

# 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 284

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

I'd guess there are lots of people, like me, who sometimes visit places which in memory are hallowed but which, through time, have been changed irreparably. It is a painful experience but it underlines life. Here Carl Little, who lives in Maine, returns to a place like that.

### The Clearing

The sunbox lies in pieces,  
its strips of aluminum foil  
flaking away to the wind,  
tanning platform broken up  
for kindling. Planted grass  
sprouts where the path once  
sharply turned to the left  
circumventing underbrush,  
there the man (a boy then)  
stumbled on beauty's wrath:  
pale sisters yelling him off,  
scrambling for clothes to cover.

All has been cleared, thick  
cat briar raked into piles  
and set ablaze, invincible  
ailanthus stacked for dump.  
All's clear and calm save  
his childhood rushing head-  
long through tearing thickets,  
and the sisters, barely glimpsed  
against reflective flashing,  
laughing after him, then  
lying back to catch  
all the sullen autumn sun they can.

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