

# 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 195

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

Here is a poem, much like a prayer, in which the Michigan poet Conrad Hilberry asks for no more than a little flare of light, an affirmation, at the end of a long, cold Christmas day.

### Christmas Night

Let midnight gather up the wind  
and the cry of tires on bitter snow.  
Let midnight call the cold dogs home,  
sleet in their fur—last one can blow

the streetlights out. If children sleep  
after the day's unfoldings, the wheel  
of gifts and griefs, may their breathing  
ease the strange hollowness we feel.

Let midnight draw whoever's left  
to the grate where a burnt-out log unrolls  
low mutterings of smoke until  
a small fire wakes in its crib of coals.

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 © 2008 by Conrad Hilberry, whose most recent book of poetry is "After-Music," Wayne State University Press, 2008. Poem reprinted from "The Hudson Review," Vol. 60, no. 4, Winter 2008, by permission of Conrad Hilberry. Introduction copyright © 2008 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.