



# The Life and Poetry of Ted Kooser

*Mary K. Stillwell*

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## **The Life and Poetry of Ted Kooser** Mary K. Stillwell

Like a flash of lightning it came to him—the unathletic high school student Ted Kooser saw a future as a famous poet that promised everything: glory, immortality, a bohemian lifestyle (no more doing dishes, no more cleaning his room), and, particularly important to the lonely teenager, girls! Unlike most kids with a sudden ambition, Kooser, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry and thirteenth poet laureate of the United States, made good on his dream. But glory was a long time coming, and along the way Kooser lived the life that has made his poetry what it is, as deeply grounded in family, work, and the natural world as it is attuned to the nuances of language.

Just as so much of Kooser's own writing weaves geography, history, and family stories into its measures, so does this first critical biography consider the poet's work and life together: his upbringing in Iowa, his studies in Nebraska with poet Karl Shapiro as mentor, his career in insurance, his family life, his bout with cancer, and, always, his poetry. Combining a fine appreciation of Kooser's work and life, this book finally provides a fuller and more complex picture of a writer who, perhaps more than any other, has brought the Great Plains and the Midwest, lived large and small, into the poetry of our day.

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