

A SCENT OF LILACS

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Illustrations & cover
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We are not now that strength which in old days

Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are—

One equal temper of heroic hearts,

Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will

To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.

—from Alfred Lord Tennyson

Ulysses

A NOTE OF THANKS

During the five or so years that I have been writing haiku I have been privileged to meet many generous and talented people. Almost without exception these new “haiku and tanka friends” have been encouraging, cheerful, and more than willing to share their skills with me.

Pamela Miller Ness, one of the most talented haiku-tanka authors I know, has taken hours from her busy schedule to talk to me, mentor me and often to read my poems and make valuable suggestions. This book would not “be” without her. I cannot express how much I value our times together, in person, and on the computer.

Stan Forrester is another new and wonderful friend whose company, tutoring, and humor have not only helped me become a better writer, but has enriched the quality of my retired years and made them more productive and fun.

I have spent wonderful hours with my friends in the “hi-lo” workshop in Connecticut, and with my wonderful colleagues at the “Tanka Café” workshop which meets monthly on the lower level of Grand Central Station.

I want to thank Michael Dylan Welch who now lives in Seattle, Washington. Also a talented poet he has made valuable suggestions about my poetry and has shared some of his philosophy of tanka and haiku with me.

Janet Patterson is a talented artist whose work is superb. She has spent hours working and re-working paintings for this book. Last year she beautifully illustrated a book of haiku which I wrote for my first grand daughter age 5. Her sensitive paintings make all the poems brighter and significantly enhance their beauty.

I feel fortunate to have you all.

I want to also thank the scores of people who I have not specifically mentioned but who have made my "life in haiku" so enriching.

Allen M. Terdiman

January 23, 2003

INTRODUCTION

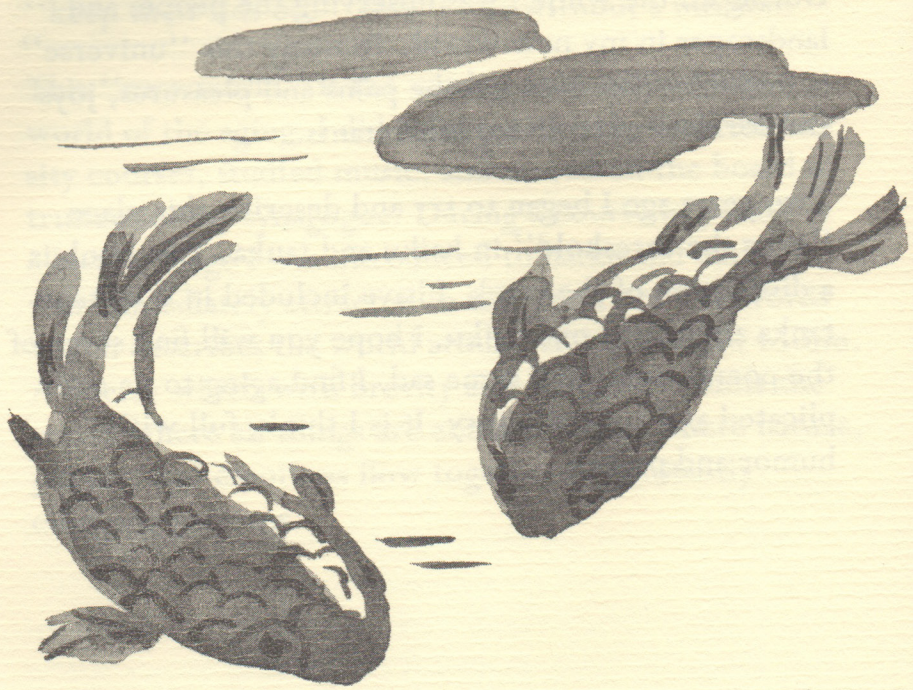
On August 15, 1994 I crossed a threshold. I entered a new world. After 34 years of practicing psychiatry, I retired. I was 61 years of age. For thirty four years I treated patients, taught medical students and psychiatrists in training, worked nights in psychiatric emergency rooms, and spent two years in the United States Air Forces' Strategic Air Command trying to help men and women responsible for the delivery of nuclear weapons "keep their lids on." Now I was without a mission.

This "new world" is the world of the retired, the world of the aging. I did volunteer work, took university courses, studied music, and served on the board of trustees of my synagogue. During a course in poetry at a local college I was introduced to haiku and tanka. I was immediately attracted to this poetry of few words which describes the world around and the world within. A poetry which with brevity and simplicity paints the world where all things are connected and where nature, people, and emotions flow together in constantly changing patterns.

I joined the Haiku and Tanka Societies of America, attended workshops, and met many congenial friendly people who shared their poems and ideas and often were happy even eager to share their talents and wisdom. I began to write poems. In a while some of my work was published and some was included in haiku and tanka anthologies.

During all the while I was observing the people and landscapes in my new world. To many this “universe” is invisible. Not seen are the pains and pleasures, joys and sorrows of its living inhabitants.

Two years ago I began to try and describe this place “over the threshold” in haiku and tanka. This book is a distillation of the work. I have included in it sixteen tanka and thirty-one haiku. I hope you will find some of the poems funny and some sad. I find aging to be complicated and contradictory. It is I think, full with humor and pathos.



walking at dusk—
a girl and her grandpa
hold hands

after forty years
they see only each
other's shadow

boy and grandpa
fly-fishing—
clear skies

reading a book
the old man's eyes close—
winter twilight

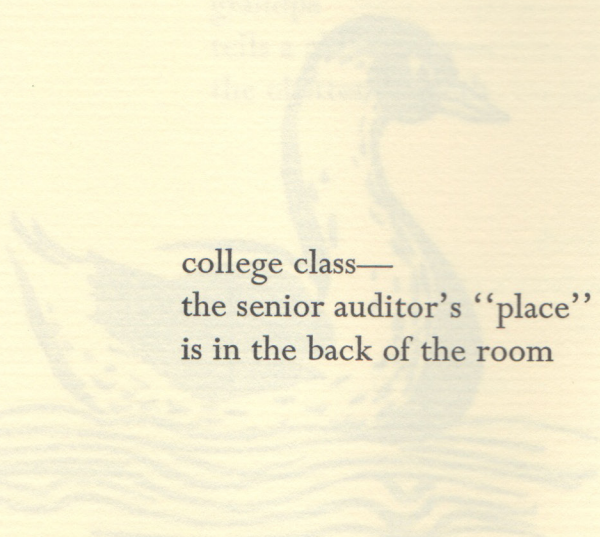
summer TV—
old men in Dodger jackets
argue over the umpire's call

an old man
carrying a newspaper
stops to read the gossip

graveside—
echo of gravel
against the coffin

old man at the stadium
squints to see the “Play”—
thickening mist

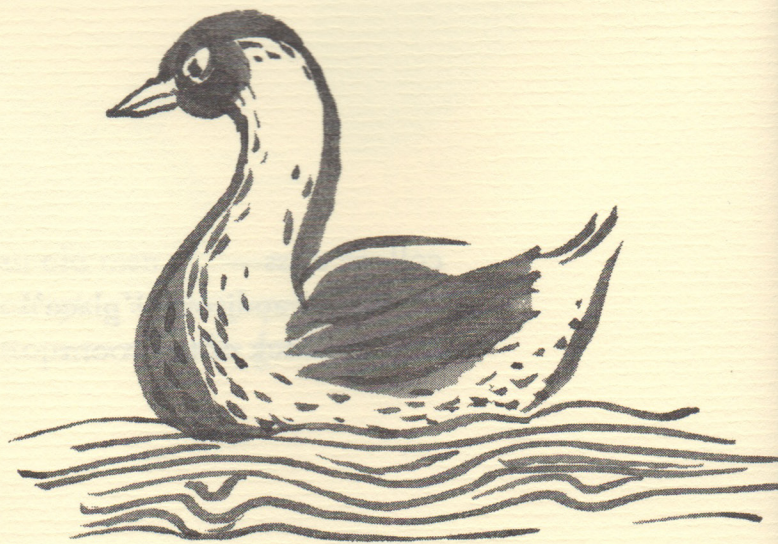
college class—
the senior auditor’s “place”
is in the back of the room



summer afternoon—
waiting for the first matinee
retired men chat

in front of the café
old men sip wine—
tales of long ago

birthday party—
she draws grandpa's cake
with 200 candles



grandpa baby sitting—
kids turn TV to the
X rated channel

a bearded rabbi
teaches torah with puppets—
Moses climbing Mt. Sinai

grandpa
tells a ghost story—
the chatter of teeth



the unwound clock
in my dead grandson's room
continues to tick

Sunday afternoon—
pa and grandson
browse the internet

a misty day—
dad at the airport
slumped in his wheelchair

hospital at dusk—
dad's unfocused eyes
stubble on his chin

the hospice—
in the middle of my story
dad takes his last breath

by the sea—
sitting in the salt air
an aged man and a monk

pa leaves late
after baby sitting—
a full moon

elderly patient and doctor
swap old time jokes—
afternoon light

the north wind pushes
him down the road—
whirl of brittle leaves

after your funeral—
heavy snow

a pot bellied man
on the treadmill—
memories of youth

a memory
of your smile—
the setting sun

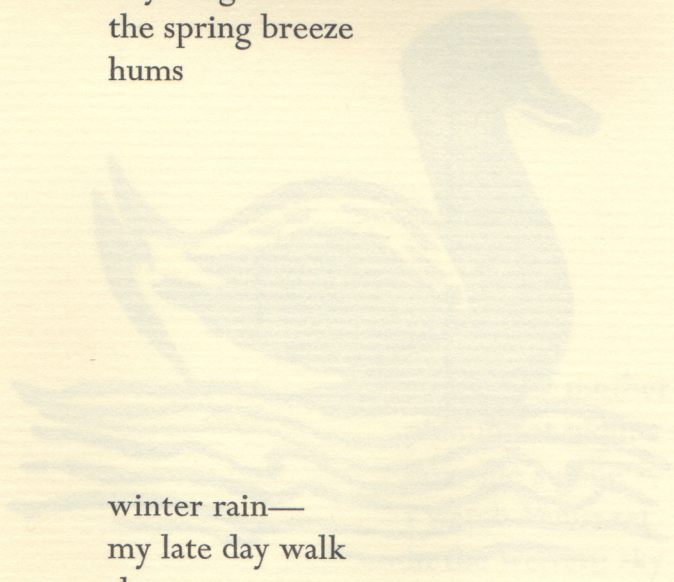
visiting
my childhood home—
scent of mother's lilacs



on the platform
after missing the train—
deep snow

at your grave—
the spring breeze
hums

winter rain—
my late day walk
slows



this summer
you are not present
at the lake—
flowers are blooming
and the birds sing

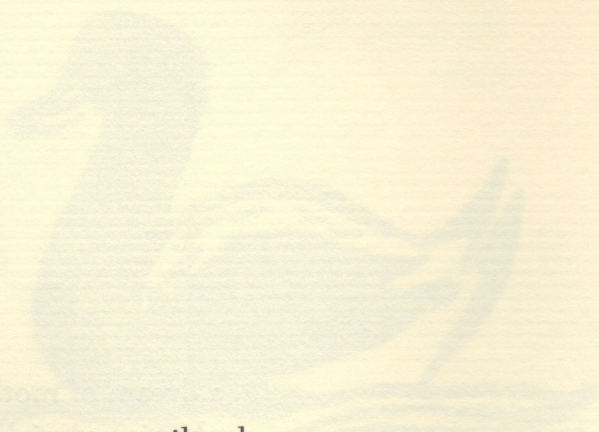
summer day
fishing with my grandson—
back at the dock
his bright eyes and
toothless grin



mountains
under a gray sky—
an old man
walks through drifts
of deep snow

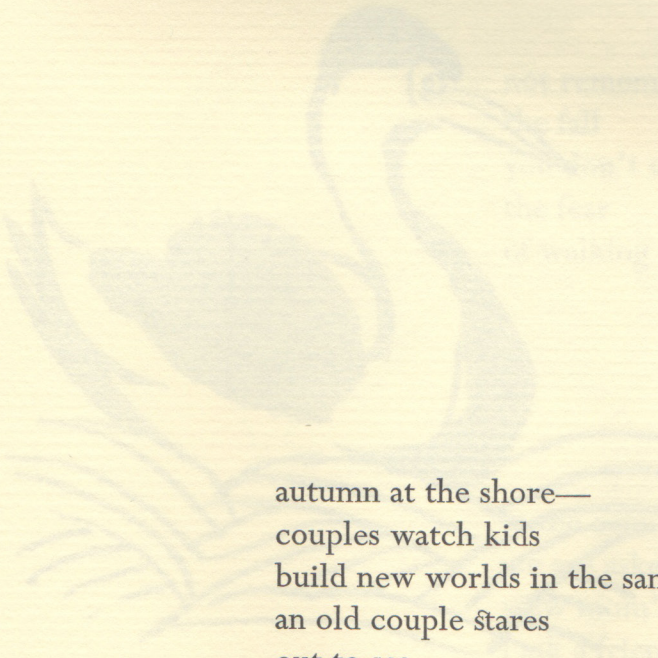
a dream of mother
phoning at night—
now she's gone
I watch Venus set
in the western sky

at your grave
a splash of yellow—
I remember
the forsythia on the trail
we climbed years ago



silently
sitting with you
on the nursing home patio
we listen to a lifetime
of music

in a room
with the grandchildren
your eyes glitter—
I feel the joy



autumn at the shore—
couples watch kids
build new worlds in the sand
an old couple stares
out to sea

seeing you after years
my heart speeds—
do you remember us
diving into the waves
on that summer day?



hiking in the woods
you are three steps ahead—
after thirty years
you're still walking at
your own pace

not remembering
the fall
you don't understand
the fear
of walking outdoors

at the cemetery
we are asked to
view mom's body—
I ask a friend

dad
on an icy path
falls backwards—
tears in his eyes

50 years later
we visit our
honeymoon cottage—
the sea, the stars
you have not changed

feeling empty
my grandchildren's greeting
fills the void—
bright noonday sun

above the clouds
a full moon
in the night sky—
an old man begins
the trek up Mt. Sinai



COLOPHON

One hundred and fifty copies were printed on Classic Laid papers using Perpetua monotype. Presswork was done on a Heidelberg Windmill & a Vandercook Universal at Swamp Press despite the glacial cold of February Northfield.

This is copy number

