

# 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 134

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

When ancient people gathered around the fire at nightfall, I like to think that they told stories, about where each of them had been that day, and what that person had seen in the forest. Those were among our first stories, and we still venture into the world and return to tell others what happened. It's part of community. Here Kathleen Flenniken of Washington tells us about a woman she saw at an airport.

### Old Woman With Protea Flowers, Kahalui Airport

She wears the run-down slippers of a local  
and in her arms, five rare protea  
wrapped in newsprint, big as digger pine cones.  
Our hands can't help it and she lets us touch.  
Her brother grows them for her, upcountry.  
She's spending the day on Oahu  
with her flowers and her dogs. Protea  
for four dogs' graves, two for her favorite.  
She'll sit with him into the afternoon  
and watch the ocean from Koolau.  
An old woman's paradise, she tells us,  
and pets the flowers' soft, pink ears.

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