

# AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006  
AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY © 2006 THE POETRY FOUNDATION WEBSITE: WWW.AMERICANLIFEINPOETRY.ORG CONTACT: ALP@POETRYFOUNDATION.ORG

## American Life in Poetry: Column 145

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

If one believes television commercials, insomnia, that thief of sleep, torments humans in ever-increasing numbers. Rynn Williams, a poet working in Brooklyn, New York, tries here to identify its causes and find a suitable remedy.

### Insomnia

I try tearing paper into tiny, perfect squares—  
they cut my fingers. Warm milk, perhaps,  
stirred counter-clockwise in a cast iron pan—  
but even then there's burning at the edges,  
angry foam-hiss. I've been told  
to put trumpet flowers under my pillow,  
I do: stamen up, the old crone said.  
But the pollen stains, and there are bees,  
I swear, in those long yellow chambers, echoing,  
the way the house does, mocking, with its longevity—  
each rib creaking and bending where I'm likely to break—

I try floating out along the long O of *lone*,  
to where it flattens to *loss*, and just stay there  
disconnecting the dots of my night sky  
as one would take apart a house made of sticks,  
carefully, last addition to first,  
like sheep leaping backward into their pens.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation ([www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org)), publisher of *Poetry* magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Poem copyright © 2007 by Rynn Williams, whose most recent book of poetry is "Adonis Garage," University of Nebraska Press, 2005. Poem reprinted from "Columbia Poetry Review," no. 20, Spring 2007, by permission of Rynn Williams. Introduction copyright © 2007 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

American Life in Poetry ©2006 The Poetry Foundation  
Contact: [alp@poetryfoundation.org](mailto:alp@poetryfoundation.org)  
This column does not accept unsolicited poetry.