

# AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006  
AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY ©2006 THE POETRY FOUNDATION WEBSITE: WWW.AMERICANLIFEINPOETRY.ORG CONTACT: ALP@POETRYFOUNDATION.ORG

## American Life in Poetry: Column 440

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

On a perfect Labor Day, nobody would have to work, and even the “associates” in the big box stores could quit stocking shelves. Well, it doesn’t happen that way, does it? But here’s a poem about a Labor Day that’s really at rest, by Joseph Millar, from North Carolina.

### Labor Day

Even the bosses are sleeping late  
in the dusty light of September.

The parking lot’s empty and no one cares.  
No one unloads a ladder, steps on the gas

or starts up the big machines in the shop,  
sanding and grinding, cutting and binding.

No one lays a flat bead of flux over a metal seam  
or lowers the steel forks from a tailgate.

Shadows gather inside the sleeve  
of the empty thermos beside the sink,

the bells go still by the channel buoy,  
the wind lies down in the west,

the tuna boats rest on their tie-up lines  
turning a little, this way and that.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation ([www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org)), publisher of *Poetry* magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Poem copyright ©2012 by Joseph Millar from his most recent book of poems, *Blue Rust*, Carnegie Mellon University Press, 2012. Poem reprinted by permission of Joseph Millar and the publisher. Introduction copyright 2013 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction’s author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

American Life in Poetry ©2006 The Poetry Foundation  
Contact: [alp@poetryfoundation.org](mailto:alp@poetryfoundation.org)  
This column does not accept unsolicited poetry.