

# 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 184

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

I hope it's not just a guy thing, a delight in the trappings of work. I love this poem by John Maloney, of Massachusetts, which gives us a close look behind the windshields of all those pickup trucks we see heading home from work.

### After Work

They're heading home with their lights on, dust and wood glue,  
yellow dome lights on their metallic long beds: 250s, 2500s—  
as much overtime as you want, deadline, dotted line, dazed  
through the last few hours, dried primer on their knuckles,  
sawdust calf-high on their jeans, scraped boots, the rough  
plumbing and electric in, way ahead of the game except for  
the check, such a clutter of cans and iced-tea bottles, napkins,  
coffee cups, paper plates on the front seat floor with cords  
and saws, tired above the eyes, back of the beyond, thirsty.  
There's a parade of them through the two-lane highways,  
proudest on their way home, the first turn out of the jobsite,  
the first song with the belt off, pure breath of being alone  
for now, for now the insight of a full and answerable man.  
No one can take away the contentment of the first few miles  
and they know they can't describe it, the black and purple sky.

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