

## Increased Collaboration: Opportunities to Participate in the Haiku Society of America by Ce Rosenow

In 2008, I had the opportunity to chair the Haiku Society of America's Nominations Committee. Working with an'ya and Harriot West, I tried to find people to fill various positions on the Executive Committee and to serve as regional coordinators. I was surprised at how difficult it was to find people willing to hold office. I also detected a serious degree of "burnout" from the people who had been donating their time and effort to HSA for many years. I began thinking about the role of volunteers in HSA and asking others for their views on this topic. I discovered that many people didn't know what they could contribute to the HSA and others, while willing to volunteer, were unsure how to go about it. I am convinced of the importance of increasing the number of volunteers to help meet the needs of the large HSA membership, and I am also certain that we can create opportuni-

ties that will benefit the volunteers. The following suggestions, many of which are adapted from the feedback I have received this past year, by no means form a comprehensive list, but I offer them as encouragement for members to get more involved with the organization and help to direct its future.

### The Local Level:

Traveling to national HSA events can be difficult depend-

ing on your other commitments and your budget, and not everyone has an interest in serving as a regional coordinator or Executive Committee officer. For these and other reasons, not everyone chooses to participate in HSA on the national level. Even if you do not want to participate nationally, there are several ways for you to actively participate at a local level. One simple way is to attend the haiku events in your area. This suggestion seems almost too basic to mention, yet how often

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does a two-hour drive for a weekend event or an extra com-

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mute after work to attend an evening meeting or reading seem like a real barrier? I speak from experience, having neglected to attend some of the meetings organized by Francine Porad

in Bellevue, Washington because attending meant driving two more hours after getting off of work in Tacoma. When I did make it to meetings, I benefited from the camaraderie and the feedback on my poems. In the years since those meetings in the early 1990s, I have organized many large and small meetings, and I have learned first hand how much difference it makes to the organizers and to the group as a whole when people make the effort to attend events.

Another option is offering to help the regional coordinator for your area. Volunteer to assist with setting up meetings or read

ings or publicizing those events. If you belong to a non-HSA haiku group, consider becoming the liaison between that group and the HSA regional chapter to increase the communication between the different groups. Even sending in your haiku news on a regular basis so that the coordinator can assemble the re

gional report for the HSA Newsletter is a way to participate. It helps the coordinator and lets poets in other parts of the country know what you have been up to.

You can also share your skills and hobbies. If you have experi

ence with websites, video recorders, or photography, contact the regional coordinator and offer to create and maintain a website or document haiku events. Artists or musicians can consider ways in which their talents might become part of the program for a local or regional meeting. If you have experi

ence with desktop publishing or graphic design, participate in editing and/or producing an anthology for your region.

Your engagement on a local level adds to the mix of talents and interests in the region, thereby enriching the local and regional groups as well as the national society. In an even more basic way, the division of labor among many volunteers means that no one person or small group of people will become overwhelmed or exhausted.

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#### The Regional Level:

Regional coordinators have a varied set of tasks before them depending on how many states constitute a particular region, the number of members, and the geographical distance between the members. Furthermore, some regions have several other

active haiku organizations within them. As different as the regions are, each one is important to the success of the HSA as a whole and can contribute in key ways, especially under the leadership of the regional coordinator.

First, strengthen the unity within the region. True, the way in which each regional coordinator approaches this goal will vary for the reasons described above. Nevertheless, increased communication between the members within a geographical area will develop a stronger sense of community within that region. Having served as the Oregon Regional Coordinator, I know how easy it is to repeatedly rely on the same volunteer base. By getting to know more of the region's members, I dis-

- covered how talented and generous the poets in this state are. Coordinators should stay in contact with members, ask for help, and look for ways to forge connections with other poetry groups and organizations. The individual HSA regions are potentially one of our best means of outreach to other poets and educators interested in learning more about haiku through joint meetings, poetry readings, and other events open to the public.

Second, consider hosting a national quarterly meeting. This option may not be appropriate for all regions, but many regions are capable of organizing these meetings. The meeting dates are set well in advance, which gives the regional group plenty of time to plan. There are so many aspects to planning a regional meeting that almost everyone can find some way to contribute. Although there is no set format for national meetings, and the scope of the meeting is up to the people organizing it, many national meetings involve the following activities: deciding on a program and inviting participants; creating flyers and email

announcements to publicize the event; arranging for meeting space and, if necessary, restaurants or catering for group meals;

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setting up meeting rooms; organizing book tables; picking up or dropping off out-of-town guests at the airport and host

- ing out-of-town guests; and cleaning up the facility after the event ends. Clearly, there are ways for everyone to assist at some level. Additionally, working on national meetings is fun and rewarding, especially as this work provides a chance to get to know poets from around the country. These meetings

also create opportunities to hear a variety of readings and performances, and to listen to informative papers and presen

tations. By making these meetings open to the public, HSA regions again help significantly with outreach and education.

The National Level:

Volunteerism at the national level requires a certain amount of knowledge about haiku, and it also involves a commitment of time and labor comparable to, and often exceeding, that of regional coordinators (depending on the level of activity in an individual region). For these reasons, it can be challenging to find people willing to undertake a position at this level; how

ever, these positions are very important to the HSA's ability to achieve its mission statement and to support its membership.

The most obvious way to volunteer on the national level is to serve on the HSA Executive Committee. EC mem

bers commit to a fairly high level of involvement in the operations of the organization, including traveling to some of the national quarterly meetings and fulfilling very spe

cific responsibilities as set forth in the HSA By-laws on the HSA website: <http://www.hsa-haiku.org/bylaws.htm>.

There are also opportunities to volunteer on the national level other than becoming an officer, and HSA needs people willing to donate their time, labor, and knowledge of haiku

There are also opportunities to volunteer on the national level other than becoming an officer, and HSA needs people willing to donate their time, labor, and knowledge of haiku so that some of the society's large-scale services can be ac

complished. For instance, each year we need someone to

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chair the Nominations Committee and we need people to serve on the committee. Additionally, the success of the an

nual membership anthology requires people to choose sub

missions and to edit, design, and produce the anthology. The many contests sponsored by HSA require qualified judges to select the winning poems and write judges' comments in

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tended to highlight the accomplishments of the winners and to articulate important aspects of haiku and related forms. I realize that I have outlined volunteer opportunities starting from the local level and moving up such that the local level feeds the regional level which feeds the national level; however, I want to emphasize that the reverse is also true. Volunteers at the national level have a responsibility to support members at the regional and local levels, and clearly the regional coordina-

tors are focused largely on the needs of the members in their region. Having an organization run by a large and vibrant group of volunteers at all levels means that support will run in both directions, local to national and national to local. The result will be a well-connected membership working together for the further development and appreciation of haiku in English. I hope that the above information demonstrates how important volunteers are to the success of the Haiku Society of America. I also hope that it reveals the wide range of opportunities to participate in ways that are interesting and enjoyable to the volunteers. Don't assume that your contributions aren't needed if you haven't been asked to volunteer. Every member, whether a new or established poet, has something to offer. Consider your interests, find your niche, and get involved. Both you and the HSA will be the better for your efforts.

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