

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 817

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

James Crews is the editor of a very timely anthology entitled *Healing the Divide: Poems of Kindness and Connection*, published by Green Writers Press. He's also an accomplished poet and the author of several books, including *Bluebird*. This poem first appeared, appropriately, at Gratefulness.org.

Winter Morning

When I can no longer say thank you
for this new day and the waking into it,
for the cold scrape of the kitchen chair
and the ticking of the space heater glowing
orange as it warms the floor near my feet,
I know it's because I've been fooled again
by the selfish, unruly man who lives in me
and believes he deserves only safety
and comfort. But if I pause as I do now,
and watch the streetlights outside flashing
off one by one like old men blinking their
cloudy eyes, if I listen to my tired neighbors
slamming car doors hard against the morning
and see the steaming coffee in their mugs
kissing chapped lips as they sip and
exhale each of their worries white into
the icy air around their faces—then I can
remember this one life is a gift each of us
was handed and told to open: Untie the bow
and tear off the paper, look inside
and be grateful for whatever you find
even if it is only the scent of a tangerine
that lingers on the fingers long after
you've finished peeling it.

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