

# 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 629

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

Surely you've seen those Japanese scroll paintings in which tiny figures trail up the side of an enormous mountain? Here's a poem about one such life by Lucia Cherciu, who lives in Poughkeepsie, New York. She gathers an enormous amount of human experience in these few lines. Her most recent book is *Train Ride to Bucharest* (Sheep Meadow Press, 2017). This poem appeared first in *The Broadkill Review*.

### The New Church

The old cupola glinted above the clouds, shone  
among fir trees, but it took him an hour

for the half mile all the way up the hill. As he trailed,  
the village passed him by, greeted him,

asked about his health, but everybody hurried  
to catch the mass, left him leaning against fences,

measuring the road with the walking stick he sculpted.  
He yearned for the day when the new church

would be built—right across the road. Now  
it rises above the moon: saints in frescoes

meet the eye, and only the rain has started to cut  
through the shingles on the roof of his empty

house. The apple trees have taken over the sky,  
sequestered the gate, sidled over the porch.

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