

# 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 232

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

I've built many wren houses since my wife and I moved to the country 25 years ago. It's a good thing to do in the winter. At one point I had so many extra that in the spring I set up at a local farmers' market and sold them for five dollars apiece. I say all this to assert that I am an authority at listening to the so small voices that Thomas R. Smith captures in this poem. Smith lives in Wisconsin.

### Baby Wrens' Voices

I am a student of wrens.  
When the mother bird returns  
to her brood, beak squirming  
with winged breakfast, a shrill  
clamor rises like jingling  
from tiny, high-pitched bells.  
Who'd have guessed such a small  
house contained so many voices?  
The sound they make is the pure sound  
of life's hunger. Who hangs our house  
in the world's branches, and listens  
when we sing from our hunger?  
Because I love best those songs  
that shake the house of the singer,  
I am a student of wrens.

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