

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

Of taking long walks it has been said that a person can walk off anything. Here David Mason hikes a mountain in his home state, Colorado, and steps away from an undisclosed personal loss into another state, one of healing.

In the Mushroom Summer

Colorado turns Kyoto in a shower,
mist in the pines so thick the crows delight
(or seem to), winging in obscurity.
The ineffectual panic of a squirrel
who chattered at my passing gave me pause
to watch his Ponderosa come and go—
long needles scratching cloud. I'd summited
but knew it only by the wildflower meadow,
the muted harebells, paintbrush, gentian,
scattered among the locoweed and sage.
Today my grief abated like water soaking
underground, its scar a little path
of twigs and needles winding ahead of me
downhill to the next bend. Today I let
the rain soak through my shirt and was unharmed.

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