

# 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 268

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

If writers are both skilled and lucky, they may write something that will carry their words into the future, past the hour of their own deaths. I'd guess all writers hope for this, and the following poem by Peter Cooley, who lives in New Orleans and teaches creative writing at Tulane, beautifully expresses his hope, and theirs.

### The One Certain Thing

A day will come I'll watch you reading this.  
I'll look up from these words I'm writing now—  
this line I'm standing on, I'll be right here,  
alive again. I'll breathe on you this breath.  
Touch this word now, that one. Warm, isn't it?

You are the person come to clean my room;  
you are whichever of my three children  
opens the drawer here where this poem will go  
in a few minutes when I've had my say.

These are the words from immortality.  
No one stands between us now except Death:  
I enter it entirely writing this.  
I have to tell you I am not alone.  
Watching you read, Eternity's with me.  
We like to watch you read. Read us again.

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