

THE HERON'S NEST — VOLUME 6 (2004)



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FEATURED POEMS

a salmon leaps
Grandpa starts to sing
with a brogue

William Cullen, Jr.

*

first dance —
the moon
in her hair

Sandra Simpson

*

winter rain . . .
pigeons under a bridge
folding in for the night

Michael McClintock

HERON'S NEST AWARD

a salmon leaps
Grandpa starts to sing
with a brogue

William Cullen, Jr.

This delightful poem makes me smile big every time I read it. The scene alone is enough to stir a reader's imagination and evoke emotion. But for an audience that understands the technique of layered meaning in haiku, there is much more to be found beneath the surface.

The first line indicates the season. The word "leap" suggests either summer or autumn, when salmon make their journeys upstream from the sea. The element of cause and effect, often troublesome in haiku, is clearly present in this poem, inseparable from the poet's moment of insight. Yet it is effective here. The core and strength of the haiku do not lie in the implication that a fish leaping caused Grandpa to burst into song, but rather in the discovery of intrinsic, unwritten reasons for this kind of reaction. Cullen uses the juxtaposition of two vibrant images to create an uplifting mood and invite readers to find significance on a deeper level. In my perception, the poem is about the poet's familial relationship, humanity's ancient relationship with salmon, and one man's awareness of his inherent connection with nature.

Salmon are born in freshwater streams or rivers, but they spend part of their lives in the ocean. Swimming upstream from the sea, the adults return to their birthplace to spawn. Various species of this fish have been important to humans worldwide for a very long time. Cro-Magnon people etched pictures of them on tools and weapons

20,000 years ago. As major sources of food and sport, the salmon's annual migrations were anticipated with great excitement in North America and Europe for centuries.

Salmon are famous for their fighting spirit and splendid leaps. They struggle furiously to escape the fisherman's hook and will leap out of the water many times. With immense will and strength, they battle currents and rapids and even leap ten-foot-high waterfalls. It is no accident that their scientific name, *Salmo salar*, means "the leaper."

Due to artificial dams and pollution by humans, their numbers have been declining since the early 1600s. In spite of overfishing, man-made obstacles, and other dangers, this mighty fish continues to survive and herald the season for those who know its ways. All of this fills Grandpa's voice. He spills over with jubilation that this creature's life cycle continues as it has for his kindred for centuries of generations. Able to share this wonderful moment with someone dear to him, he starts to sing--and not merely to sing, but to sing in the brogue of his native Ireland, a sign of deep emotion.

As the New Year begins, The Heron's Nest editors thank William Cullen Jr. for sharing his timely haiku of hope and renewal and of subtle homage to family and ancestral roots.

— Ferris Gilli
January, 2004

POEMS

first snow
a drift of cattle
against the fenceline

Vanessa Proctor

*

the cat and I
walk together
all the fallen leaves

Katherine Cudney

*

woodstove's glow
the scent of oranges
studded with cloves

Connie Donleycott

*

waxwings
exchange rose hips
Christmas morning

H. Gene Murtha

*

a red flush
on the amaryllis bud
New Year's Eve

Pamela Miller Ness

*

falling leaves —
a street person
adjusts her bundles

Mary King

*

echo of an axe —
wood smoke holds
in the hollow

Timothy Hawkes

*

letting out the dog
in the chill of dawn
the drifting stars

Angelee Deodhar

*

along the railing
hollows in the snow
where sparrows sat

Joann Klontz

*

early morning snow
the janitor shaves
at a barbershop sink

Dave Russo

snowstorm over
my grandson puts a seed
in my hand

June Moreau

*

morning walk —
nothing for the stone fence
to stop

Gary Hotham

*

without his wife —
throwing old bread
to the sparrows

Raffael deGruttola

*

passing clouds
the scent of wild thyme
on my fingers

Marili Deandrea

*

red ribbon
on a sweat-lodge pole
fading sunset

Victor Ortiz

*

fiddleheads
in the chill breeze
my fingers curl inwards

Ruth Yarrow

*

scent of blossoms . . .
her house at the end
of the avenue

K. Ramesh

*

tilted gravestone
the weight
of a butterfly

Adelaide Shaw

*

cloud shadows —
an eagle picks over
what the tide left

Cindy Zackowitz

*

twilight . . .
the brush of dune grass
across bare shins

Robert Gilliland

*

a wild rose
inside the caterpillars' tent —
ocean sunrise

George Dorsty

*

giving sound
to the submerged stone wall
my new kayak

Yu Chang

*

faultline
wild eyes of the horses
as we cross

Jerry M. Bryant

*

talk of peace . . .
a fly in the sugar bowl
missing one leg

Kirsty Karkow

*

whispers
on a sultry night
salsa music

Paula Fisher

*

day moon
wind sculpts ripples
on the dunes

Sue Mill

*

thunder
the old windmill
needing grease

Kay Grimnes

*

Sunday
the chorus of sparrows
in a church maple

Christopher Patchel

*

fireworks display
missing
his ooohs and ahhs

Peggy Heinrich

*

low-country creek —
the flow of Spanish moss
from an osprey's talons

Linda Jeannette Ward

*

deep in the forest
deep in the night
cuckoo

Elizabeth Howard

*

Vs of geese —
I look where everyone else
is looking

Jim Kacian

*

Halloween snow
the yeti's
tiny footprints

Ed Markowski

*

Indian summer —
we ride around town
just to be riding

Lenard D. Moore

*

that butterfly
I thought was a dead leaf —
Indian summer

Sabine Miller

*

my eye . . . my mind
led into the woods
by the red sumac

Charles Trumbull

*

Mars watch
the seeded star
of a cross-cut apple
D. Claire Gallagher

*

half moon
the white cat vanishes
into shadow

Allen McGill

*

pink cosmos —
my divorced friend
learns to salsa

Fay Aoyagi

*

full moon . . .
 shadows ripple through
 the field of catnip

Naomi Y. Brown

*

handshake —
our sleeves touched
by the autumn wind

Dietmar Tauchner

*

drifting hawk
soccer players surge
down the field

Richard Alan Bunch

*

my solitary life
a path worn around
the lotus pond

Lynne Steel

*

night winds
rake the pond leaves —
wobbly moon

H. F. Noyes

*

so suddenly winter
the colors
in her pill box

Carolyn Hall

*

a stiffness in the joints
shrunk tomatoes
piled in the turnrow

J. C. Herring

*

rain so heavy
it calms the water
autumn evening

Jim Kacian

*

cold drizzle . . .
one of the sparrows
sits apart

Robert Gilliland

*

frosted windows —
my weight
still on the gym scale

Michael Dylan Welch

*

pond ice
the fixed eyes
of the decoy

Tom Painting

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FEATURED POEMS

low tide —
stones that have dried
among those that haven't

John Stevenson

*

winter dusk
the bare shoulders
of the prostitute

Yvonne Cabalona

*

starry night
a doe's breath
frozen on her fawn

Katherine Cudney

HERON'S NEST AWARD

low tide —
stones that have dried
among those that haven't

John Stevenson

What a surprise to again find myself writing commentary for a poem by John Stevenson. And so soon! Well . . . not such a surprise really. What is it about this man's way with words that time and again tweaks us into perceiving familiar things in fresh and profound ways?

In the role of reader, I stepped into John's shoes (though he may not have been wearing any), to allow the images he presented to stimulate my own thoughts and emotions. In other words, I made the moment my own. As a writer, I'll now draw on my own experiences to express (in the form of a haibun) what I intuit to be the core of John's fine poem.

The sun, having floated free of the horizon, now seems to hover in a clear sky.
The chill of early morning is gone yet there's no one but me on the beach.

I am weary. The last few weeks of work have been exceedingly stressful. As deadlines loomed, equipment broke down. Progress slowed and frustrations were vented. The home front has also been hectic. There's been a steady stream of appointments: doctor, dentist, tax consultant, audiologist, ophthalmologist, and car mechanic. There have been several dinner parties, two poetry readings, and a jam session. Friends just had a baby, another friend has died. For the most part, these are now things of the past. Finally, I have a little time to myself, yet some emotions linger and I feel hollow, filled with echoes. I'm at a low ebb. A breeze has sprung up. The paper mill's pungent smell mingles with those of brine and seaweed. The Klikitat ferry rounds Point Hudson on its way to Whidbey Island. A gull flaps up from a buoy. The bell clangs . . . just once. (C.H.)

low tide —
stones that have dried
among those that haven't (J. S.)

My experience of John's inspired moment is just that, my own. You will come to it differently. Writing a haibun to accompany his poem was illuminating; it increased my empathy for the moment John shares with us. You might enjoy doing the same.

The practice of reading and writing haiku takes us through unending stages of development. With tenacity, we can reach a stage that R. H. Blyth described this way: "At the moment of composition or appreciation, there is no distinction between inner and outer. Life runs so freely between them that we perceive things by introspection, and our experiences of the 'outer' world have the same immediacy, validity, and certainty as have states of pure 'self' consciousness." Anais Nin put it another way: "We don't see the world as *it* is; we see it as *we* are." We may not always be aware of this while writing our own haiku, but if we aren't aware of it while reading other poets' work, we are likely to miss a substantial part of what makes haiku so special. Ideally, the poet, the object of inspiration, and the reader become inseparable.

John Stevenson made it easy for me to take his place on the beach. His sandals fit so well I don't feel them — the sign of an expert craftsman!

— Christopher Herold
March 2024

POEMS

one seed
at a time
winter finch

Tom Painting

*

the slant of sleet —
redwings riding
withered reeds

Robert Gilliland

*

afternoon moon
puddles on the ice
about to freeze

Florence Vilén

*

tree-swaying wind
echoes in the air ducts . . .
the afghan grows

Francine Porad

*

dense snowfall
the different stories
of father's youth

Dietmar Tauchner

*

morning rush hour —
my ankles wrapped
with yellow leaves

Adelaide Shaw

*

call from the hospital
a leaf caught in my wiper
leaves a streak

Joshua Gage

*

funeral over
people and leaves scatter
in the wind

William Cullen, Jr.

*

winter afternoon:
finding the needle
with my finger

Sandra Simpson

*

faded totem pole —
the frog's mouth
filled with snow

Cindy Zackowitz

cold evening —
the smell of chili beans
and cornbread

Lenard D. Moore

*

winter night —
the moon absorbed
by her nightgown

Michael Meyerhofer

*

moonlit beach . . .
the white teeth
on a cowrie shell

Timothy Hawkes

*

fresh breeze —
the weathervane turning
with the gulls

Francis Masat

*

butchering a rabbit
cold rain
on my hat

Nate Haken

*

snow after Shakespeare
a child asks
"Is it true?"

George Dorsty

*

slowly she brushes
her long black hair . . .
snow still falling

Stephen Toft

*

Valentine's Day
eiders displaying
just offshore

Cherie Hunter Day

*

your letter
all of the bananas
too green to eat

Kay Grimnes

*

eviction notice —
a moth ricochets
in the lampshade

Alice Frampton

*

power failure —
the mockingbird
keeps on singing

Emily Romano

*

Early spring warmth —
the cleaning lady shows me
her first tattoo

Rebecca Lilly

*

bonsai hall
we lower
our voices

Yu Chang

*

quiet morning
the garden snails nibble
young radishes

Giselle Maya

*

kingfisher
a scent of willow hangs
in the air

Darrell Byrd

*

morning haze
at the foot of the hill
forsythia

Tomislav Maretic

*

glass harmonica —
a chickadee listens
from the windowsill

Linda Jeannette Ward

*

conversation over
I touch a petal . . .
real blossoms

K. Ramesh

*

our boat drifts
under the bridge
nesting cormorants

Connie Donleycott

*

a willowtip
touches the water . . .
sun-rings

Michael McClintock

*

thunder —
the plover lower
on her eggs

Peter Yovu

*

a molting peacock
settled on the gatepost —
dog days

Elizabeth Howard

*

train delay —
all the ripe blackberries
beyond reach

Matt Morden

*

stepping stones
across a swollen stream —
the Milky Way

Debi Faulkner

*

flowers for his grave
the morning moon
a full circle

Lynne Steel

*

garden clearout
snails cling
to the wheelbarrow

Vanessa Proctor

*

dreary day —
my neighbor takes down
the hummingbird feeder

H. Gene Murtha

*

starry starry night —
unfinished art school paintings
in the dumpster

Michael Dylan Welch

*

row of silver oaks
the first touch of frost
in my hair

Angelee Deodhar

*

rising mist . . .
a heron breaks
the surface calm

J. B. Leong

*

the hambone
sticks out from the soup
last geese

Burnell Lippy

*

year's end —
the median strip vanishes
into a curve

D. Claire Gallagher

*

wolves gnawing
at my dream . . .
singing bowls

Randy M. Brooks

*

New Year's morning —
the circles
of a toy train

D. Claire Gallagher

*

winter doldrums —
my own footprints lead me
into the woods

Cindy Zackowitz

*

December seventh . . .
from the ship's bell
icicles

Scott Mason

*

year's end
well-worn pages
of the Psalms

Christopher Patchel

*

awake at dawn —
a snow mantle muffles
the cock's crow

H. F. Noyes

*

sitting alone . . .
how slowly the
icicles melt

Toshiro Takeshita

*

one mallard
drifts on the satin lake
my mind smooths out

Carmen Sterba

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FEATURED POEMS

sunlight
through a snail shell
and the snail

Katherine Cudney

*

I turn the radio lower
 & lower
 the summer stars

vincent tripi

*

no wind today
the cottonwoods speak
in chickadee

Billie Wilson

HERON'S NEST AWARD

Exceptional haiku strike resounding chords within us. At the time of reading them, we may not be directly aware of the consequences; nevertheless, the way we respond to poems that touch us influences how we subsequently read and write haiku. Many of us have a collection of the works that continue to inspire and drive this organic, ongoing process. Of the haiku in my own trove, none beg explanation. Each one speaks clearly and emphatically for itself. This is such a poem:

sunlight
through a snail shell
and the snail

Katherine Cudney

As is primarily true of outstanding haiku, this month's award winner glows brightly on its own. Each reader will respond according to his or her life experiences without direction from a commentator. Yet, even as I acknowledge that quality, I am grateful for the opportunity to write a tributary review. During the formal exploration of a significant haiku, my appreciation and understanding of it invariably expand.

A haiku is most likely to reverberate when the reader discovers an unexpected association between two different things within it. Ideally, the juxtaposition of independent images produces an effect beyond what the reader first sees or understands. Restricting a poem's focus to a single object or topic frequently precludes discovery on the reader's part. However, I am not acquainted with any editor of English-language haiku who considers the combination of disparate images an absolute prerequisite for haiku. The fact is, poets often achieve success with uncut or lightly cut single-object poems. Discerning editors appreciate the value of such works.

Katherine Cudney's "sunlight" is a notable example. Katherine evokes certain expectations, then gives readers the unexpected. She does this without juxtaposing dissimilar elements. After reading the first two lines, "sunlight / through a snail shell," I imagined that the shell was empty, the mollusk long gone, fulfilling its destiny in the food chain. I might have muttered, "Ho hum," hoping the juxtaposition of the unrelated image that was sure to make up the third line would stir my interest. But lo! The last line gave me the creature, the snail itself, translucent in sunshine. This worked beautifully against my expectations.

Katherine's skillful presentation, focusing on a single topic, summons a balmy, gentle mood with almost mystical overtones. "Snail" is traditionally an all-summer kigo. I perceive the poem as a celebration of those early, warm days when green growing things still look new, when the mild sun is so inviting that even the delicate snail stretches out . . . and a poet can watch it fill with light.

— Ferris Gilli
April 2004

POEMS

spring again
a taste of rust
in the harmonica

Paul Pfleuger, Jr.

*

spring morning
the freshly painted name
on the overpass

Chad Lee Robinson

*

a fallen leaf
rocks back and forth —
the size of an ant

Sue Stanford

*

tidal creek
slowing my pulse
the blue heron's flight

Linda Jeannette Ward

*

funeral day
a black ribbon binds
the wind chimes

Allen McGill

*

Goldfinch
on the topmost birch branch
sunrise

George Swede

*

Manhattan skyline —
I gather egg-shaped stones
by the river

Kuniharu Shimizu

*

day labourers
gathered at the Goodwill —
the dripping awning

Michael Dylan Welch

*

coastal flatland
umbrellas color
a cemetery

Nina Wicker

*

Dad's tie
slips from my neck —
bearded iris

Robert Bauer

*

summer lightning
at the crack of dawn
the temple conch

Angelee Deodhar

*

mare's tail clouds —
Great Aunt pointing out
where stores used to be

D. Claire Gallagher

*

high desert sun
the field of poppies
shining back

Marian Olson

*

afternoon tea
wind chimes mingle
with the river's sound

Vanessa Proctor

*

sultry night
the breeze from a fan
stirs up the gossip

Tomislav Maretic

*

kudzu greening
the iron gate posts —
a buck's velvet antlers

Elizabeth Howard

*

summer pasture
a calf licks dew
from the cattle gate

Dave Russo

*

midday heat
the sheen of fish scales
on the pier

Lenard D. Moore

*

last color
left in the sky
a flicker's call

Ann K. Schwader

*

aftershock
the music box takes up
where it left off

Yvonne Hardenbrook

*

deadfall pine
the beetle does
a head stand

Darrell Byrd

*

sleeping bag —
the distance between me
and the nearest star

Timothy Hawkes

*

oak leaves
curled almost shut
the clocks turned back

Burnell Lippy

*

frost on the windows
the crescent moon's
sharp points

Jack Barry

*

blue frost
a man on the train
with too much to carry

Frances Angela

*

summer night
the soft bottom
of a farm pond

John Stevenson

*

Sunday morning —
nothing comes or goes
but the fog

Cindy Zackowitz

*

corn stubble
rippling ribbons
of blackbirds

Linda Jeannette Ward

*

hurricane alert
a sudden urge to visit
his grave

Nancy S. Young

*

falling leaves . . .
the street preacher
quickens his cadence

Curtis Dunlap

*

snow warning
the bend in the hemlock
furrows her brow

Gary Steinberg

*

New Year's Eve
looking for my sign
among the stars

William Cullen, Jr.

*

spilled milk —
nothing more
pours out

Gary Hotham

*

rain all day —
behind the bead curtain
her smile

Peter Yovu

*

February storm
my ratty blue Volvo
under plum petals

Paul Watsky

*

first snow
today I'll wash
the dishes by hand

Joann Klontz

*

a puff of fog
floats over the falls
New Year's dawn

Pamela Miller Ness

*

winter seclusion
we cover the fridge
with children's drawings

Marcus Larsson

*

Valentine's Day —
a cyclist signals
with a long-stem rose

Robert Gilliland

*

rainy day
my mother singing
an old love song

Yvonne Cabalona

*

millet seeds
sticking to the cardinal's beak —
winter rain

George Dorsty

*

garden sundial
from nine to noon
leftover snow

Robert Gilliland

*

graveside Kaddish
the weight of the stone
in my hand

Carolyn Hall

*

sea cliff
fledgling gannets
face the wind

Tom Painting

*

widow's cottage —
rosemary edges closer
to the door

Beverley George

*

almost spring
humming the notes
of a bird's song

Connie Donleycott

*

April burial . . .
the weeping mother neatens
her son's perfect hair

Michael McClintock

*

her first fossil
the curve of the creek
in springtime

Cherie Hunter Day

*

spring rain
a bruise on my arm
from donating blood

paul m.

*

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a bridge spanning
an invisible lake

Helga Härle

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FEATURED POEMS

city heat –
the grocer spritzes his greens
and little girls

Peter Yovu

*

I am the age
my father never was
spring planting

Katherine Cudney

*

birdsong
my imaginary lover
alive again

Yu Chang

HERON'S NEST AWARD

city heat —
 the grocer spritzes his greens
 and little girls

Peter Yovu

With grit, grime, and traffic sounds stirred in, city heat can be wiltingly oppressive. Every activity requires extra effort. Pavement steams. Energy withers and tempers flare. Amid such discomforts, Peter Yovu captures a refreshing moment of human activity that suggests a whole way of life. A few words are enough to recreate the scene so readers, too, can relish the squeals and laughter.

The grocery is small and makes careful use of every inch of space. Otherwise, it would not survive economically, given the challenges of urban rents and nearby competition. The grocer counts on attractive fruits and vegetables to entice potential customers. Perhaps the produce is displayed under an awning or within a roofed alcove just next to the sidewalk. Keeping it fresh requires close attention. Spraying cool water on cress, romaine, endive, and Boston lettuce is an important part of the grocer's routine. His livelihood depends upon the appeal of those greens.

Almost certainly this store is part of a real neighborhood where people tend to know their grocer. Are the little girls the daughters of patrons or passersby, or are they the grocer's own children? There are several ways to read "his" in line two. It is possible that the poet himself is a passer-by and doesn't know the answers to such questions. Haiku usually leave much unsaid, allowing readers to continue the creative process.

I like to imagine that this might be a family business. Maybe the family lives above the store. That way of life is relatively rare now, but it played a vital role in America's

development. I wonder what accent I might hear if Yovu's grocer spoke, and whether spritzing the girls has become a part of his summer routine. Whatever the circumstances, his gesture is endearing.

The playful redirection of the water provides an eye-opening surprise for the poet and his readers as well as for the little girls. The power of haiku to make us stop and take notice feeds ripples of sympathetic awareness and encourages good will. Lightness and vitality sparkle through the sludge of heat, and human spirit shines.

— Peggy Willis Lyles
May 2004

POEMS

first warm day
a hermit thrush
pumps its tail

H. Gene Murtha

*

spring festival
sunlight haloes
the baby's hair

Connie Donleycott

*

half-blown dandelion
my neighbor's daughter
moves back in

Deborah P. Kolodji

*

Tomb of the Unknown —
bird shadows
in sudden flight

Michael McClintock

*

wet road
a shepherd watching me
slow down

Glenn G. Coats

*

scattered sun —
one chickadee louder
than the rest

Cindy Zackowitz

*

a child bride
bows her head
the whitest peony

Greg Piko

*

nowhere else
but the next flower —
afternoon butterfly

Gary Hotham

*

before & after
paying respects
a smoker in the rain

LeRoy Gorman

*

tripod holes
in the creekside mud —
Yosemite dawn

Michael Dylan Welch

*

white water —
a salmon ignores
the fish ladder

Sabine Miller

*

tranquil afternoon —
nicking moonflower seeds
with a pocketknife

Mark Brooks

*

dry heat
a hawk corkscrews
the sky

Tom Painting

*

sunset
smoke from a fire
beyond the hill

Helga Härle

*

rumble of the sea
against the headlands —
a fray in my cuff

D. Claire Gallagher

*

curtains flutter
the shadows of birds
rising in waves

Carol Raisfeld

*

empty cowshed . . .
a little bird drinks
water from the pail

K. Ramesh

*

just alive
enough for flickers
the old cottonwood

Ann K. Schwader

*

dusk moon
a child's ball bobs
on the ebb tide

Beverley George

*

Cousteau Museum —
on the exotic fish
our family's grin

Francine Porad

*

late summer
the water
in one ear

John Stevenson

*

ikebana
the space
where the lily was

Pamela Miller Ness

*

moonrise
over marshlands —
the hissing geese

CarrieAnn Thunell

*

full moon . . .
shadow on shadow
of prickly pears

Naomi Y. Brown

*

her grave
the names of flowers
escape me

Paul Pfleuger, Jr.

*

rain-soaked turf
echo of a gull's cry
blurs against the hill

Ruth Yarrow

*

a final bulb
the warmth of garden soil
just after sunset

Wanda Cook

*

standing naked
in the moonlight —
the taste of a nashi pear

Sandra Simpson

*

cemetery —
the scent of muskmelon
from the next hill

Chad Lee Robinson

*

hopscotch grid
faintly visible
first stars

Cherie Hunter Day

*

finding Orion . . .
how moonlight shines
in my daughter's hair

Maria Steyn

*

where he drowned
the broad backs
of catfish

Burnell Lippy

*

tending
her grave for spring —
tending my soul

Toshiro Takeshita

*

wind chill —
walking backward
toward home

John O'Connor

*

news of her cancer —
the radiance
of paperwhites

Margaret Chula

*

Lantern Moon —
I guide mother's steps
around the duck pond

Ruth Holzer

*

one purple finch —
the tick of sunflower husks
on first frost

Linda Jeannette Ward

*

bone cold
the lights from shore
lost to fog

Kirsty Karkow

*

lost —
I watch
a falling leaf

Lynne Steel

*

spring-like day
the cat grapples
with a catnip bird

Carolyn Hall

*

blue-sky rain
among countless geese
the tundra swan

Steven Thunell

*

first blossoms
my cell phone
set to vibrate

paul m.

*

Spring thaw . . .
the tracks below
tracks in the snow

vincent tripi

*

the river bubbles
between stepping-stones
an upturned duck

Matthew Paul

*

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a man with a comb-over
changes direction

George Dorsty

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abdomen

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FEATURED POEMS

starlit sky –
I touch a turtle
before it enters the sea

K. Ramesh

*

listening to
the ocean's history –
spring sunset

Fay Aoyagi

*

wet feet
from the same rain –
the elevator stops at our floor

Gary Hotham

HERON'S NEST AWARD

starlit sky –
I touch a turtle
before it enters the sea

K. Ramesh

On a certain night, with a certain tide, and a certain phase of the moon, a turtle comes back to the very same beach where it broke through its own eggshell, climbed up through the sand, and scuttled to water. This female sea turtle has been away for anywhere from one to three decades. Upon returning, she crawls across the sand to a place she somehow knows is above the high-tide line. She may repeat the process from one to six more times throughout spring and summer. Each time, eggs will be laid in a hole scooped by legs better suited for graceful, powerful swimming strokes. When depleted of eggs, she will return to the sea and may swim thousands of miles away from the nesting place. After two or three years, the breeding female will come back to the beach, within a few hundred yards of her previous nests, to continue her ancient line. Miracle and mystery.

K. Ramesh has felt kinship with this process of nature. His touching the huge reptile has not affected the egg laying or the turtle's return path to the sea. She is oblivious to all but completion of reproduction. The writer has added this experience to a part of himself. Touch sends the animal home again, perhaps with his blessing.

When turtles first evolved from other reptiles to live in the sea, the patterns of stars were different; none of our named constellations were even recognizable. Sea turtles swam with some dinosaurs and nested on beaches where others walked and roared in the night. One hundred and eighty million years ago. The seven species in today's oceans range from a hundred pounds to well over a thousand – smaller than their

ancestors yet, for the most part, unchanged in the last ten to twenty million years. The males never return to land, procreation taking place in the ocean. Females must return to the sand.

I admire the effortless language Ramesh has used. In the dark of the moon, the eternity of the stars is invoked. Although he mentions himself, the reader can easily be substituted. The words “touch” and “turtle” have an affecting musical smoothness. The last line portrays his need to touch before this ancient beast disappears in the dark water. The “sea” is an open, well-chosen, end-sound that brings the reader or listener of the haiku back to stars and “sky.” In so few words, this poem sets the stage, shows the action in brief, and leaves me there as a partner on a beach, pondering this infinite mystery of nature. Life will find a way.

K. Ramesh has been witness to a timeless act. I have enjoyed sharing it with him . . . under the stars.

— Paul MacNeil
June, 2004

POEMS

day beginning
lupine
at the end of the wren's flight
D. Claire Gallagher

*

wandering
where there is no path . . .
a flicker's salmon-pink tail

Kay F. Anderson

*

Father's Day
the height
of the lighthouse

Chad Lee Robinson

*

making plans
conch shell pressed
to my ear

Zach Zufall

*

river breeze . . .
the faint clang of a ringer
on the other bank

Robert Gilliland

*

sunlit creek
my discarded walking stick
passes me

William Cullen Jr.

*

a new neighbor —
the feel of sand
on a smooth shell

Francis Masat

*

a surfer's sea
my footprints deep
in the sand

Lynne Steel

*

children running
the aged nun's wimple
flows in the wind

Elizabeth Howard

*

iced tea —
the scent of lemon grass
from her scarf

Angelee Deodhar

*

the heat —
two old men argue
over a parking space

Matt Morden

*

slow drift of the river
splashes of sunlight
from a moorhen's back

Vanessa Proctor

*

whispers . . .
the hummingbird's tongue
ripples the nectar

Connie Donleycott

*

roadhouse
a patched screen door
squeaks us through

Jeanne Marie Booth

*

thieves' moon
salt on tomatoes
from the neighbor's vine

Dave Russo

*

third inning
a shot over the wall
raises a dove

Gary Steinberg

*

a skull no bigger
than my thumbnail
jasmine in bloom

Cherie Hunter Day

*

Chappaquiddick
a water strider
crosses the pond

Kay Grimnes

*

alder stump —
an inch worm arches across
1984

Alice Frampton

*

despite everything
her dog wags its tail
when we meet

Tomislav Maretic

*

drought
the sound of the cat grooming
wakes me

Sue Stanford

*

earthquake
the orange tree drops
its scent

Carolyn Rohrig

*

starlit night —
coolness settles
in my shoes

Richard Balus

*

morning fog
a dark pine shape
sheds its crows

Robert Gilliland

*

leaves on the river —
too old to call myself
orphan

Peter Yovu

*

insomnia
the cat
kneads my hair

Elena Naskova

*

apples picked
and the casket chosen —
lingering sunset

Michael Dylan Welch

*

shooting star . . .
 the young girl wishes
 for a white horse

Emily Romano

*

autumn rain
having just said I love you
into a phone

Sabine Miller

*

still wanting
to fly these feathers
of the dead owl

Elizabeth Searle Lamb

long sermon

snow gathers
on the windowsill

Joshua Gage

*

February thaw
goose droppings slip
into the pond

Connie Post

*

a long moment
before I recognize myself
spring puddle

Jason Sanford Brown

*

first light . . .
the wide-awake hats
in the lettuce field

Michael McClintock

*

Seuss's birthday
a dad and two lads plant
a plant in a planter

Mark Brooks

*

winter beach —
tire tracks turn back
on themselves

Harold Bowes

*

plum petals —
do they cross her path too
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Michael L. Evans

*

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with moonlight

Yvonne Cabalona

*

spring equinox —
the sun shines through
an onion skin

Cindy Zackowitz

*

spring's light green
I can smile
without wanting anything

John Stevenson

Daylight Savings —
the glimmer of a penny

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Lenard D. Moore

*

first star —
a tiny crab climbs out
of the sand castle

Marili Deandrea

*

the mourning dove's head
turns backward so easily
cool of the evening

Burnell Lippy

*

The old magnolia . . .
a southern drawl
to my death poem

vincent tripi

*

deep night sky —
the car radio
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Christopher Patchel

*

spring fever

a new notch
on the tomcat's ear

Ed Markowski

*

incoming tide
a hermit crab wanders
among empty shells

Kirsty Karkow

*

spring dusk
a black sheep
joins the flock

Dietmar Tauchner

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the whiteness of sheets
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Sue Mill

*

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I wonder what Yu Chang
is doing tonight

Joann Klontz

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the heat
two boys take it
outside

Paul Pfleuger, Jr.

*

letter from Iraq
a birdsong spelled
phonetically

Katherine Cudney

*

pear blossoms . . .
the farmer's wife
selects a chicken

Robert Bauer

HERON'S NEST AWARD

the heat
two boys take it
outside

Paul Pfleuger, Jr.

In just seven words, this haiku conjures up myriad images. As the oldest of three brothers and the father of three sons, my mind races through memories in abundance. My most vivid recollection, however, is more recent, and takes place in a work setting. A former manager once attempted to motivate me with a highly public, utterly unprofessional tirade. My response was even-tempered but stern: I assured him that if he ever raised his voice to me again, we would “step outside and settle it like men.” So here are two questions to which most of us colloquial English-speakers already know the answers: what is “it,” and what does it mean to “take it outside”?

Paul Pfleuger helps us to answer this question by establishing the scene with two simple words, “the heat.” We know this right away to be a reference to temperature, but implications abound: among them tension, impatience and discomfort. For this reason, we understand that the “it” in the second line is not a barking dog or a burning frying pan. “It” is a boiling over of emotions that verges on physical confrontation and is often blind to surroundings or circumstances. Combatants do well to move their dispute to a place where it is less likely to cause peripheral damage.

The “two boys” in the second line could be soldiers from a crowded barracks or bar patrons who’ve had a few too many, but I prefer a more literal reading: that two pre-adolescent males have somehow crossed from the land of “playing nice” to the less hospitable terrain of “playing rough.” I recall my uncle dealing with this situation by refusing to intervene in the quarrels between my two cousins, but rather letting them

fight in the backyard until one of them returned to the house crying — usually from a wounded pride more than any physical injury. The “winner” of the fight was then punished by my uncle, the lesson being that no one really wins a fight between brothers.

In these boyhood skirmishes the stakes are usually not very high — more often than not the two participants will not remember what started the disagreement. So while not much may be resolved, tension is released instead of suppressed, and the boys return to being friends again.

I can't help comparing this fraternal struggle to a typical summer weather pattern: heat and humidity build throughout the course of the day, culminating in a violent but brief thunderstorm, after which cooler temperatures prevail. It is this post-storm feeling of refreshment, however fleeting, that remains as I read and re-read Paul Pfleuger's fine haiku.

— Paul David Mena
July 2004

POEMS

moonless night
the first click
of a shark reel

John W. Wisdom

*

fragments of a dream —
starfish left behind
by the flood

Helga Härle

*

seabirds
the wind lifts
my daughter's hair

Deb Baker

*

a greengrocer
lays out her bok choy
scales of the dragon

Greg Piko

*

fading light
a small boy hurls rocks
at the surf

Vanessa Proctor

*

ocean sunrise —
we flip shells
with our toes

Curtis Dunlap

*

ocean swells . . .
cows on a headland,
noses illuminated

Michael McClintock

*

ocean's roar —
all the beachgoers
on their backs

Sabine Miller

*

funeral . . .
I still remember
my first swim

Marili Deandrea

*

wild pond
step by step a turtle
meets the heat

Kirsty Karkow

Great blue heron . . .
but the stillness
after love

vincent tripi

*

midnight
at the railway crossing:
last kiss of summer

Sandra Simpson

*

early morning
the spent lily
falls apart

Pamela Miller Ness

*

family photo
the barn
needs a coat of paint

Carol Purington

*

forever diminishing
our view of the sunset:
the loss of the pine

Tom Tico

*

night rain
no space
between us

Lynne Steel

*

moonlight . . .
the white peonies
all to myself

Naomi Y. Brown

*

hands in prayer
the carpenter has one
shorter finger

Sue Stanford

*

autumn clouds
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“Lou’s dead, dead, dead”

Marilyn Appl Walker

*

dusk
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through cicada cries

William Cullen, Jr.

*

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Elizabeth Searle Lamb

*

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grows uncomfortable

paul m.

*

pond pagoda —
the goose twines wild grasses
around herself

Linda Jeannette Ward

*

snow melt
the tiny dot
of a mountain goat

Kay Grimnes

*

morning pitch
of my grandmother's voice
spring wind

Lenard D. Moore

*

mountain stream
the steady flow
of autumn leaves

Graham Nunn

*

daylight savings —
moon spiders stride
across the lagoon

Elizabeth Howard

*

morning stillness
pianoblack reflecting
parrotgreen

Emily Romano

*

plum blossoms
my dog follows
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Yu Chang

*

swift clouds
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Agnes Eva Savich

*

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Joann Klontz

*

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*

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*

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Dietmar Tauchner

*

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he pedals
faster

Carolyn Hall

*

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talk of bringing back
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John Stevenson

*

insomnia . . .
turning the page
to birdsong

Scott Mason

*

Mother's Day
the clown paints sequined kisses
on her cheek

Gillena Cox

*

rotting cabbage —
a slum child watches clouds
drift away

Allen McGill

*

cobwebs —
the smile on
Buddha's face

K. Ramesh

*

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cloudless sky
the baaing
of penned sheep

Carolyn Hall

*

Hermit thrush . . .
 knowing when it's time
 for me to go

vincent tripi

*

17-year cicadas —
the persistent itching
of my stitches

D. Claire Gallagher

HERON'S NEST AWARD

cloudless sky
the baaing
of penned sheep

Carolyn Hall

This outstanding haiku is also quite unusual. It demonstrates an astonishing balance of intense (heavy) emotions, intellectual musing, and whimsical association. One can approach it from several directions, producing very different feelings with each reading. The literal and figurative interpretations are also beautifully balanced.

Paired images of freedom and confinement produce a heightened tension between exhilaration and sympathy, or even distress. Though the intense interaction between these emotions seems to be at the heart of this poem, so too are the philosophical and light-hearted implications.

From the philosophical standpoint, a cloudless sky can suggest more than freedom. It can suggest purity, faultlessness, wisdom, or enlightenment. Associate these concepts with a popular use of the word "sheep" in reference to people who blindly follow rather than think for themselves. Although "self-penning" behavior is often voluntary, it is commonly accompanied by feigned helplessness and much bleating. Considering this angle, it would seem that Hall's poem is infused with a healthy dollop of social commentary.

In the realm of whimsy, how about "counting sheep?" Have you ever (when anxious or otherwise too preoccupied to fall asleep) been advised to "count sheep?" This antidote for insomnia is intended to short-circuit the overactive mind by refocusing attention on an activity so boring that relaxation naturally occurs. It is then easier to let oneself drift

off into the relative freedom of sleep – a relatively cloudless sky. Meekly, I admit to a vision of freeing those poor penned animals and counting them as they go.

Last, but certainly not least, and with a good measure of sheepishness (haiku guilt) for bringing up this notion . . . what about sheep as clouds? Fluffy white cumulus sheep, and the occasional cumulonimbus? The sky is cloudless. Surely this is because the clouds have been herded down from the heavens into the confines of a pen. Set free, they'll drift up and away, filling the sky again. Hmmm . . . could it possibly be that Carolyn Hall mulled over such fantasies too? I'd bet on it. Maybe she's still laughing as she tries to get the tongue out of her cheek.

I don't doubt that there are other possible readings. I know of another fanciful one, but I think I'll leave you to find it, if you haven't already.

On a technical note (and in hopes of steering away from my suggesting a connotation that involves a simile – perish the thought!), the hard “c” sounds in the first line enhance a sense of clarity – a crystalline vision. The sounds of the second line add to a feel of mindless helplessness. Repeated “p” sounds in the final line add to the feeling of restriction.

Many thanks to Carolyn Hall for sharing this well-wrought, thoroughly entertaining haiku.

– Christopher Herold
August 2004

POEMS

sagging cedar rail . . .
wind works its way
through the bluestem

Robert Gilliland

*

gathering heat —
my throat
no longer firm

Yvonne Cabalona

*

deadlines . . .
an ice cream truck's song
in the distance

Christopher Patchel

*

Gettysburg
traffic backed up
to the interstate

Tom Painting

*

campfire circle
a friend's back
leans against mine

Kay F. Anderson

*

above the cries of
"hey, batter, batter"
a meadowlark

Mary Lee McClure

*

songwriter's lunchbreak —
a dishrag muffles
the windchimes

Sabine Miller

*

swelter
a cat watches traffic
from the long grass

Joshua Gage

*

summer grasses
the Lakota sings
of a white buffalo

Chad Lee Robinson

*

first firefly
my wife and I share
our fortunes

Shimi

*

last kiss . . .
the smell of hay
in her hair

Dietmar Tauchner

*

Pleiades at dawn —
his hand comes to rest
on the small of my back

Jeanne Emrich

*

long train journey —
a man brings on
the smell of autumn

Stephen Toft

*

new moon
the possum's posthumous
grin

Stephen Amor

*

raindrops
snaking down the pine bark —
his rough hands

Paula Fisher

*

meteor shower —
digging my toes deeper
into the sand

Vanessa Proctor

*

morning train —
a few notes of birdsong
through the closing door

Timothy Hawkes

*

home
for Dad's funeral —
not the same quiet in the kitchen

Gary Hotham

*

new patterns
on the wallpaper —
autumn dawn

Graham Nunn

*

lingering fog —
a tent caterpillar
drops out

Peter Yovu

*

midday hush
the rasp of a mallard
calling his mate

Ray Rasmussen

*

a heart-shaped pebble
if you hold it just right —
our first days apart

Katherine Cudney

*

winter rain . . .
who am I
to the cat?

Paul Pfleuger, Jr.

*

Darkening sky
snowflakes soundless
against the garden chime

Carol Purington

*

winter evening —
my newly divorced friend
hogs the cat

Sandra Simpson

*

a magnolia leaf
falls between us
tenor sax

Lenard D. Moore

*

restless pigeons —
gentle words from a clerk
bring a hint of tears

William J. Higginson

*

dead hamster —
my son invents
a religion

George Dorsty

*

Cold winter night
the scent from fireplaces
all the way home

Tom Tico

*

lunar eclipse
the primal beat of techno
from a passing car

Jeffrey Winke

*

tipping back
my whiskey glass:
the moon

Nate Haken

*

lower and higher
higher but not sure
first spring peeper

Bruce Ross

*

an IV tube
caught in sunlight
daffodils

Allen McGill

*

spring fever
mule ears gee and haw
above the pickup's slats

Elizabeth Howard

*

passing laundry
between a flutter of sheets . . .
bob bob white

Linda Jeannette Ward

*

making way
for the power lines —
a divided maple

Kirsty Karkow

*

the smell
of root-bearing earth . . .
these restless hands

Carmen Sterba

*

rustle of wind
among the rhododendrons
feather-fluffing wren

Francine Porad

*

just as I decide
what kind of bird it is —
its call

Cindy Zackowitz

*

sweltering day —
little grasshoppers jump
ahead of the scythe

Jasminka Nadaskic Diordievic

*

such heat
the weight
of the cat's breath

Pamela Miller Ness

*

storm front
a splinter of obsidian
between my fingers

Victor Ortiz

*

lengthening shadows
a stray dog
joins the picnic

paul m.

*

beach stones
the sun's warmth
fills my hand

Connie Donleycott

*

twilight
a yellow canoe
drifts across the bay

Beverley George

*

sultry day
the time it takes
to detach a tick

Joann Klontz

*

class reunion
everybody loved
my wife

John Stevenson

*

reunion photo
my long shadow
joins the family

Charlie Close

*

harbor sunset —
lovers stroll
in reflected light

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*

snap of a twig
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H. Gene Murtha

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FEATURED POEMS

weathered bridge
everything but the moon
drifting downstream

Rick Tarquinio

*

pink sky
a woman sings
to her laundry

Sabine Miller

*

fierce bull . . .
a little bird
on the hump

K. Ramesh

HERON'S NEST AWARD

weathered bridge
 everything but the moon
 drifting downstream

Rick Tarquinio

Only rarely does a haiku hold me as this one has. How could such a tranquil depiction of an ordinary experience jolt me to my core? As a quiet river contains depths not divined by the casual observer, so Rick Tarquinio's poem contains depth of meaning beyond the immediate imagery – for those readers who will “drop the plumb.”

At first reading, the haiku evokes a peaceful scene, and its alluring physicality draws me in. Unmodified, the moon traditionally denotes a full autumn moon. I have a sense of early autumn, when days are still warm, and the hours between sunset and sunrise only hint at the nearness of winter. It is night. I imagine a thick wooden rail, worn smooth by decades of sun, wind, and rain. The author leans against it, absorbing the small dramas that play around him. The rise and fall of insect songs. The steady lap of water against piles. Within the nearby woods, herons squabble over roosting spots. Things drift downstream in the current of the wide, slow river . . . a bit of paper, a small tree branch, a boat with two lovers who don't bother to row; thin, lacy cloud reflections sliding over and past the moon. In my bystander's role, I think dreamily, “Everything . . . drifting downstream,” and then, I whisper “Ohh!” Because I get it.

Most exceptional haiku share two basic characteristics: (1) They resonate on more than one level; (2) Much or all of their resonance lies in what they imply, not in what they say. By experiencing the instant of insight, I open another door into “weathered bridge” and find a deeper level of resonance. Tarquinio's haiku is the consummate metaphor for the way I sometimes view my life.

This poet writes without excess; he completes the poem with nothing to spare.

Tarquinio doesn't mention time or age, yet he begins with a word that suggests the passing of years, that many seasons have come and gone since travelers began crossing here. A bridge is a structure providing passage over a gap; this bridge also connotes a passage over time. The second and third lines are a vivid reminder that while countless things may endure longer than humanity, the effects of time are ceaseless. The phrase "everything but the moon" typifies the changes that occur in the course of one's life. The words "drifting downstream" signal that change is the only constant, that perceived constancies create only an illusion of permanence. Things and people do drift away from us, or we from them—youth, hometowns, beliefs, and abilities; friends and family; landmarks of life as well as simple irritants and pleasures. One way or another, "everything but the moon/drifts downstream."

Having reached this present state of mind, I reflect on my life's journey. Not for the first time, I start to dwell on regrets, to list all the things I should have done better, to bemoan my often unwise use of precious years. But here is Tarquinio's beautiful haiku, an artesian well of epiphanies, and it won't let me continue this indulgence of self-rebuke. Because after all, there is the moon, full and bright and as permanent as anything we will ever know; and the river flows under the bridge before it reaches the sea. Sometimes, that's all we need to know.

— Ferris Gilli
September 2004

POEMS

heather in bloom —
between wind gusts
the sound of my pen

Katie Cameron

*

country store —
two old-timers whittle
over world affairs

Curtis Dunlap

*

first day of school
the line of children
at the pencil sharpener

Michael Ketchek

*

autumn sun
the comfort
of old blue jeans

Timothy Hawkes

*

thinning bones —
craters darken
the harvest moon

Cherie Hunter Day

*

rain today
a foot tapping
of its own accord

paul m.

*

summer's end
a flatbed's loose chain
rattles down the road

Chad Lee Robinson

*

17 years
how carelessly she flicks off
the cicada

Yu Chang

*

last of the sunlight
cows bounding
downhill

Carolyn Hall

*

a keeper moon . . .
the old fisherman
lets out more line

George Dorsty

bird call . . . insect . . .
who is it wakes me
in the deepest dark?

Elizabeth Searle Lamb

*

morning fog
a carpenter calls
for a 2 x 4

Joann Klontz

*

leaves turning —
the toboggan hanging
in the dark garage

Michael Dylan Welch

*

ebb tide
the other tracks in the sand
also mine

Janelle Barrera

*

clothesline —
ballet tights frozen
in fifth position

Allen McGill

*

half-empty bed
I try to recall
his faults

Peggy Heinrich

*

an early chill —
the toolshed door
pounds on its latch

Francis Masat

*

one maple leaf . . .
end over end on the sand
without a trace

William J. Higginson

*

gliding hawk
balancing the light
on stiffened wings

Emily Romano

*

quitting time
snowflakes blend
with the crowd

Agnes Eva Savich

*

black pond
swallowing snowflakes
a goose dips her beak

Jack Barry

*

ice melted —
she reads Garcia Marquez
under a cat

Shimi

*

spring wind
the sprinter dashes
the other way

Lenard D. Moore

*

The evening star . . .
 our flower-viewing faces
 begin to change

vincent tripi

*

twilit city
creek pebbles
in my shoe

Paul Pfleuger, Jr.

*

silent spring —
a Cooper's hawk
stalking the bushes

Elizabeth Howard

*

bilingual children
honey bees move
into the bird house

Francine Porad

*

cloudless sky —
in Mayan nine words
for the color blue

Lynne Steel

*

steel band at twilight —
a single file of ducklings
crosses the bay

Barry George

*

night heat —
the rising scent
of mosquito repellant

Cindy Zackowitz

*

first light
my brow breaking
a strand of web

Tom Tico

*

hard paddling
the wind
dries my teeth

John Stevenson

*

sun-warmed patio
the bird with one foot
bellies down

Kay F. Anderson

*

his small "please"
a burial procession
for the fish

Katherine Cudney

*

remaining heat
the frayed edge
of a salesman's tie

paul m.

*

summer solstice —
insect eggs swell
in the alder leaves

Cindy Zackowitz

*

harsh sun
a child watches fishermen
club eels

Frances Angela

*

summer solstice
the bright spaces between
long tree shadows

Connie Donleycott

*

a quiet afternoon —
the pinwheel twirls
only halfway

Adelaide B. Shaw

*

boys play past dusk
the smell of water
from a garden hose

Beth Vieira

*

midsummer's eve —
even the terrifying mongrel
decorated with flowers

Jörgen Johansson

*

silence after thunder
a damselfly's
still wings

Jack Barry

*

morning light
each cattle egret
selects its cow

Beverley George

*

my daughter skips off —
in a drying clam shell
a color I couldn't name

Peter Yovu

*

summer vacation
the bumpy ride
back home

Lenard D. Moore

*

evening thunder
magpies scold something
at the windmill

Darrell Byrd

*

campgrounds
a snail shell
in our spot

William Cullen, Jr.

*

honeymoon —
the undertow pulls the sand
from beneath my foot

Helen Russell

*

map unfolded
an earwig scurries
from main roads

LeRoy Gorman

*

the mother quail
keeps calling her lost chick
summer twilight

Naomi Y. Brown

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FEATURED POEMS

hot afternoon
the squeak of my hands
on my daughter's coffin

Lenard D. Moore

*

eyes closed
while listening to her poem
the summer wind

Lenard D. Moore

*

first frost —
the thrush brings a snail
to the anvil stone

Sara Winteridge

*

winter rain
the shape of shoulder blades
through her shawl

Burnell Lippy

HERON'S NEST AWARD

hot afternoon
the squeak of my hands
on my daughter's coffin

Lenard D. Moore

*

eyes closed
while listening to her poem
the summer wind

Lenard D. Moore

Two summer poems share this month's Heron's Nest Award. Infused with raw sorrow, they exemplify compression and restraint. Each is pure and true. Each moves the editors to profound respect for poet Lenard D. Moore and expanded appreciation of the power of literal images to communicate deep feeling and significant human experience.

The first haiku focuses on a thin, high-pitched sound like no other. Produced by the friction of sweaty hands over the smooth, hard surface of the coffin, it hurts the ears and pierces the heart. The father's hands continue to provide and protect, but they cannot alter the terrible fact of his daughter's death. The seasonal reference is familiar and authentic. In context, it underscores the clear truth that this death is out of season and out of sequence. The squeak reaches beyond words to become a primal cry of pain and smallness.

No reader can go the full distance into this experience with the poet. The intense sadness is uniquely his. The haiku lets us see it and hear it and leaves us with awed admiration for his endurance and his consummate mastery of haiku expression. I

believe “hot afternoon” stands well with the finest poetry of loss in all literature, and I encourage teachers and scholars to test that judgment.

The second award-winner is as lyrical as the first is discordant. Though less experienced and accomplished than her father, the late Maiisha Moore was a poet, too, and I believe it is her poem Lenard is listening to. I can easily imagine doing that with him. We concentrate on her words and feelings, closing our eyes to shut out distractions. The summer wind touches us, and this time the physical sensation is a blessing consonant with what we hear and feel. One poet participates in the spirit of another, and all are linked to the on-going phenomena of the physical world.

The haiku poet’s work is exacting. He must participate fully in human experience and capture deeply felt moments of that experience in simple words, without comment or interpretation. Lenard D. Moore’s “hot afternoon” and “eyes closed” are superb products of haiku discipline. We are grateful for first rights to publish them.

– Peggy Willis Lyles
October 2004

POEMS

The downpour ends . . .
much discussion inside
the balsam fir

George Swede

*

rumors —
a hillside
of kudzu

Marilynn Appl Walker

*

back to school
the bitter end
of the cucumber

Timothy Hawkes

*

family album —
the cherry branches in bloom
now bare

Sonia Cristina Coman

*

the sheep too
were always here
standing stones

Ann K. Schwader

*

evening star
the skiff's wake whispers
in the reeds

Robert Gilliland

*

still some song
in the four strings left —
summer's end

Paul Pfleuger, Jr.

*

Sabbath morning
the transfigured face
of the shaped-note singer

Mitzi Trout

*

the day after
the family reunion
visiting graves

Tom Tico

*

earthquake season —
the moth orchid
begins to flutter

Sandra Simpson

*

autumn colors
seeping into the mist —
water down my collar

Adelaide Shaw

*

funeral day
his old umbrella
won't open

Allen McGill

*

winter twilight
an arc of crows
echoes the mountain

Graham Nunn

*

dwindling fire —
our conversation shifts
to death

Michael Dylan Welch

*

midnight stars —
the kitten warm
in my sweater

Lynne Steel

*

chapel in the rain —
the lift of white doves
against blackened stones

Emily Romano

*

winter twilight
the shadowed hill
beyond the hill

Beverley George

*

her placenta
beneath an oak sapling
first star

Victor Ortiz

*

prison vigil
cold gusts keep blowing out
the candles

William Cullen, Jr.

*

all the frogs
in the snakes' aquarium
staring at the sun

Scott Metz

*

snow glare —
the scent of lotion
on a pair of sunglasses

John Stevenson

*

hazy dawn
a skunk's white stripe
blends with the daisies

Elizabeth Howard

*

Chinese New Year —
daring to call my sister
a monkey

Helen Buckingham

*

miles of beach . . .
the sudden urge
to run

Connie Donleycott

*

walking off anger . . .
Johnny-jump-ups
exactly mid-path

Helen Russell

*

almost spring
noseprints
on every window

Charlie Close

*

sunbeams
the toddler sticks his finger
in a daffodil

Sabine Miller

*

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a sandpiper glides by
on blurred legs

Peter Yovu

*

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dog-toothed violets
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Stephen Engleman

*

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Gary Hotham

*

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from the flooded field
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*

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*

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*

singing gondolier
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fixed smiles

Kay Grimnes

*

the long day —
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*

Berlin Wall
a smooth stone
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H. Gene Murtha

*

doctor's waiting room —
each patient examined
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Mike Blottenberger

*

still alive!
a distant neighbor's
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sunset moon
she pops seafoth bubbles
with her lips

Linda Jeannette Ward

*

After the burial
my eyes on the shadows
of everything

George Swede

*

one of the stumps
turns in the fire
All Hallow's Eve

Burnell Lippy

HERON'S NEST AWARD

sunset moon
 she pops seafoth bubbles
 with her lips

Linda Jeannette Ward

A Japanese acquaintance, discussing haiku key words with me, once used the phrase: "the killing word." His meaning was clear, his wording probably translated well. Such a word is one that just makes it all happen, a special word, a perfect, inspired "bon mot." To me, the killing word in Linda Jeannette Ward's poem is "seafoth." Not only beautiful to say, it conjures up so many images. Because of it, "she" is placed in water, salt water, with breaking waves coming ashore. Ordinarily, "seafoth" would be two words. As editor or reader, I do not mind the minor coining of a word such as this. Rather, this is a gorgeous bit of wordsmithing. As a compound modifier, it would properly have been hyphenated: "sea-froth bubbles." It seems much cleaner and smoother as one word.

The poem's order of delivery is carefully structured. First shown are the time of day and the fat, rising moon. We can see sunset colors in the sky and on the water. Is there also a moonpath?

Next the reader is quickly loaded up with implications from the second line: a woman bending to the top of a spent wave; or, a woman in the water at head level with the surf; a beach setting and a time of year that allows a sunset swim. This seems either set in the tropics or in a warm season if at higher latitudes. Popping bubbles could be a game, even a child's act, but then the closing line gives us the lips. Sure, it still could be a kid playing. That notion, however, is overridden by the moon, the sunset, the gender of the popper, and those lips, oh my! Now, many more scenarios can be imagined. "She"

could even be alone, but with so many implications of romance, I doubt it — I hope not. I do not need to know.

The poem doesn't seem either overfull or clipped. It is, however, full of images. In fine haiku manner, words lead to much more. It begins and ends with an "s." The poem, examined closely, has a lot of "s" sounds. Languid slowness. The final "t" of sunset is not emphasized, and the "p" of pop is slowed and smoothed by the word's own "s." How slow to say are moon, seafoth, bubbles, and lips? One cannot rush this wording.

Linda has tied the whole together in several ways. Roundness repeats with the sun, moon, bubbles, and the shape of lips. The haiku contains different kinds of motion implied as well as in the immediate imagery: the sun sets, the moon rises, waves ebb and flow, lips pop one bubble, and another. Popping a balloon with a pin? That is an interruption. But a seafoth bubble popped with lips is soundless and sensual.

Thank you, Linda. Your writing is full of life, of undercurrents unstated. This poem doesn't end, it must be read again and again. I can enter this haiku and share and project. Are those coconuts on the beach under the palms, right next to the towels and swimsuits?

The haiku could be about a playful cavort, an enticement to "her" lover, or just joie de vivre. It could be a honeymoon, or a second honeymoon. I find a sunset swim, a big moon, a kiss, the salty taste of that kiss! Dear Reader, how about you?

— Paul MacNeil
November 2004

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ocean fog
the mumble of eiders
gathered offshore

Kirsty Karkow

*

apple-picking day
the faded pattern
of Grandma's blouse

Lynne Steel

*

All Souls' Day
a child tries to catch
the falling leaves

William Cullen, Jr.

*

near dark —
the grand hotel drips
long after the rain

Gary Hotham

*

long winter —
prayer bundles sway
in the cedars

Billie Wilson

*

foggy morning —
tipping his hat
to the scarecrow

Sandra Simpson

*

autumn dusk
a girl with pigtails milking
the black angus

Lenard D. Moore

*

wind and rain
the candle's smoky flicker
as we speak of ghosts

Mitzi Trout

*

a solitary night
this quiet communion
with fireplace flames

Tom Tico

*

field of gravestones
not one tree to block
the sweeping wind

Francine Porad

*

winter doldrums
up to her elbows
in potting soil

Pamela Miller Ness

*

broken iris
every vase
looks wrong

Ann K. Schwader

*

scent of lilacs
the chalk ledge full
of small pieces

Charlie Close

*

mosquitoes
the slap of feet
in the dojo

Kay Grimnes

*

meditation —
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hits the skylight

Maria Tadd

*

snowcaps
clouds of breath
above the herd

Katherine Cudney

*

sunshine
through the river's haze
white butterflies

Barry George

*

alley windows
laundry and gossip
pass back and forth

Allen McGill

*

a spider crawls
from the bonsai pot —
cello notes

Cindy Zackowitz

*

a new day
 how to translate
this talk of crows

Elizabeth Searle Lamb

*

soft rain
an earthworm
stretches its pink

Marilyn Appl Walker

*

silvered leaves
the sound of a jet
inside the rain

Peter Yovu

*

just long enough
to leave an impression
dragonfly

Yu Chang

*

rejection letter
I walk at dawn
past barking dogs

Margarita Engle

*

blazing heat
a homeless woman
wishes me a good day

Frances Angela

*

summer morning —
the mockingbird sings
a song from my youth

Rick Tarquinio

*

the damp pavement
around each puddle . . .
summer dusk

John Stevenson

*

moonless night
a ladybug husk
down the drain

Shimi

*

blue sky morning —
sweeping a cobweb
off the clothesline

Connie Donleycott

*

cliff dust
cicadas saw
through the heat

Agnes Eva Savich

*

harvest time
watermelons tossed
man to man

Joann Klontz

*

farmers' market
the snap of a green bean
over traffic noise

Charles Trumbull

*

new moon —
one white chick strays
from the broody hen

Nancy Stewart Smith

*

sultry day
peaches packed at the bottom
of the grocery bag

Carolyn Hall

*

bright estuary . . .
the red jellyfish float in
with the tide

Bruce Ross

*

Labor Day
the plowboy pauses
for a photo

H. Gene Murtha

*

no crop this season —
the deep wrinkles
in his neck

Graham Nunn

*

roadside stand
the cold skin
of the last pear

paul m.

*

end of vacation
palmetto husk dolls
with slanted smiles

Ariel Lambert

*

war news . . .
an old peasant talks to
the persimmon tree

Marili Deandrea

*

home from vacation . . .
houseflies find
the open door

Ed Markowski

*

a new school year —
one long blast
of the bus driver's horn

Curtis Dunlap

*

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Cherie Hunter Day

*

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should I complain about my life
like Hisajo?

Fay Aoyagi

*

she lets go of my hand . . .
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without a constellation

Chad Lee Robinson

*

family reunion . . .
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Angelee Deodhar

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winter stars
who else sits up
with a sick child?

Joann Klontz

*

crackling beach fire —
we hum in place of words
we can't recall

Michael Dylan Welch

*

Flooded plain —
fence tops show which water
belongs to whom

George Swede

HERON'S NEST AWARD

winter stars
 who else sits up
 with a sick child?

Joann Klontz

No season evokes such a profound sense of austerity and loneliness as winter. And no life event exacerbates one's sense of "me-against-the-world" as much as a sick child.

Think about it: all of the trees are bare and trembling in the raw breeze. What was once a lush, green lawn is now a gray-white tarp of hardened snow. The vibrant streetlife of the city has retreated to gas-powered fireplaces and cable television reruns. Life has become an indoor sport.

When a child becomes sick, however, the sporting life is tagged out at home plate. Parents run out of arms and legs very quickly. Forget the marathon you ran three years ago — can you pace the length of a two-bedroom apartment for six hours straight? I think of this passage from one of my favorite poems, "Marriage," by Gregory Corso: "I am sleepless, worn, / up for nights, head bowed against a quiet window, the past behind me, / finding myself in the most common of situations a trembling man."¹ Yes, this is a common situation, but who is sharing it with me at this, my darkest hour?

When a haiku poet is devoid of inspiration, he or she needs only to look to the sky. Whether the moon waxes or wanes, shooting stars silently arc above us, or clouds render the heavens a featureless expanse of utter nothingness, it is often our only

¹ Excerpt from "Marriage" by Gregory Corso, originally published in *The Happy Birthday of Death*. Copyright © 1960 by New Directions Publishing Corporation.

consistent Muse. Winter stars are all the more poignant in their contrast with the dark sky, a contrast that heightens with each sleepless hour.

Joann Klontz has looked to the winter stars for both inspiration and solace. They cannot cradle a crying child or soothe a feverish face, but they offer an image of constancy in a world that seems to be spiraling out of control. They provide a deep sense of connectedness which overcomes all obstacles and all distances—our imaginations' assembly of the stars into constellations, the uniquely intimate bond of mother and child, and ultimately the connectedness of all beings who share the act of caring. When no one else shows up for the midnight watch, the stars stand silent vigil with those who long for daylight.

— Paul David Mena
December 2004

POEMS

A killing frost —
everything i couldn't write
about chrysanthemums

vincent tripi

*

out of work —
the silverberry hedge
in a growth spurt

Cherie Hunter Day

*

cracked sidewalk
a young maple
branches out

Laryalee Fraser

*

fall breeze
a wasp struggles
with the screen door

Darrell Byrd

*

jays at the feeder
I remember the names
of high school bullies

Christopher Herold

*

fallen apple —
the bruise from the earth
cut off

Gary Hotham

*

deep autumn
a fish slides down
the cormorant's throat

Ferris Gilli

*

autumn rain
settled
in my ways

John Stevenson

*

a path opens
through the pigeons —
wet maple leaves

William Cullen, Jr.

*

all its leaves fallen —
a tree we were
forbidden to climb

paul m.

*

year's end
the bartender
blocks my reflection

Tom Painting

*

winter day —
too tired to make the clouds
anything but clouds

Lane Parker

*

first blossoms
a breeze shifts something
in each room

Burnell Lippy

*

robins outside —
the piano tuner
works on middle C

Charlie Close

*

cycling uphill —
the butterfly
passes me

Jason Sanford Brown

*

chemotherapy
her children's names
tattooed on her shoulder

Victor Ortiz

*

doe and yearling
fade into the woods
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Grant D. Savage

*

spring morning
the children's game
of being quiet

Marcus Larsson

*

sunny morning —
his basket full
of spinning pinwheels

K. Ramesh

*

cherry blossom hill . . .
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where there is no path

Scott Metz

*

warm afternoon
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Deborah Baker

*

sweet nothings . . .
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*

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Ariel Lambert

*

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Marilyn Appl Walker

*

first day of school
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*

solar eclipse
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*

moonless night —
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the hoot of an owl

Angelee Deodhar

*

billowing curtains —
an unexpected memory
of Grandma's parakeet

D. Claire Gallagher

*

summer's end
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behind a web

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*

fall colors —
my youngest son's
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*

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Kirsty Karkow

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lonely walk
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Grzegorz Sionkowski

*

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*

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Paul MacNeil

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Cindy Zackowitz

*

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returning home
to shadows

Helen Buckingham

*

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settle in

Sandra Simpson

*

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Joshua Gage

*

a slow wasp —
the lamb on the spit
makes another turn

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*

War Memorial
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*

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VALENTINE AWARDS, 2004

OVERVIEW

I'll begin by restating what I've said in previous years, that there are three prime purposes for our annual Valentine Awards. The first is to honor poets who have gifted *Heron's Nest* readers with exceptionally powerful work. The images, moods, and emotions in their haiku continue to resonate long after reading them. The second purpose is to provide an opportunity to help shape the evolution of haiku beyond individual publishing efforts. Poems voted to be favorites serve as guiding lights for poets and editors alike. Haiku included in the Valentine Awards issue exemplify qualities that are generally held by our readers to be the most desirable. The third purpose goes along with the second. A careful review of a given volume of *The Heron's Nest* (with the intention of selecting favorite haiku) produces valuable insights to the craft.

All year long we receive poems from around the world. We probably read close to 13,000 poems during 2003, but seriously considered only about one in twenty. Of those 3,000 or so true contenders, we accepted about one in five. Of the 636 poems in Volume V, 54% received at least one vote. These figures are presented in order to illustrate a point. We feel that all poems that have been accepted into *The Heron's Nest* are praiseworthy.

The editors chose 36 poems (three per month) to be Editors' Choices. That's only one quarter of one percent of the approximately 13,000 poems submitted to us. Of those 36, the twelve *Heron's Nest* Award poems constitute one tenth of one percent of all poems submitted. Amazing odds! Again this year, the results of Valentine Award voting clearly affirm that readers and editors agree in feeling that certain poems stand

out from the rest! We are happy to tell you that, of the twelve *Heron's Nest* Award winners, eleven were voted into the top twelve places.

The Heron's Nest continues to consist of a healthy balance between poets from North America and those from other parts of the world. Volume V includes work from poets who live in 28 countries and in 33 of the states within the United States. We are also pleased with the balance of new voices to those of long-time contributors. Of the 166 poets represented in 2003, 30% of them were new to *The Heron's Nest*. It is also a great pleasure to share for the first time the voices of ten poets who have been writing for many years and whose names are familiar to many of us.

Far more voters turned out for the fifth annual Valentine Awards than ever before. We thank all of you who took the time to select your favorite poems. Choosing only ten from 636 is a difficult challenge. Fortunately it appears to have been a richly rewarding process as well. Along with poems selected, many of you sent comments about your voting experiences. We very much appreciate such responses and have decided, with permission, to share some of them. You'll find "Notes from Voters" at the end of the issue.

We value the contributions of everyone who has appeared in *The Heron's Nest* and thoroughly enjoy corresponding with you, encouraging you, and learning from you. You have shared with us a wealth of deeply resonant moments, expressed with great skill. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to share your haiku with the world. Those of you who appear in the Valentine Awards issue have achieved something extra special. It is a great pleasure to honor you.

— Christopher Herold

READERS' CHOICE – POET OF THE YEAR

Poet of the Year: John Stevenson

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your verdict and your service. John Stevenson is a habitual writer of fine haiku. Evidence is abundant: John sends poems to his *Heron's Nest* editor every month (hasn't missed for years); he habitually carries small dime-store notebooks; he is seen to sketch or write haiku daily; and he will probably admit to even thinking in haiku. After a ginko with John, in the form of a mountain climb, Yu Chang wrote this haiku for a group of friends [quoted with permission]:

lichened pine
my poet friend asks
for a pencil

However, mere frequency or volume of composition is no guarantee of haiku success. Stevenson possesses both a wordsmith's skill and a poet's eye for the natural world. He knows the alga and fungus of lichen as indeed he knows the pine. Even if some of John's poems might look irregular, reading them aloud reveals purposeful emphasis of a word or a line break. His chosen words are the right ones and they appear in the right places.

John is able to see himself in the larger world and appears in the first person without pointing an egoistic finger at himself. There's an awareness of the poet's place; it is not a central place.

autumn wind
the leaves are going
where I'm going

moths on the door
I close
and lock

snowy night
sometimes you can't be
quiet enough

Much of his work shows awareness of season and utilizes an intuitive juxtaposition.

a few leaves
left on the tree
we have our talk

hope
without knowing what for
autumn colors

trial separation
ice distends
the rain gutters

walking home from church
sun on the other side
of my face

Mother's Day
that first breath of air
outside the door

Not to forget another hallmark of John's poetic voice, here are examples of a certain bemused twinkle of irony:

signs of spring
the expiration date
on fat-free milk

May sun
I'm the one
the puppy comes to

For the second year in a row, John Stevenson was judged “Poet of the Year” by his peers, the readers and poets of *The Heron's Nest*. There is obvious agreement among the Editors and with these Nesters. This past year, we published 17 of his haiku, and 15 were supported by the voters. Bravo to John! He is successful by both measures. It is my special pleasure to congratulate such an excellent haiku poet as John Stevenson.

— Paul MacNeil

READERS' CHOICE – POEM OF THE YEAR

creak of the swing . . .
my feet still reach
the sky

Connie Donleycott

From the first reading many months ago, Connie Donleycott's "creak of the swing" has nourished my spirit. It becomes increasingly expansive and satisfying over time, holding true and inviting new layers of association.

The long "e" sounds creak their way to what is surely a clear spring sky. Subliminally the sound suggests bones that have known the rigors of a good number of winters. That is all the more reason for exuberance as the swing rises and youthful pleasure returns. The long "i" rhyme of "my" and "sky" melds self and infinite space, personalizing the limitless possibilities the haiku celebrates.

Maybe the poem harks back to earliest childhood when a loving parent pushed the swing and encouraged Connie to see her feet "reach the sky." Maybe she formed the phrase later on when she could control the motion herself, pushing against the ground and then lifting her legs to arc higher as she gained strength and skill, experiencing the wonder of the universe and of her own achievement. Maybe language has only recently joined the sensation, bringing with it the symbolism of joyful capacity and continuing potential. Whatever their origin, the words are just right.

As a rule of thumb, first-person pronouns in haiku require great skill. They can overemphasize the ego or close readers out of the experience described. On both counts the opposite is true here. Gentle humor infuses the poem, exposing and

universalizing the self-test. Success and delight bring the reader right in, first with a cheer of “Go, Connie!” and then with a compulsion to swing along.

The haiku rocks some paradigms. Certainly, well-grounded people (and poems) deserve admiration. That a person has his “feet on the ground” communicates his good sense and reliability. I can’t fault the wisdom of well-wishers who, from time to time, advise me to get my head out of the clouds and come down to earth and realistic expectations. No one ever told me to get my feet out of the sky, though! Relishing the image of Connie’s up there, I enjoy a broad grin, once more becoming an observer and then a participant in the 2003 Poem of the Year. I commend the voters who selected it and invite all readers to return to it again and again.

— Peggy Willis Lyles

READERS' CHOICE – FAVORITE POEMS

1ST RUNNER-UP – VINCENT TRIPI

Deathbed . . .
my old friend's imitation
of a firefly

The effectiveness of this wonderful haiku begins with the starkness and immediacy of the raw emotion it evokes — the imminent death of an old friend. vincent tripi's use of the single word “deathbed” demands the reader's attention and reflection, capturing the most basic human frailty and leaving us to contemplate all of its implications.

We are not left in this state for long, however. The haiku strengthens and deepens by providing a simple but vivid reminder of the brevity of life. This reminder comes in the form of a firefly, whose care-free floating through summer breezes belies its short lifespan. How very much like our own experience this is — a balmy night of flutter and flash, seemingly timeless, but over much too soon.

It is this very analogy that completes the haiku, the realization that our own existence, so full of cares and worries, is nonetheless fleeting, and in that sense is not at all unlike that of a firefly.

vincent tripi's use of the word “imitation” is intriguing in that the dying friend is most likely not trying to consciously mimic a firefly. Instead, this imitation occurred in the mind of the author, who, in gazing at his friend, drifted back to a moment long ago, a seemingly endless summer night. Like the flashing of a firefly, however, this moment, too is short-lived, leaving only the resonating words of this sad and lovely haiku.

— Paul David Mena

2ND RUNNER-UP – ALLEN MCGILL

storm clouds
the valley darkens
farm by farm

It has been claimed that many of the stones in walls built by the Incas were made to fit so perfectly that it is impossible to wedge a razor blade between them. The same could be said about the words of this haiku. Allen McGill could not have expressed his experience more simply or more effectively. The surface images are perfectly clear and yet there is ample room for readers to delve deeper. The juxtaposition of storm clouds to farms gives rise to several interesting associative meanings. In his July commentary, Paul David Mena pointed to a few of those associations. There may well be others; it is up to us to find our own.

Impending disaster is implied by those heavy clouds. Soon there could be flooding, loss of crops, loss of buildings, even loss of life. The foreboding is tangible and this feeling can be projected to include other current events as well: political, martial, economic, or domestic.

There is something more basic to this poem, however, than sharp imagery and a variety of meanings. I am first and foremost struck by its emotional intensity, its quality of ominousness. The storm has not yet struck. The shadows of massive, cumulo-nimbus clouds are gliding into the valley. There's no time to waste. The livestock must be gathered, pets brought inside, windows shuttered, and doors secured.

Editors and readers alike agree that this is a haiku of remarkable power.

— Christopher Herold

3RD RUNNER-UP – JOHN STEVENSON

snowy night
sometimes you can't be
quiet enough

It's nearly midnight. My wife and I are in bed reading our books. All at once, something about the silence causes me to turn to look at her. Eyelids drooping, she's falling asleep.

In the morning, I'm the first one to the meditation room. I settle on my cushion and wait. It seems I'll be sitting alone today so, at the appointed time, I ring the bell. A minute or two later the door opens. Someone crosses the room and sits down. Then it's quiet again, but there's a distinct change in the nature of the silence.

I'm sure you've been in a large hall filled with people who are not speaking, a candlelight vigil maybe, or perhaps outside, for a funeral committal, or a moment of silence at a ball game. Imagine how different those silences are. How many qualities of silence are there?

Night has fallen and the surrounding world is slowing down, drawing inward. Snow begins to fall . . . Can you feel the change, even in the silence itself? Yes! As it accumulates, snow becomes a muffler, softening and calming the rough-edged world. It was at such a time John Stevenson was moved to stop what he was doing to listen.

When he resumed his activities, even the slightest sounds appeared harsh in contrast to the deepening drift of silence. John is a natural-born poet, a haiku poet. It would be impossible for him not to seek words to express wonderment at such a subtle but perceptible change. John did find the words and we would be hard pressed to find others that come close to matching the way he conveys this special experience. The syntax is not typical of haiku. The tone, so casual that it almost comes across as an after-thought, a scribbled a note, is quite a contrast to the moment of awe described. That this is so illustrates the great skill with which John Stevenson writes. His down-to-earth use of language puts us at ease and welcomes us to share his experiences. And now, I too am moved to a respectful silence.

— Christopher Herold

READERS' CHOICE – POPULAR POETS

1ST RUNNER-UP – CONNIE DONLEYCOTT

Connie Donleycott has a way with words. Her haiku, while instantly understood by the reader, nonetheless illuminate their subjects in fresh and often pleasantly surprising ways:

finding a way
through the forest
winter sunlight

The first two lines of this haiku might suggest a lost hiker or an adventurer. The final line completes the poem in an unexpected way, revealing that it is the sunlight — and not a person — that has navigated the forest. The result is not just a description from nature but rather the celebration of a completed journey.

Connie frequently begins with a scene from nature. Then, like a camera, her words focus in on an object with a human connection, allowing the reader to share her discovery.

blowing rain . . .
colors blend
on a garden pinwheel

summer garden
the full stretch
of the hose

Sometimes nature encounters humanity directly, often with delightful results:

beachcomber
grains of sand fill
her smile lines

As I revisit Connie's haiku from Volume V, my smile lines deepen as well.

— Paul David Mena

2ND RUNNER-UP – VINCENT TRIPI

vincent tripi breathes new life into the haiku genre. He often does this by presenting common subjects from uncommon perspectives. Sometimes this is startling:

her only nipple
begins to harden
a new year

Deathbed . . .
 my old friend's imitation
 of a firefly

The connections between people, or between people and nature, are often central to tripi's haiku. He is a master of "show don't tell," ever nudging us toward a deeper, more universal understanding of the experience described. A good example is "small town — / the smell of / everyone's wood." On the surface, the olfactory image is plain enough, and easily accessible. Without digging far, however, one uncovers an intriguing paradox: we are at once independent and interdependent. With a casual sniff, the scent of woodsmoke may seem homogeneous, but tripi is sensitive, a haiku poet. He detects at least one particular variety of wood and intuits a multitude of fires. The smoke from each rises and mingles with smoke from the others. One more step returns him to the recognition of a unified whole. The small size of the town is

meaningful here. Most of the inhabitants know and interact with one another, just as the various odors of smoke rise and mingle. tripi's haiku are not without humor. In this poem he pokes fun, subtly, at another side of the same fact: in small towns everyone knows what everyone else is doing. Sometimes his humor is right up front, as in one of my favorites:

a foot of snow —
the cat out loving and
where is the garden Buddha?

Superficially, this is hilarious — the thought of a cat's kinky romancing of a stone Buddha. Even so, as with most of tripi's work, there are profound levels. The garden Buddha (just a representation of the historical figure) is transcended, literally and figuratively, by snow. A great leveler of playing fields, the snow covers everything, leading us to realize that there is "nowhere to spit and not hit Buddha!"

vince tripi's work is exciting, provocative, and rewarding. I'm delighted that readers have voted accordingly.

— Christopher Herold

3RD RUNNER-UP — ALLEN MCGILL

Allen McGill lives in Mexico. *The Heron's Nest* first published his work in December 2002, and he has contributed regularly to our journal ever since. It has been my great pleasure to serve as his editor.

This year Allen's fellow readers and writers awarded him the fourth highest number of votes overall. He won *The Heron's Nest* Award in July 2003, with a poem whose

beauty and level of insight continue to garner praise from readers. Of his ten poems that appeared in Volume V, “storm clouds” received the most points:

storm clouds
the valley darkens
farm by farm

Allen’s haiku demonstrate his respect for the natural world and his affinity for its creatures. Many feature animals, usually combined with some aspect of humanity. Skillfully balancing humankind and nature, Allen juxtaposes vivid images to create memorable, multilayered haiku. His work is rich with sensory appeal that draws readers into the experience.

a gull slips
on the polished handrail
rolling thunder

sunglare
the rasp as my clam rake
uncovers tin cans

evening rain
the deaf dog sleeps
with a paw on my foot

Allen’s haiku come from the real world, from life. When he includes himself, he is careful not to get in the way of the poem.

— Ferris Gilli

EDITORS' CHOICES

POEM OF THE YEAR

slave cemetery
 the tug of the current
 on willow fronds

Carolyn Hall

Moving with the deep, subtle power of a river current, Carolyn Hall's poem pulls at my emotions. It stirs a strong memory of my childhood. One freezing day, I sat with my young cousin at a scrubbed, white deal table in a kitchen that was filled with a wood stove's heat and the energy of bustling women. We listened while a woman named Sing described how she was taught to cook by her grandmother, who told Sing stories of her life as a slave. Years later, I heard the unforgettable voice of The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., speaking his immortal words: ". . . I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down at the table of brotherhood."

It is often difficult to delineate boundaries of centuries-old burial grounds without expensive archaeological surveys. Great numbers of slave cemeteries that lie concealed under tangles of weeds and debris may never be found. Lost to the unremitting forces of progress, others lie under concrete and steel. Only a few eighteenth and nineteenth century maps show the locations of slave burial grounds, and on these few, the plots are not clearly defined, with no roads leading directly to them. Unwilling to give up tillable land, most slave owners chose burial grounds in marginal areas not suitable for agriculture, such as low, swampy places subject to flooding. Lacking headstones and monuments, mourners adorned the graves with wildflowers or small trees and sometimes placed wooden markers on them. On the Sea Islands and along the South Atlantic coast, relatives and friends of dead slaves

sometimes covered the individual burial mounds with oyster shells — the same kind of shells that are used in building tabby houses.

Cemeteries represent the foundation of African-American history. Some that are still used today have survived the passage of time in the care of descendants of slaves. Families exist who have buried their dead in the same cemetery for close to 200 years, beginning with their ancestors who were brought in chains to work the surrounding land. Wherever the site of Carolyn's haiku, it is a unique historical resource.

With delicate skill and sensitivity, Carolyn creates resonance through powerful juxtaposition and symbolism. She places a beautiful scene that traditionally evokes a gentle mood and connotations of pleasant, warm-weather activities beside an image that has associations of the most base acts of human cruelty. As Paul MacNeil wrote in his essay for this poem (*The Heron's Nest Award* Vol. V:06), "The slave times are past, yet the river, the land, and the poet remain."

But those times still reverberate; the river still flows, tugging, sometimes uprooting whatever is in its path; the land is forever changing; the poet does not stand unmoved. I sense the poem itself as metaphor. The era of human bondage is over in the United States, but descendants of its perpetrators, victims, and fierce abolitionists continue to struggle for balance in its aftermath.

— Ferris Gilli

FAVORITE POEMS, 1ST RUNNER-UP

faint stars . . .
the cabby speaks
of home

Timothy Hawkes

Distances and empathy snap together in a moment of profound human connection and insight. Timothy Hawkes successfully captures the experience in a few simple words that involve the reader, expanding the links and inviting a wealth of personal associations. We discover something we knew already and respond with the classic “ah” as a deeply-felt and touching haiku takes its place among the finest of the genre.

The first line fixes the poem in a vast and often uncertain universe. Stars are markers shared by all human beings, constants amid ongoing change. Weather, smog, or city lights make them seem faint on this particular night, subtly augmenting the anonymity and potential loneliness of urban life.

The cabdriver and his paying passenger share a relationship that is both distant and, temporarily, intimate. Theirs is a chance and utilitarian meeting. They probably will never see each other again. When the cabby speaks of home, he is likely to describe a place that is an ocean and many land miles away, surrounded by terrain and culture very different from those the listener would associate with the word. Connotations outweigh denotations, though, and “home” as a concept is almost universally understood. So are the complex emotions associated with separation from that special place of origin and identity.

Briefly, in a cab going from one place to another under faint stars, two human beings confront a commonality that supersedes their differences. The everyday reality of the encounter makes the epiphany all the more memorable and evocative. Omar from Egypt is the driver I think of. Other readers will supply specific details that bond them to the slice of life Hawkes has so adroitly sketched. One way or another, we feel a little closer to fellow travelers on this small planet that is our home.

— Peggy Willis Lyles

FAVORITE POEMS, 2ND RUNNER-UP

summer garden
the full stretch
of the hose

Connie Donleycott

This haiku won the October *Heron's Nest* Award. In the accompanying essay, Peggy Lyles wrote of simplicity and the poem's consonance with haiku philosophy.

The poem's subject is water and getting it to a garden in summer. Yet, the writer doesn't use the word "water," and the poem has no verbs. Connie Donleycott presents the action and key subjects with laudable skill. Most of the words recede in prominence, nearly disappearing, except perhaps the keyword "stretch." Saying it aloud is elongation itself. The sound and meaning of the noun blend together provoking, as Peggy wrote, a kinesthetic response. The touch and smell of the vinyl (or rubber) and the feel of the water pulsing through it take me right to Connie's spot in a garden — one from my own memory. The hose is threaded to an outside spigot just a bit too far from my garden. Of course, I could buy a longer hose, but who knew how much I'd plant this year? It is heavy and I have hauled the full hose to its natural length, and tug for a few more inches to get water to the outlying plants. I see the spray sparkling as it breaks after an upward angle and drops to the ground. I have my thumb over the end of the hose, tightening my grip to get the best distance. I learned this skill as a child, no doubt dashing around trying to soak my brother. Yet as a gardener I hold the pose for a long, purposeful time. Fatigued, I switch to the other thumb.

Daily chores. There is an obligation, a bond, between the gardener and the garden.

Raising vegetables or flowers is work, but ideally, it is a creative, often solitary pleasure. Irrigation, which the haiku implies, is the giving of life. The hobbyist works the soil, starts and maintains the growth of the plants, and is rewarded aesthetically and materially. Great satisfaction comes with the harvest for vase or dining table. Such a simple and effortlessly accessible poem, full of so much imagery, is a gift from Connie to readers and lovers of haiku.

— Paul MacNeil

SPECIAL MENTION

Several poems scored well above the average, and a few poets accumulated high overall point scores for their respective bodies of work. Although they didn't receive awards, it is clear that these poems and poets have made lasting impressions and richly deserve to be honored by inclusion in this Valentine Awards issue.

New Year's Eve bath —
I fail to become
a swan

Fay Aoyagi

*

Hokusai's Wave
a child shapes his fingers
into claws

Pamela Miller Ness

*

spring morning
the raven goes
where the wind went

Elizabeth Searle Lamb

*

tai chi
with my wife
morning glories open

Randy M. Brooks

*

there must be light
where they came from —
chestnut blossoms

Gabriel Rosenstock

*

spring scents
my dog and I walk
through different worlds

Kirsty Karkow

*

my father's globe
so many countries
with wrong names

Gary Warner

*

animal skull
the child fingers
her eye

Tom Painting

*

gaunt children
selling old bayonets —
noonday sun

Kylan Jones-Huffman

*

a field of crickets . . .
stepping in the spaces
between their songs

Stephen Amor

*

bird house empty of seed
even the jays
look for Bernard

Francine Porad

*

single living
I allow the kettle
a full whistle

Carmen Sterba

*

twilight
a child's pail taken
by the tide

Cherie Hunter Day

*

village square —
old faces borrowing angles
from the stone

H. F. Noyes

*

the nail sinking in —
my father's hammer
in my hand

Gary Hotham

*

a purple tree
when did I stop
being young?

Katherine Cudney

*

the corner
where nothing grows —
moonlight

Brian Gierat

*

autumn chill —
a butterfly swept up
with the leaves

Cindy Zackowitz

*

open hospice door
a path of moonlight
across the sea

William Cullen, Jr.

*

headstone
a dash
between the years

Francis Masat

*

ice moon —
the cat grooms away
my touch

Linda Jeannette Ward

*

stone garden —
this morning the islands
float on snow

Kuniharu Shimizu

NOTES FROM VOTERS

The Valentine awards is really an excellent idea, making a reader go through all the haiku of the preceding year, shifting and considering and perhaps finding more depth than at the first reading.

— Florence Vilen

What a great idea to encourage thoughtful reading! Ranking the poems is a critical step. It is a different process than the initial selection of poems. It requires you to ask yourself what matters most; what makes a poem stronger, in your estimation, and what weakens it.

— Dave Russo

It is one of the highlights each year to do this-enjoy again each pleasing page of each Nest, and then try to narrow my favorites, and then to somehow put them into an order of preference.

— Billie Wilson

What a difficult task it is to select just ten! Fun though, and it certainly focuses one's thinking.

— Sandra Simpson

As always, a wonderful exercise! How often do any of us pull down old issues of any other haiku periodical except in such an instance? There is so much fresh, exciting poetry, that I tend to always be looking forward. Or if I do look back, it is through a collection such as *The Haiku Anthology* or an individual collection. So I thank you for the exercise.

— paul m.

I take the voting very seriously. I certainly enjoy re-reading all of the poems.

— Lenard D. Moore

It was most gratifying to reread all the 2003 haiku published in *The Heron's Nest*, and as always, very, very difficult to choose only ten. My shortlist was much longer than that!

— Maria Steyn

I can't tell you how much trouble I had this year. There were some terrific haiku I hated to let go.

— Marian Olson

It has been very hard to select only ten poems; there are so many other great poems published in *The Heron's Nest* too (in fact, I didn't find one I don't like!).

— Dietmar Tauchner

Well, if I needed (and I didn't) something to help me appreciate the incredible task you and your fellow editors perform each month this was it. Had you given me twenty votes I would still be agonizing over the many favorites I'd have to leave out of the winners of my "Damn, I wish I'd written that!" awards. Many thanks, again, to all of you for making this task so difficult.

— Robert Gilliland

I reevaluated — blind — my top 230 haiku from the year, came up with a shortlist of about 30, and winnowed from there. When I revealed the authors' names to myself, I was surprised (pleasantly).

— Charles Trumbull

Hardest job I ever did! How to choose from so many winners?

— Mary Lee McClure

It was my time to stop and smell the roses, and I enjoyed each poem. Some of them even triggered poems of my own. Amazing how that happens.

— Yvonne Cabalona

How do I vote? Way too many great poems to choose from. Thank you so very much for dealing out the opportunity to not just push these poems aside, but to revisit them again and again.

— Alice Frampton

Why did I think it would be easier this year?

— Barry George

I must have made a zillion lists of favorites, and still felt that I left ones out that should be in. John Stevenson's beautiful snow silence, and the delightfully evocative country diner. They went in and out, in and out. Another one that I had go in and out, as it really hit me as one of the most unexpected, original, and non-snooty, was Emily Romano's painted toenails lure a turtle. I loved it! So unselfconscious, too, in a medium that she could have felt that she should not show her bighairness, if you know what I mean. It proved to me the essence of what I love about haiku as it should be — that it is for real people, and about the real world. There were others, too. Kylan Jones-Huffman's gaunt children selling old bayonets. It went from three to out numerous times. Of course, I will never forget it, and only wish more people could be touched by this, rather than the next distraction: Michael Jackson's nose yesterday, the moon today. Kay Anderson's mama pitting cherries with a paperclip--such a warm

picture of a world that I always think must be gone, yet still lives somewhere. Fay Aoyagi's trenchant incomplete resume. Summer afternoon with boys telling stories about "someday" — wonderful from Jennie Townsend! Paul Pfleuger's spot-on black ice. I thought it was a perfect poem. Such a perfect observation. Then I was drawn to Allen McGill's deaf dog, at which I actually cried, not because the dog is unhappy, but because of the closeness that was so beautiful there. Maria Steyn (who is one of my favorite poets) wrote about something my cat used to love to do: check out what everyone else is eating and doing. Emily Romano's pregnant cat left behind haunts me just as it haunted her. Matt Morden's winter sickness was really a milestone poem of great power. Claire Gallagher's "losing the stars I know to the skyful" — such truth there. Then there was that wonderful cherry blossom in the baby's diaper, found by Michael Meyerhofer. Well, those weren't the only ones. Every one of those went into the top ten. And yet none of them are among the ten that I sent to you. In the end, I tried to pick the ones that were the freshest, not meaning most original. Gary Warner's peanut-cracking kindergartners would have made the top three if that were the only criterion. I did enjoy that one mightily but chose ones that really stuck with me and had surprising qualities of understated power. It took several weeks again, to finally say to myself that this particular list that I sent was the one I wanted to send. But the thing is, congratulations for making it so bloody hard to do it!

— Anna Tambour

Are you tired yet, of hearing how hard it is to choose just ten of the poems published in *The Heron's Nest* in 2003? But it is, incredibly so!

— Jennie Townsend

ABOUT *THE HERON'S NEST*

*where tradition and innovation meet ...
and complement each other*

PHILOSOPHY

As editor of this journal my intention is to present haiku in which the outward form of each poem has been determined by two important elements. The primary element is the poetic experience, faithfully and uniquely evoked in words. The second element helps to shape the first; it is the poet's knowledge and respect for traditional haiku values. When well balanced these elements result in work that is distinctively and unmistakably haiku.

"Poetic experiences" are those which inspire us to express ourselves creatively. "Haiku values" are the traditional underpinnings, both Japanese and Western, by which haiku sensibility has evolved into what it is today, and which will continue to shape haiku traditions in the future. There are many ideals equated with each of the various haiku forms. No one poem can embody all, or even a majority of these ideals. Each of us must decide for ourselves what is important in the writing and appreciating of haiku. To help you decide whether or not to submit your work, I'd like you to know the qualities I regard as important to haiku.

STAFF

Christopher Herold, managing editor

Carol O'Dell, administrator

Paul David Mena, webmaster & contributing editor

Ferris Gilli, associate editor

Peggy Willis Lyles, associate editor

Paul MacNeil, associate editor

TECHNICAL NOTE

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