

# Riding on the Wind



Haiku

Martin Beresford



# **Riding on the Wind**

Haiku, senryu and some longer poems

by

**Martin Beresford**

**Marina Publications, San Francisco**

Copyright © 2004  
Martin Beresford

All rights reserved

ISBN 0-9754946-0-0

Front cover photo by Deborah Johnson-Jackson;  
back cover photo by Geoffrey Rutledge;  
both are reproduced by kind permission

Published by Marina Publications,  
San Francisco, CA

Layout and graphics by  
Matsumoto Design, Tokyo

Printed by  
Morris Publishing, Kearney, NE

## Contents

Introduction

Soldiers in Winter

### **To Masae, with love**

Riding among flowers

Dead Leaves

ordani 源田

Burns in the Night

Longer Poems



# 夏草や兵どもが夢のあと

*natsugusa ya tsuwamonodomo ga yume no ato*

Summer grass  
All that remains  
Of the warriors' dreams

芭蕉 Basho

## Contents

Introduction	6
Soldiers in Winter	7
Apple Tree in Bloom	27
Riding on the Wind	37
Dead Leaves Eddying	51
Sirens in the Night	59
Longer Poems	71

In these short poems (dare I call them "haiku"?) I have tried to capture a few haiku-like experiences, from childhood experiences in England during World War II, through my own army days, to more recent times living in Europe, Hong Kong, Japan and California. Generally, I have tried to conform to traditional haiku conventions regarding scanning, seasonal references, and the essentially Zen-like nature of the haiku experience; however, I fear that I have fallen short in many cases. The poems are grouped broadly according to the four seasons, with a separate section relating to World War II, and a few longer poems included at the end of the book. The latter were written nearly fifty years ago. They are a young man's poems, and touch on some of the fundamental issues underlying the deep poignancy that is expressed - albeit more obliquely - in some of the best haiku.

Despite the title and the cover pictures, this is not a book about hang gliding, though some of my most haiku-like experiences have indeed been associated with that marvelous sport. I am much indebted to my many hang gliding friends, in Japan and the USA, for their warm comradeship and support.

I am especially indebted to Jerry Kilbride, distinguished Haiku poet, for his encouragement, advice and friendship.



# Soldiers in Winter

**Soldiers in winter,  
Freezing, tired, hungry, afraid,  
Dreaming of warm beds**



**Alone on sentry  
In the frosty moonlight. Bach  
Plays inside my head**

Stranger in the street.  
Our eyes met; we smiled. What love  
Might have grown from it



Entering the churchyard:  
Mossy tombstones in the grass.  
The wooden gate creaks

On parade: sergeants  
Howl commands with frosty breath.  
Red sun through the mist



Winter night: bright stars  
Over the silent valley;  
Far off, a dog barks

**My friend's funeral:  
The requiem plays. Outside,  
Crows caw in the elms**



**The bell tolls. Mourners leave  
Respectfully. Shall we ever know  
Where we are from, and why?**



Gazing in wonder  
At the stars, seeking answers  
In their ancient light



By the common room fire  
Witty reasoning of pale dons,  
Sipping dry sherry

Night in the frozen  
Slit trench; far off, warm light glows  
In a farm window



White frost; red sun glows  
Through the mist; a black horse stands  
By the iron gate

Midnight in the chapel:  
All alone, the organist  
Softly playing Bach



Red brick barracks glow  
In the winter sun. Commands  
Ring through frosty air.

At the aircraft door:  
Below, frozen fields and trees;  
Behind me, my platoon



Chords of music, bringing  
Thoughts too deep for words; tears of  
Ancient memories

Night drop: the sergeant,  
Tightening his helmet strap,  
Pats his parachute



In the cathedral  
The choir's ethereal song; outside,  
Diamond glints on snow



Night patrol; a cough  
Somewhere in the darkness: click  
Of a rifle bolt



Rocket flare goes up:  
We freeze; shadowy figures move,  
Bathed in ghostly light

**Purring and snuggling:  
Cupboard love, perhaps, but Ah!  
How I love this cat**



**Dawn in the slit trench:  
Hidden in the wintry mist  
Ancient spirits move**

Caw, caw! Raucous crows  
Squabble in the leafless elms.  
The sad church bell tolls



Crusader, etched in brass,  
Hands in prayer, solemn-faced  
In his long, long sleep

**Misty London dawn:  
Lights in suburban windows;  
Whistling kettles sing**



**In the gym, thumping  
Heavy punch bags; smell of sweat,  
Resin, and leather**

Twinkling galaxies  
In the cold night. Silently,  
Look! A shooting star!



In the dressing room  
Waiting for my turn to fight.  
Out there, the crowd roars



The orchestra plays.  
Deep sadness and beauty; love  
For the composer



Entering the ring:  
Over there, my opponent;  
Briefly our eyes meet

Sleeping by the fire,  
The cat's paws twitch; juicy mice  
Scamper in her brain



Shortening my punches;  
The crowd roars: glorious taste  
Of superior will

Waking, with my hand  
On her breast; womanly warmth  
In the winter dawn



Frosty rugby pitch;  
Low behind the leafless elms,  
Hazy orange sun

In the smoky pub  
After rugger. Pints of beer;  
Women on our minds



Sensing, somehow, that  
This could be his last season:  
Skiing beautifully





# Apple Tree in Bloom

Apple tree in bloom  
By the bombed-out house. A shoe  
Lies in the rubble



Lonely country lane:  
By the hawthorn hedge, a bull  
Menacingly stares

Dining with Masae:  
The shakuhachi plays; laughing,  
We discuss our lives



Bouncing on the waves,  
Sparkling sun, sail filled with wind;  
Salt spray on my face

Drums beating, colors  
Flying, bayonets fixed, we march,  
Filled with martial pride



Dark forest in Spring:  
Hidden among the tall pines  
A shakuhachi plays

Dining alone. Nearby,  
Pretty girls, their happy talk  
Like birdsong in spring



Hiking through the forest:  
Dappled light among the trees:  
How green the spring leaves!

In the echoing forest  
Cooing of a wood pigeon  
Hidden among the trees



A tiny ant crawls  
Across the page, fiercely intent  
On his wanderings



**Blackbird's evening song  
In the silver birch. Inside,  
Mother plays Chopin**



**On the mountain trail:  
Silently observing us,  
Look! A mountain lion**

My father's body,  
Face still stern in death. Ah, how  
I could have loved him



Early spring morning:  
Dew drops on the spider's web  
Sparkle in the sun

Rusty helmet lying,  
Bullet-holed, among the dunes.  
Nearby, children play



Deep-toned resonance  
Echoing through the misty trees:  
Buddhist temple bell

**Golden Buddha, smiling  
Serenely at endless rounds  
Of existence. Why?**



**Sunlight through the trees:  
Pools of luminescent green  
Glow with heavenly light**

# Riding on the Wind

Riding on the wind:  
Far below me, golden hills  
Glow in the late sun



The old dog twitches,  
Sleeping in the summer shade,  
Dreaming of past fights



Night ambush; waiting  
In the long grass, rifles cocked:  
Mosquitoes attack



Stained glass: sun turns saints  
Into pools of colored light  
On the cold stone floor

**Summer afternoons:  
Smiling as she undressed for me,  
Magic in her eyes**



**Shady river bank:  
Quick blue flash - a kingfisher,  
Plop! Into the stream**

An old man, waiting  
In the hot sun, pensively  
Licking his ice cream



Her perfect beauty  
In my arms. Blue curtains stir  
In the summer breeze

Sunbeams through the trees:  
Jogging on the lonely trail,  
Scent of summer pines



Down by the lakeshore  
Coyotes howl. Outside my tent,  
How white the moonlight!

Bugling by moonlight  
The elk shows off to his wives,  
Tossing waterweed



Summer night; foghorns  
Moan. Out in the bay, a seal  
Barking in the mist

In the still valley,  
Echoes of a passing crow,  
Slowly flapping by



Summer night; champagne:  
Extraordinarily  
Clear thoughts in my mind



Afternoons with Connie:  
Wine in bed; loving each other,  
We make love again



Summer sunset. Wine  
In my hand. The calm beauty  
Seems to explain all

**Circling in thermals:  
Below, mountain peaks grow small.  
Great to be a bird!**



**Crimson evening sky:  
No wonder they thought the Gods  
Live up in those clouds**

Close by my wingtip  
The Red tail hawk wants to play,  
Showing what he can do....



Soaring with me, the hawk  
Seeing a crow down there, catches  
My eye, sharing the joke

Back to the office:  
Management meeting; on my lips  
Her lingering taste



Coiled in the grass  
The rattler rattles; thank you  
For the warning, friend!

English country garden;  
Bees hum; fragrant lavender:  
Distant memories



Pacific sunset:  
Red, blue, my glider sparkles  
With celestial light

**Cello note, pulsing  
With menacing energy:  
Terrible beauty**



**Leaving the forest:  
Framed by trees, the sunlit meadow  
Glow with golden light**



# Dead Leaves Eddying

**Dead leaves eddying  
In the moody autumn wind:  
Sadness in my mind**



**Blue smoke curling up  
From the Autumn bonfire; apples  
Rot in the damp grass**

Village where we lived  
Fifty years ago. The oak tree's  
Familiar branches



First day back at school:  
Autumn sun on ancient bricks;  
Smell of polished floors

**In the master's study,  
Waiting to be caned. Outside,  
Classmates wait for news**



**In the morning train:  
Coughs, damp clothes, tobacco smoke;  
Dull, averted eyes**

Hitch hiking alone:  
Trucks roar past and disappear  
Into the wet night



Her dark-haired beauty  
Used to fill me with desire.  
Sad how love grows cold...

Dark autumn morning:  
My ageing face in the mirror;  
Outside, cold rain falls



"Wake me up" she says,  
"If you feel like making love".  
Ah, how passion fades...



**Alone in London  
Dialing old phone numbers.  
Strangers answering**

*Sirens in the Night*



**Autumn in London:  
Alone in the hotel room,  
Thoughts of former loves**

Darkness and light  
Proceeding from the point  
Of origin and end



"What is it?" he asks.  
"If you don't mind, I'll  
tell you the answer."

# Sirens in the Night

Sirens in the night.  
Searchlights probe the sky. Unseen,  
Bombers drone above



German bombers throb  
In the night. Under the table,  
Mother tucks us in

Barbed wire on the beach:  
Are the Germans coming soon?  
Picnic in the dunes



The Germans are coming.  
Up on the hill, village men  
Keep watch in the night

Vapor trails circling  
High up in the August sky.  
Mother calls us in



Tap on the window:  
Warden spots a crack of light  
Through our blackout screen



Bombed-out home: zig-zags  
Where the stairs were; broken glass  
Crunches underfoot



Smoking Messerschmit,  
Engine coughing, spirals down.  
Spitfire's victory roll

Dead German pilot  
In the wreckage of his plane:  
Children stare in awe



Small white parachute  
High up in the summer sky.  
Is it one of ours?

Drowned pilot, floating  
In the seaweed. Seagulls cry  
In the summer breeze



Fleeing Messerschmit,  
Spitfire closing in behind;  
Colored tracers fly

American troops  
Clattering past on tanks, throw us  
Gum and chocolates



Soldier back on leave:  
"He fought at Arnhem", mom says.  
We all gaze in awe

Crater in the field:  
Fleeing German dumped his bombs.  
Fossils in the chalk



Doodlebug throbbing  
Overhead. It stops. Silence.  
Counting the seconds...

**Teacher announces:  
"We've won the war". Joyful bells  
Peal all over town**



**Teacher says they've found  
Germans gassed six million Jews.  
Why? What's wrong with Jews?**



**German POWs  
Come to tea, Heinrich and Hans.  
Photos of their wives**



Teacher announces

"We've won the war," David tells

Paul and Henry

Come to tea, Heinrich and Hans

of their wives



To Astrid

On the death of her brother

## Longer Poems

# To Astrid

## On the death of her brother

### I

Loving you, and much moved by your grief,  
I wish that I had words to dry your tears,  
And that I had the wisdom to explain  
A purpose for his dying - some belief  
That would make sense of suffering and pain,  
Mortality and grief, or could console  
Those left to mourn him; some faith that might  
tell  
The meaning of the solemn funeral bell,  
And why it is for him that it must toll,  
Or show where we are from, why we are born,  
Suffer and die; or comfort those who mourn.

## II

We gaze in wonder at the starry night,  
And marvel at each twinkling galaxy,  
Seeking for answers in their ancient light.  
In vain; creation's dark immensity,  
Indifferent to our little earthly lives,  
Offers no answers of the sort we seek.  
Nor does the witty reasoning of pale dons,  
Sipping dry sherry in the common room  
In scholarly but passionless debate;  
Nor does the Buddha's enigmatic calm,  
Smiling exquisitely at endless rounds  
Of unexplained existence: to what end?  
Nor do the old but meaningless disputes  
Of metaphysics and theology.

### III

Stained glass, Victorian hymns, the organ's roar,  
The choir's ethereal tunes, give fleeting hints  
Of possible sublimity, but fail  
To answer our most deep-felt questions; nor  
Do the soft platitudes of costumed priests:  
What kind of liturgy is theirs, that seeks  
To tell us that his suffering and death  
Were God's almighty will, yet glibly speaks  
Of God's love? Did God see him suffering  
there?



#### IV

It is intolerable to the mind  
That this small time and space where we are  
locked  
Might be all we shall ever understand;  
Or that the great incomprehensible  
Mysteries of life and death must always lie  
Beyond the frontiers of our consciousness.  
The mind demands to know more than we see,  
Insisting that there must be more than this.

V

Brief moments of perfection - diamond glints  
Sparkling on freshly fallen snow,  
The marvelous beauty in your eyes, the glow  
Of sunset; moonlight on a tranquil sea,  
Or when Spring's perfectly formed blossoms  
bloom

Ecstatic pink against the April sky,  
Their beauty hints at immortality.

A single chord of music sometimes brings  
Feelings too deep for words, the tears of  
things

Dimly remembered from some distant time:  
Glimpses of one-ness with infinity.

## VI

If we could only grasp those passing gleams  
Of insight... but they quickly fade away,  
Like fleeting memories of ancient dreams  
Or exquisitely formed chords of music, frail,  
Perfect, withering away on the air.  
And often, when those perfect moments fail,  
Their very transience adds to our despair:  
When petals scatter in the breeze, we see  
Reminders of our own mortality,  
And sense the hopeless autumn of the mind  
In dead leaves eddying in the moody wind.

## VII

If God is dead, we are alone, a brief  
Flicker in cosmic time and space, our life  
A random transience, unexplained; and all  
Our loves, dreams, hopes, achievements, joys  
and grief  
Are ultimately mocked by grinning death  
And, in a vast but empty universe,  
We live like playthings of some unseen fate -  
Destined, without understanding why,  
Like cattle in a slaughterhouse, to die.

## VIII

Must we accept that this is simply so -  
Abandoning the search for answers to  
Life's great unanswered mysteries, and accept  
That this is all that we can ever know?

The spirits of dead warriors must despise  
Those placid clerks and merchants with dull  
eyes,

Who do not know the strenuous ecstasy  
Of running up steep hills under the sun,  
Or sweaty combat; are not deeply stirred  
By chords of music, or the restless need  
To understand; who, without passion, turn  
Away from the great unsolved mystery,  
As if the human age where we are locked  
Were some suburban sitting room, replete  
With comfort and respectability.



## IX

There is in us a glorious discontent  
And pride, that will not softly tolerate  
The absurdity of this predicament -  
The ignominy of the human state,  
And of suburban mediocrity:  
A spirit of superior will that strives  
With restless curiosity to see,  
Past the dimensions of our little lives,  
The awesome mysteries that must surely lie  
Beyond the boundaries of the universe:  
Knowledge that lies beyond our deepest  
dreams,  
Vistas of wonder and infinity.



X

We do not know where we are from, or why,  
Nor do we know what lies beyond the grave;  
But if we do not also choose to die,  
We must accept pain and mortality,  
And live with courage, love, superior will,  
Commitment, and a passion to excel.  
Suffer and do not flinch, and we shall prove  
The power of our godlike energy  
And will. We shall be lions, fighting bulls,  
And I shall love your eyes, my love, my love.



# Mike

Bullets, five of them,  
Lined up on an oak bookshelf,  
The cartridges gleaming trumpet yellow,  
The bullets glowing golden pink,  
The books behind the bullets  
As they must be.  
"Detail, with five rounds, load!"  
And there was my friend  
Crouching under the crack and thump,  
And suddenly there he lay, dead.  
Nothing new; friends do die.  
The news of it, a casual paragraph,  
Caught the eye at breakfast.  
Here was toast and marmalade and coffee,  
There, in his room, the pictures by his bed  
And all his gear, and Mike no longer there.

# Mary

A silk scarf  
And a green bottle  
On the table.  
The morning sun  
Rich on the colored silk  
Deeply green on the bottle.  
Outside the window  
A workman sings  
And the tree sways gently.  
She is far away  
In some corner of grief  
And no longer smiles.  
Knowing her grief  
The heart cries out in pain.  
Seeing the fragile perfection  
The cool beauty of the glass  
Deeply green in the morning sun  
The mind is numbed  
And cannot find a reason.  
Outside the window  
The workman sings  
And the tree sways gently.  
I touch the cool glass,  
And all the sadness of the world is there.

# Carol

A shriek - the bayonet stuck home;  
Another soldier dead; now long since gone.  
A girl, for whose smug liberty  
Men like him died, now talks at me.  
She is superior to war  
And knows what fools all soldiers are.



# Remembrance

Yes, we miss you my friend, after this year  
Of death; and conversations still pause at  
The mention of your name - brief eulogies  
And murmurs of sincere agreement; then  
The talk moves on again; for you are dead,  
Beyond return. That little bullet settling  
Swift like a buzzing hornet in your brain  
Took you from us forever. You are now  
No more than a dear memory. And yet  
I cannot think you altogether dead -  
You, whom I still can see so clearly, climbing  
Into the ring, and your fine body pounding,  
And hear you laugh, and see you putting back  
A pint, or blowing smoke rings, with a smile.  
We still thump punch bags, gloved with sweaty leather,  
Still drink and talk around the mess room fire  
On winter nights. But someone else now sleeps  
In your old room, and we are now accustomed  
To knowing that some other voice will answer  
A knock upon your door; that new, strange pictures  
Are hanging in your room, where you once had  
Grimacing sweaty boxers on the wall  
And, by your bed, Christ, and the girl you loved.



# Another subaltern's love song

(with apologies to John Betjeman)

She said, as he dressed, and kissed her  
Gently, "next weekend, remember".  
Then she turned and slept as he closed the door  
That cold grey dawn in November.

Where milk bottles kept frosty vigil  
And the tall lamps burned in the dawn  
He walked alone down Warwick Road  
While his girl slept quietly on.

He started his Ariel 250  
And roared off round Nevern Square.  
The empty streets echoed the engine  
As he rode through the cold dawn air.

As he rode through the sleeping suburbs  
He remembered the things she had said  
And thought of her head on the pillow  
And her womanly warmth in the bed

The sun rose over the Great Park;  
He stopped there to hear the birds' song,  
And smiled at the frosty sunrise  
Then started the bike and rode on.



The sun glowed through pine trees in Bagshot  
On laurels and gravel and gates  
And frosted verges in Wisley  
Where a milkman swung rattling crates

He arrived at the mess for breakfast.  
"How's the love life?" they asked him. "It's fine",  
He replied. "Lucky bastard" a friend said,  
"I wish I could say that of mine".



# Blackbird

French windows opened  
To a perfect summer evening;  
A blackbird singing  
In the silver birch  
And my mother playing Chopin.  
It is a trite enough scene  
But the moment has its perfection  
And I am suddenly happy.  
The frail reality of the moment  
Will not last longer  
Than the cigarette smoke rising  
But the mood seems a memory  
Like lavender in country gardens  
Of a perfection long forgotten  
Sometimes for a moment re-attained.



## About the Author

Martin Beresford is President of Nichibei Associates, a San Francisco firm specializing in US-Japan trade and investment. Earlier, he worked in the technology and financial sectors in Japan, Asia, Europe and the USA, as head of Moody's-KMV Asia; as a Vice President with Morgan Stanley; as a General Manager with S.G. Warburg; and as a management consultant with McKinsey & Company. Before entering the financial services sector, he worked in international management with Levi Strauss and Cadbury-Schweppes, and as a brand manager with Procter & Gamble.

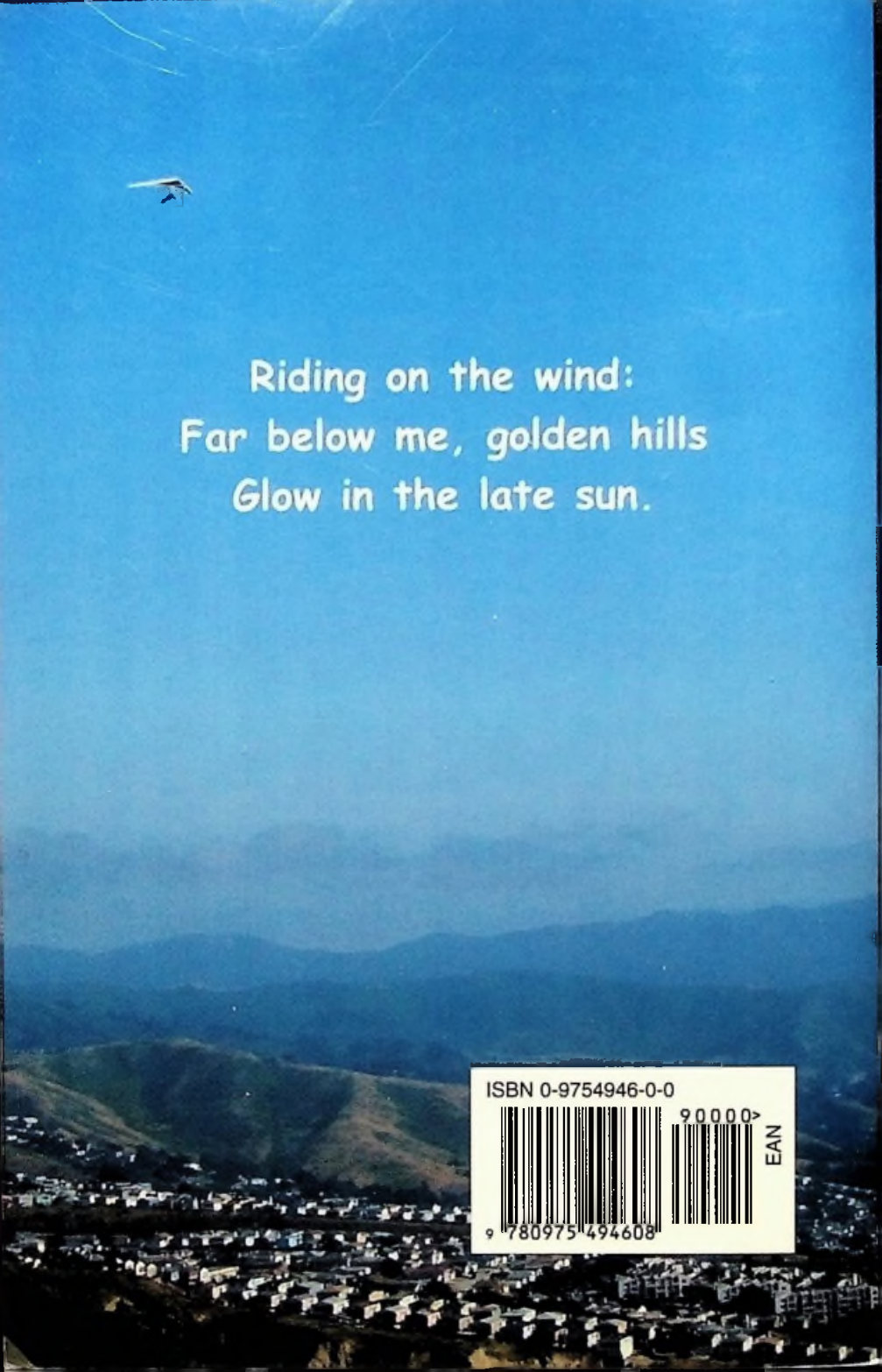
He was born in London in 1937, and was evacuated to Somerset during the blitz in World War II. He won scholarships to Merchant Taylors' School, London, and to St. John's College, Oxford. He studied philosophy and economics at Oxford, and finance at Stanford University. Earlier, he was an officer in the Parachute Regiment (British Army) where he served as a platoon commander. His hobbies include hang gliding, skiing, sailing, running, music and poetry, and he was formerly a professional boxer.

In the UK, he was active in the European Movement. Later, he served as a director of the Japan Society of Northern California, as a committee chairman in the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, as a member of the Bay Area Development Council, and on various other boards. He speaks and reads Japanese, and has published numerous articles on the Japanese economy, international capital markets and economic development.

90





A person is seen paragliding in the upper left portion of the frame against a clear blue sky. Below, a town is nestled in a valley, with rolling hills and mountains in the background under a hazy sky.

Riding on the wind:  
Far below me, golden hills  
Glow in the late sun.

ISBN 0-9754946-0-0



EAN

9 780975 494608