

# 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 212

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

We've published this column about American life for over four years, and we have finally found a poem about one of the great American pastimes, bowling. "The Big Lebowski" caught bowling on film, and this poem by Regan Huff of Georgia captures it in words.

### Occurrence on Washburn Avenue

Alice's first strike gets a pat on the back,  
her second a cheer from Betty Woszinski  
who's just back from knee surgery. Her third—  
"A turkey!" Molly calls out—raises everyone's eyes.  
They clap. Teresa looks up from the bar.  
At the fourth the girls stop seeing their own pins wobble.  
They watch the little X's fill the row on Alice's screen—  
That's five. That's six. There's a holy space  
around her like a saint come down to bowl  
with the Tuesday Ladies in Thorp, Wisconsin.  
Teresa runs to get Al, and Fran calls Billy  
at the Exxon. The bar crowds with silent men.  
No one's cheering. No one's bowling now  
except Alice's team, rolling their balls  
to advance the screen around to Alice, who's stopped  
even her nervous laugh, her face blank and smooth  
with concentration. It can't go on  
and then it does go on, the white bar  
reading "Silver Dollar Chicken" lowering and clearing  
nothing, then lowering and clearing nothing again.

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