

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, THE POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES

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

Visiting a familiar and once dear place after a long absence can knock the words right out of us, and in this poem, Keith Althaus of Massachusetts observes this happening to someone else. I like the way he suggests, at the end, that it may take days before that silence heals over.

Homecoming

We drove through the gates
into a maze of little roads,
with speed bumps now,
that circled a pavilion,
field house, and ran past
the playing fields and wound
their way up to the cluster
of wood and stone buildings
of the school you went to once.

The green was returning to
the trees and lawn, the lake
was still half-lidded with ice
and blind in the middle.

There was nobody around
except a few cars in front
of the administration. It must
have been spring break.

We left without ever getting out
of the car. You were quiet
that night, the next day,
the way after heavy rain
that the earth cannot absorb,
the water lies in pools
in unexpected places for days
until it disappears.

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