

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006
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BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

Ah, yes, the mid-life crisis. And there's a lot of mid-life in which it can happen. Jerry Lee Lewis sang of it so well in "He's thirty-nine and holding, holding everything he can." And here's a fine poem by Matthew Vetter, portraying just such a man.

Wild Flowers

At fifty-six, having left my mother,
my father buys a motorcycle.
I imagine him because
it is the son's sorrowful assignment
to imagine his father: there,
hunched on his mount,
with black boots, with bad teeth,
between shifts at the mill,
ripping furrows in the backroads,
past barn and field and silo,
past creek and rock,
past the brown mare,
sleek in her impertinence,
never slowing until he sees
the bull. He stops, pulls
his bike to the side of the road,
where golden rod and clover grow,
walks up to the fence, admires
its horns, its wet snout snorting and blowing
its breath, its girth, its trampling
of small wild flowers.

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