

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 173

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

Poets are especially good at investing objects with meaning, or in drawing meaning from the things of this world. Here Patrick Phillips of Brooklyn, New York, does a masterful job of comparing a wrecked piano to his feelings.

Piano

Touched by your goodness, I am like
that grand piano we found one night on Willoughby
that someone had smashed and somehow
heaved through an open window.

And you might think by this I mean I'm broken
or abandoned, or unloved. Truth is, I don't
know exactly what I am, any more
than the wreckage in the alley knows
it's a piano, filling with trash and yellow leaves.

Maybe I'm all that's left of what I was.
But touching me, I know, you are the good
breeze blowing across its rusted strings.

What would you call that feeling when the wood,
even with its cracked harp, starts to sing?

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