

# 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 247

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

Family photographs, how much they do capture in all their elbow-to-elbow awkwardness. In this poem, Ben Vogt of Nebraska describes a color snapshot of a Christmas dinner, the family, impatient to tuck in, arrayed along the laden table. I especially like the description of the turkey.

### Grandpa Vogt's—1959

The food is on the table. Turkey tanned  
to a cowboy boot luster, potatoes mashed  
and mounded in a bowl whose lip is lined  
with blue flowers linked by grey vines faded  
from washing. Everyone's heads have turned  
to elongate the table's view—a last supper twisted  
toward a horizon where the Christmas tree, crowned  
by a window, sets into itself half inclined.  
Each belly cries. Each pair of eyes admonished  
by Aunt Photographer. Look up. You're wined  
and dined for the older folks who've pined  
to see your faces, your lives, lightly framed  
in this moment's flash. Parents are moved,  
press their children's heads up from the table,  
hide their hunger by rubbing lightly wrinkled  
hands atop their laps. They'll hold the image  
as long as need be, seconds away from grace.

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