

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 140

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

Here's a holiday poem by Steven Schneider that I like very much for its light spirit and evocative sensory detail. Isn't this a party to which you'd like to be invited?

Chanukah Lights Tonight

Our annual prairie Chanukah party—
latkes, kugel, cherry blintzes.
Friends arrive from nearby towns
and dance the twist to “Chanukah Lights Tonight,”
spin like a dreidel to a klezmer hit.

The candles flicker in the window.
Outside, ponderosa pines are tied in red bows.
If you squint,
the neighbors' Christmas lights
look like the Omaha skyline.

The smell of oil is in the air.
We drift off to childhood
where we spent our gelt
on baseball cards and matinees,
cream sodas and potato knishes.

No delis in our neighborhood,
only the wind howling over the crushed corn stalks.
Inside, we try to sweep the darkness out,
waiting for the Messiah to knock,
wanting to know if he can join the party.

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