

# 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 243

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

Lots of contemporary poems are anecdotal, a brief narration of some event, and what can make them rise above anecdote is when they manage to convey significance, often as the poem closes. Here is an example of one like that, by Marie Sheppard Williams, who lives in Minneapolis.

### Everybody

I stood at a bus corner  
one afternoon, waiting  
for the #2. An old  
guy stood waiting too.  
I stared at him. He  
caught my stare, grinned,  
gap-toothed. Will you  
sign my coat? he said.  
Held out a pen. He wore  
a dirty canvas coat that  
had signatures all over  
it, hundreds, maybe  
thousands.

I'm trying  
to get everybody, he  
said.

I signed. On a  
little space on a pocket.  
Sometimes I remember:  
I am one of everybody.

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