

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

I'd guess that nearly everyone is aware that time seems to speed up as we age. Whenever I say that something happened ten years ago, my wife reminds me that it was twenty. Here's a poem about time by the distinguished Maryland poet, Linda Pastan.

Counting Backwards

How did I get so old,
I wonder,
contemplating
my 67th birthday.
Dyslexia smiles:
I'm 76 in fact.

There are places
where at 60 they start
counting backwards;
in Japan
they start again
from one.

But the numbers
hardly matter.
It's the physics
of acceleration I mind,
the way time speeds up
as if it hasn't guessed

the destination—
where look!
I see my mother
and father bearing a cake,
waiting for me
at the starting line.

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