with angers,

your ship
always docked
in transparent slips

whose wharves
are sheerer than membranes.

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