

# AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, THE POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES

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## American Life in Poetry: Column 013

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE

Birthdays, especially those which mark the passage of a decade, are occasions not only for celebration, but for reflection. In “Turning Forty,” Ohio poet Kevin Griffith conveys a confusion of sentiments. The speaker feels a sense of peace at forty, but recalls a more powerful, more confident time in his life.

### Turning Forty

At times it's like there is a small planet  
inside me. And on this planet,  
there are many small wars, yet none  
big enough to make a real difference.  
The major countries—mind and heart—have  
called a truce for now. If this planet had a ruler,  
no one remembers him well. All  
decisions are made by committee.  
Yet there are a few pictures of the old dictator—  
how youthful he looked on his big horse,  
how bright his eyes.  
He was ready to conquer the world.

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