

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006
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BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

My grandfather, when in his nineties, wrote me a letter in which he listed everything he and my uncle had eaten in the past week. That was the news. I love this poem by Nancyrose Houston of Seattle for the way it plays with the character of those letters from home that many of us have received.

The Letter From Home

The dogs barked, the dogs scratched, the dogs got wet, the dogs shook, the dogs circled, the dogs slept, the dogs ate, the dogs barked; the rain fell down, the leaves fell down, the eggs fell down and cracked on the floor; the dust settled, the wood floors were scratched, the cabinets sat without doors, the trim without paint, the stuff piled up; I loaded the dishwasher, I unloaded the dishwasher, I raked the leaves, I did the laundry, I took out the garbage, I took out the recycling, I took out the yard waste. There was a bed, it was soft, there was a blanket, it was warm, there were dreams, they were good. The corn grew, the eggplant grew, the tomatoes grew, the lettuce grew, the strawberries grew, the blackberries grew; the tea kettle screamed, the computer keys clicked, the radio roared, the TV spoke. "Will they ever come home?" "Can't I take a break?" "How do others keep their house clean?" "Will I remember this day in fifty years?" The sweet tea slipped down my throat, the brownies melted in my mouth. My mother cooked, the apple tree bloomed, the lilac bloomed, the mimosa bloomed, I bloomed.

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