

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

We're entering a new kind of autumn. This one arrives after months and months when everything was new and strange, and offered very little but bad news for the future. All spring and summer parents wondered, can a country have autumn without buses full of students laughing together? Although the fortunes of people can't be predicted, nature can be. Or some of it can. Here's a poem by Barbara Crooker of Pennsylvania to introduce September. It was first published in a recent issue of *Spillway*.

And Now It's September,

and the garden diminishes: cucumber leaves rumped
and rusty, zucchini felled by borers, tomatoes sparse
on the vines. But out in the perennial beds, there's one last
blast of color: ignitions of goldenrod, flamboyant
asters, spiraling mums, all those flashy spikes waving
in the wind, conducting summer's final notes.
The ornamental grasses have gone to seed, haloed
in the last light. Nights grow chilly, but the days
are still warm; I wear the sun like a shawl on my neck
and arms. Hundreds of blackbirds ribbon in, settle
in the trees, so many black leaves, then, just as suddenly,
they're gone. This is autumn's great Departure Gate,
and everyone, boarding passes in hand, waits
patiently in a long, long line.

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