

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 170

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

I've lived all my life on the plains, where no body of water is more than a few feet deep, and even at that shallow depth I'm afraid of it. Here Sam Green, who lives on an island north of Seattle, takes us down into some really deep, dark water.

Night Dive

Down here, no light but what we carry with us.
Everywhere we point our hands we scrawl
color: bulging eyes, spines, teeth or clinging tentacles.
At negative buoyancy, when heavy hands
seem to grasp & pull us down, we let them,

we don't inflate our vests, but let the scrubbed cheeks
of rocks slide past in amniotic calm.
At sixty feet we douse our lights, cemented
by the weight of the dark, of water, the grip
of the sea's absolute silence. Our groping

hands brush the open mouths of anemones,
which shower us in particles of phosphor
radiant as halos. As in meditation,
or in deepest prayer,
there is no knowing what we will see.

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