

# 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 138

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

You've surely heard it said that the old ought to move over to make room for the young. But in the best of all possible worlds, people who love their work should be able to do it as long as they wish. Those forced to retire, well, they're a sorry lot. Here the Chicago poet, Deborah Cummins, shows a man trying to adjust to life after work.

### At a Certain Age

He sits beside his wife who takes the wheel.  
Clutching coupons, he wanders the aisles  
of Stop & Save. There's no place he must be,  
no clock to punch. Sure,  
there are bass in the lake, a balsa model  
in the garage, the par-three back nine.  
But it's not the same.  
Time the enemy then, the enemy now.

As he points the remote at the screen  
or pauses at the window, staring  
into the neighbor's fence but not really seeing it,  
he listens to his wife in the kitchen, more amazed  
than ever—how women seem to know  
what to do. How, with their cycles and timers,  
their rolling boils and three-minute eggs,  
they wait for something to start. Or stop.

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