

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

Perhaps there's a kind of afterlife that is made up of our memories of a departed person, especially as these cling to that person's belongings. Bruce Snider, who lives and teaches in California, suggests that here.

Afterlife

I wake to leafless vines and muddy fields,
patches of standing water. His pocketknife

waits in my dresser drawer, still able to gut fish.
I pick up his green shirt, put it on for the fourth day

in a row. Outside, the rusty nail he hammered
catches me, leaves its stain on everything.

The temperature drops, the whole shore
filling with him: his dented chew can, waders,

the cattails kinked, bowing their distress.
At the pier, I use his old pliers to ready the line:

fatheads, darters, a blood worm jig. Today, the lake's
one truth is hardness. When the trout bite,

I pull the serviceable things glistening into air.

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