

# 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 239

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

It's likely that if you found the original handwritten manuscript of T. S. Eliot's groundbreaking poem, "The Waste Land," you wouldn't be able to trade it for a candy bar at the Quick Shop on your corner. Here's a poem by David Lee Garrison of Ohio about how unsuccessfully classical music fits into a subway.

### Bach in the DC Subway

As an experiment,  
*The Washington Post*  
asked a concert violinist—  
wearing jeans, tennis shoes,  
and a baseball cap—  
to stand near a trash can  
at rush hour in the subway  
and play Bach  
on a Stradivarius.  
*Partita No. 2 in D Minor*  
called out to commuters  
like an ocean to waves,  
sang to the station  
about why we should bother  
to live.

A thousand people  
streamed by. Seven of them  
paused for a minute or so  
and thirty-two dollars floated  
into the open violin case.  
A café hostess who drifted  
over to the open door  
each time she was free  
said later that Bach  
gave her peace,  
and all the children,  
all of them,  
waded into the music  
as if it were water,  
listening until they had to be  
rescued by parents  
who had somewhere else to go.

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