

# AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006  
AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY © 2006 THE POETRY FOUNDATION WEBSITE: WWW.AMERICANLIFEINPOETRY.ORG CONTACT: ALP@POETRYFOUNDATION.ORG

## American Life in Poetry: Column 251

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

The poet Lyn Lifshin, who divides her time between New York and Virginia, is one of the most prolific poets among my contemporaries, and has thousands of poems in print, by my loose reckoning. I have been reading her work in literary magazines for at least thirty years. Here's a good example of this poet at her best.

### The Other Fathers

would be coming back  
from some war, sending  
back stuffed birds or  
handkerchiefs in navy  
blue with *Love* painted  
on it. Some sent telegrams  
for birthdays, the pastel  
letters like jewels. The  
magazines were full of fathers who  
were doing what had  
to be done, were serving,  
were brave. Someone  
yelped there'd be confetti  
in the streets, maybe  
no school. That soon  
we'd have bananas. My  
father sat in the grey  
chair, war after war,  
hardly said a word. I  
wished he had gone  
away with the others  
so maybe he would  
be coming back to us

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation ([www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org)), publisher of *Poetry* magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Poem copyright ©2008 by Lyn Lifshin, whose most recent book of poems is "Persephone," Red Hen Press, 2008. Poem reprinted from "Natural Bridge" No. 20, Winter, 2008, by permission of Lyn Lifshin and the publisher. Introduction copyright © 2010 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

American Life in Poetry ©2006 The Poetry Foundation

Contact: [alp@poetryfoundation.org](mailto:alp@poetryfoundation.org)  
This column does not accept unsolicited poetry.