

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

Here's hoping that very few of our readers have to go through cardiac rehab, which Thomas Reiter of New Jersey captures in this poem, but if they do, here's hoping that they come through it feeling wildly alive and singing at the tops of their lungs.

Rehab

We wear harnesses like crossing guards.
In a pouch over the heart,
over stent and bypass, a black
box with leads pressed onto metal
nipples. We pedal and tread and row
while our signals are picked up
by antennas on the ceiling, X's
like the eyes cartoonists give the dead.

Angels of telemetry with vials of nitro
watch over us. We beam to their monitors
now a barn dance, now a moonwalk.
They cuff us and pump and we keep on
so tomorrow will live off today. Nurse,
we won't forget the animated
video of our cholesterol highway
where LDL, black-hatted scowling
donut holes on wheels, blocked traffic.

But with muscles like gutta-percha,
can we leave time's gurney in the dust?
By now only the dead know more about
gravity than we do. In reply, a tape
of Little Richard or Jerry Lee comes on
and we're singing, aloud or not, all
pale infarcted pedalers, rowers, treadmillers,
and our hearts are rising in the east.

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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.

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