

# 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 226

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

Elizabeth Bishop, one of our greatest American poets, once wrote a long poem in which the sudden appearance of a moose on a highway creates a community among a group of strangers on a bus. Here Ronald Wallace, a Wisconsin poet, gives us a sighting with similar results.

### Sustenance

Australia. Phillip Island. The Tasman Sea.  
Dusk. The craggy coastline at low tide in fog.  
Two thousand tourists milling in the stands  
as one by one, and then in groups, the fairy penguins  
mass up on the sand like so much sea wrack and  
debris. And then, as on command, the improbable  
parade begins: all day they've been out fishing  
for their chicks, and now, somehow, they find them  
squawking in their burrows in the dunes, one by one,  
two by two, such comical solemnity, as wobbling by  
they catch our eager eyes until we're squawking, too,  
in English, French, and Japanese, Yiddish and Swahili,  
like some happy wedding party brought to tears  
by whatever in the ceremony repairs the rifts  
between us. The rain stops. The fog lifts. Stars.  
And we go home, less hungry, satisfied, to friends  
and family, regurgitating all we've heard and seen.

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