

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006
AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY © 2006 THE POETRY FOUNDATION WEBSITE: WWW.AMERICANLIFEINPOETRY.ORG CONTACT: ALP@POETRYFOUNDATION.ORG

American Life in Poetry: Column 219

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

As we all know, getting older isn't hard to do. Time continues on. In this poem, Deborah Warren of Massachusetts asks us to think about the life lived between our past and present selves, as indicated in the marginal comments of an old book. There's something beautiful about books allowing us to talk to who we once were, and this poem captures this beauty.

Marginalia

Finding an old book on a basement shelf—
gray, spine bent—and reading it again,
I met my former, unfamiliar, self,
some of her notes and scrawls so alien

that, though I tried, I couldn't get (behind
this gloss or that) back to the time she wrote
to guess what experiences she had in mind,
the living context of some scribbled note;

or see the girl beneath the purple ink
who chose this phrase or that to underline,
the mood, the boy, that lay behind her thinking—
but they were thoughts I recognized as mine;

and though there were words I couldn't even read,
blobs and cross-outs; and though not a jot
remained of her old existence—I agreed
with the young annotator's every thought:

A clever girl. So what would she see fit
to comment on—and what would she have to say
about the years that she and I have written
since—before we put the book away?

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation (www.poetryfoundation.org), publisher of *Poetry* magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Poem copyright ©2008 by Deborah Warren, whose most recent book of poems is "Dream with Flowers and Bowl of Fruit," University of Evansville Press, 2008. Poem reprinted from the "Hudson Review," Vol. LXI, no. 3, Autumn 2008, and reprinted by permission of the author and publisher. Introduction copyright © 2009 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

American Life in Poetry ©2006 The Poetry Foundation
Contact: alp@poetryfoundation.org
This column does not accept unsolicited poetry.