

American Haiku's Future

by
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American haiku at the end of the twentieth and into the present century has produced a flourishing array of new writers. This continuing profusion of new talent has been due, in large part, to poets getting together in various parts of the country, either independently or under the auspices of larger haiku groups such as the Haiku Society of America, to study and write haiku. Across the land, in San Francisco, Seattle, Boston, Chicago, New York, Washington, D.C., and many other places, poets from these groups, or in touch with them, are emerging into the haiku limelight. Here are brief sketches of the lives and works of fourteen of these poets, who are—or soon will be—major figures in twenty-first-century American haiku.

The West Coast

Ruth Yarrow, who now lives in Seattle, Wash., was born in Camden, N.J., on September 15, 1939. She grew up in college towns throughout the Midwest, where her father worked as a modern language professor. She writes that her Quaker parents gave her "a sense that trying to help heal the world brings joy." Her family and friends encouraged an interest in nature that she possessed at an early age. She earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Antioch College and a master's in ecology from Cornell University. She has taught in classrooms from first grade to college level in the United States, Africa, and Central America, but most of her several dozen years of teaching "have been outdoors as a naturalist in environmental centers." She discovered haiku while teaching at a state college in New Jersey in the early 1970s when the class read Harold G. Henderson's *An Introduction to Haiku* as part of their study of how people around the world view nature. She joined the Haiku Society of America in 1978. For eighteen years Yarrow and her husband lived, taught, and raised a family in Ithaca, N.Y. During this time she got to know haiku poets Tom Clausen and John Stevenson, and occasionally attended meetings of the HSA in New York City.

Yarrow's haiku reflect her interests in social justice, world peace, and the welfare of children as well as her love for nature. She believes haiku can deal with issues such as nuclear weapons, protecting the environment, and social equality. While in Ithaca she and her husband worked actively for social change. They retired from teaching a few years ago and moved to Seattle, where she continues to be active in social and environmental causes.

Yarrow has published four chapbooks of haiku: *No One Sees the Stems* (High/Coo Press, 1981), *Down Marble Canyon* (Wind Chimes Press, 1984), *A Journal for Reflections* (Crossing Press, 1988), and *Sun Gilds the Edge* (Saki Press, 1999). She has been active in the haiku world as a contest judge, guest editor, and lecturer and is currently coordinator for the Northwest Region of the HSA.

Several of Yarrow's haiku are considered classics. Probably the most famous are the

following:

warm rain before dawn
my milk flows into her
unseen

the baby's pee
pulls roadside dust
into rolling beads

The first is a memorable emblem of the union between mother and child and how that union fits into the world of nature. The second shows the poet's ever-present awareness; she notices how the dust takes on a life of its own in the "beads." By letting the reader's imagination see the universe, galaxies of dust, spinning in a drop of pee, she carries Blake's grain of sand to a new level. It can also represent the world of possibilities that lie ahead for the baby.

Here is an exceptional one-liner:

after the garden party the garden

A simple evocation of the silence and beauty of a garden as the poet contemplates it after the noise and excitement of a party, this haiku also has a kind of loneliness, a mood of silent solitude merged with the timeless of nature, that gives it emotional strength. It is a marvel of concision.

train platform:
each wet leaf
face down

rising huge
beyond the cooling tower
thunderhead

Waiting on the platform for a train, in the rain or after it, the poet is absent-mindedly looking at the autumn leaves strewn about her when she realizes they are all face down. Somehow this matches her mood, which we sense from the image is sad and melancholy. The leaves also suggest that she is at a train station in a small town. We can move back, as in a movie, and see a rainy landscape with the lone figure of the poet at its center. The second haiku reverberates with sources of power: the dreaded symbol of nuclear pollution, or even destruction, silhouetted against the natural power of the thunderhead. The thunderhead itself can be seen either as ominous, a possible carrier of poisonous vapor, or as a promise of life-supporting rain.

Vincent Tripi's first book, *Haiku Pond*, published by Vide Press in 1987, was influenced by Henry David Thoreau, and it mixes Tripi's journal entries and haiku with quotations from the great Transcendentalist. The journal notes combine mystical musings with nature sketches that are sometimes so laconic as to leave only puzzling fragments on the page. The haiku are fair attempts by a beginning haiku poet who too often seems intent on startling the reader, yet here and there we catch a glimmer of the idiosyncratic and daringly inventive, yet sharply aware, haiku poet he will become.

Born in Brooklyn, N.Y., on June 9, 1941, Tripi was brought up Catholic and took an

interest in spiritual, religious, philosophical, and social concerns at an early age. He majored in philosophy in college and later received a graduate degree in psychology. For about fifteen years Tripi was a social worker, and part of his job was to draw up investigative reports on child abuse for use in court proceedings. Any detail could be of crucial importance, and Tripi attributes some of the observational powers he exercises in creating his haiku to these experiences in protective services. About 1979 he became interested in Eastern religions and began living and teaching in spiritual communities on both the East Coast and in California. This communal period, he says, was largely spent in meditation, chanting, and playing the harmonium. In 1984 he began living a solitary life: "I moved to a small cabin in the southern part of New Hampshire," he writes. "No electricity, no running water, etc. Outhouse. Lived there for a year. Chopped wood. Read a lot. Found Nature. Thoreau. Zen. Haiku." This way of life resulted in Haiku Pond.

Since that beginning, Tripi has become one of our most prolific poets, his haiku gaining in clarity, yet retaining the wonder and mystery of nature. Constantly honing his language and infusing it with a spirit cultivated in solitude, he has brought his haiku in instance after instance to a pitch of perfection. His fourteenth book, *monk & I*, was published by Hummingbird Press in 2001. Tripi's books reflect his life's spiritual quest. More so than those of most American haiku poets, Tripi's haiku often have to be read in the context of his other haiku and writings or they may appear inaccessible.

One of this poet's major concerns is the concept of oneness. This involves a union with both nature and other human beings. Though he has a reputation for being a solitary person, Tripi actually keeps in touch with a large network of friends and has a strong sense of community. Two privately published books, *Tribe: Meditations of a Haiku Poet* (1995) and *Tribe: Further Meditations of a Haiku Poet* (1998) are devoted to musings on life, the spiritual quest, and haiku. They take the form of short prose passages or aphorisms. Their main purpose is to help give haiku poets a sense of being members of a tribe with similar interests and goals, mainly spiritual. This ideal is often expressed more obliquely through his haiku.

After he left the cabin in New Hampshire, Tripi went to the San Francisco Bay area, where he wrote and taught yoga and meditation. He has since lived in Tucson, Ariz., and Greenfield, Mass. He joined the Haiku Society of America in 1987 after Jerry Kilbride came knocking at his door bringing news that part of the American haiku tribe was right around the corner. Tripi was a charter member of the Haiku Poets of Northern California in 1989, and the same year he and Paul O. Williams became the first editors of *Woodnotes*, the official journal of HPNC. He has also served as a vice president of the HSA.

Tripi has very eclectic interests, ranging from the nineteenth century novelist George Eliot to Trappist monk Thomas Merton, but says that most of his poetry has Buddhist underpinnings. Three concepts seem to have particularly engaged him: aloneness, mystery, and togetherness. "Aloneness," which he also calls "solitude," reflects the contemplative part of Buddhism: being solitary, sitting or walking meditation, and the examination of what the self is or is not. Two of his favorite terms are "patience" and "now." You need patience to experience now in such a way that the self and nature become one. The self disappears:

To hear it,
not to hear myself,

waterfall

White lilac scent—
the dollhouse at the window
with its window open

"Mystery" includes all the mystery of existence. How do we understand what the present moment, now, really is or means? How do we accept not only our own mystery and wonder of being, but that of all sentient and nonsentient being? Given the mystery we sense in rocks and stars, perhaps the whole universe is sentient. Mystery pervades everything:

Letting-out
more string than he has
the Kite Master

In the snow
around the carousel
tracks of a horse

"Oneness" or "togetherness," when concerned with other human beings, reflects the Buddhist ideal of compassion and the concept of community, yet it is mirrored in the poet's oneness with nature as well. This is probably Tripi's strongest interest, though he might not express it this way. Tripi speaks to a need felt always by the born-alone human heart, and this is why he will likely turn out to be not only a major haiku poet, but also an important spiritual writer. Tripi always signs his name to his works in all lower-case characters: "vincent tripi." Perhaps a reflection of his spiritual concerns, it is a practice that has been followed by several other Western haiku poets.

Christopher Herold is another poet whose haiku is grounded in Buddhist thought and spirit. He was born April 23, 1948, in Suffern, N.Y. His family moved to the San Francisco Bay area in 1956, and he wrote his first haiku in 1968 while studying at the Tassajara Zen Mountain Center. He writes in a letter that he did not know it was a haiku until the head monk at the center told him. Herold left the monastery to resume a career as a drummer, and by 1976 he was playing for Kingfish, a top-selling rock band. After his daughter was born in 1980, he "put music on a back-burner" and concentrated on being a parent while working at various part-time jobs, especially gardening. At the time he published *In Other Words* (Mullock Music/Jarus Books, 1981), his first chapbook of haiku, he was still unaware of the American haiku movement. While living in La Honda, a small town in the Santa Cruz mountains, he met the haiku poets David LeCount and James Hackett, both of whom lived nearby. He credits LeCount with helping him to become more disciplined in his writing of haiku, to pay more attention to his technique and crafting the language. He became friends with Hackett, one of America's pioneer haiku poets, and also worked for him as a gardener: "I found myself spending many long days in the Hacketts' secluded compound, often without tools in hand, just sipping tea and discussing haiku."

About the time he met Hackett, Herold published *Coincidence* (Kanshiketsu Press, 1987), his second book of haiku. He was by this time contributing to haiku magazines but was not connected to any groups or organizations. A talk with Jerry Kilbride on the

beach at Half Moon Bay in 1990 changed that. As he had done with Tripi, Kilbride acted as a sort of emissary between Herold and the very active haiku community in northern California. By 1991 Herold was working as a coeditor of Woodnotes and was serving on the committee that organized the first Haiku North America conference that same year. In 1993 he was elected president of the HPNC. Since then he has conducted numerous workshops on haiku and meditation both in California schools and at various Zen centers on the West Coast.

Herold has published three more books: *Voices of Stone* (a book-length haibun (Kanshiketsu Press, 1996), *In the Margins of the Sea* (Snapshot Press), and *A Path in The Garden* (Katsura Press), both published in 2000. Herold moved to Port Townsend, Wash., in 1998, and in September 1999, with the help of Alex Benedict, he started *The Heron's Nest*, the first monthly haiku journal to publish simultaneously on the Internet and in a print edition.

This poet likes to go off suddenly into the wilderness on camping trips. He has written haiku while on hikes in the Pinnacles National Monument and along trails in the Sierra Nevada. Herold's haiku are less subjective, less laden, or graced, with obvious spiritual messages than those of some other spiritually oriented poets such as Tripi. Herold looks closely at small things:

Sierra sunrise . . .
pine needles sinking deeper
in a patch of snow

one thread
of the old, frayed shoelace
pulls through

The vivid image of the pine needles connects us to the wide panorama of the mountain sunrise and the wonder of spring, which is melting the snow. The shoelace poem at first has a senryu-like effect, the humor of the poet's thrift leaving his shoe hanging by a thread, but there is also a sense of what Japanese poets call *sabi*, a loneliness in time. In this case, it is a feeling that something old and reliable must finally give way to the new. Here are two haiku from *A Path in the Garden*:

no ripples—
from under the lily pad
a bubble

the kettle whistles
a blur of garden color
on the window

The simple image of the lily pad is an allusion not only to Bashô's "old pond," but also to Nick Virgilio's famous "lily" haiku. Out of the still depths of the pond comes the single bubble. What kind of life or shifting of the universe has sent it to the surface? Could it be Bashô's frog? In the kitchen we see a blur of color through the kettle's steam that fogs the window and realize it is the garden. The warm coziness of having a cup of tea, whether in solitude or with a friend, is meaning-fully juxtaposed with the

color and life outside where the poet will soon be working or meditating.

Garry Gay was a cofounder of the Haiku Poets of Northern California and its first president, 1989–90. Even earlier he was a leading member of the Leanfrog haiku group in Oakland, Calif. In 1991 he served as president of the Haiku Society of America. As the first HSA president not from the East Coast, he was instrumental in making the HSA more national. In the HPNC he started several long-running traditions, including the Two Autumns readings. Besides holding office in these organizations, Gay has been a vital presence in a number of haiku projects. He was a cofounder of Haiku North America and is still active on the board that determines where in North America this important conference will be held every two years. He chairs the advisory board for the American Haiku Archives, located at the California State Library, Sacramento, and was elected president of HPNC again in 2001. Besides publishing his own books of haiku, he has edited several haiku anthologies, including, with coeditors Tom Tico and Jerry Ball, *The San Francisco Haiku Anthology* (Smythe-Waithe Press, 1992). In 1992 he invented a popular form of linked poetry called "rengay" that is related to renga but has characteristics of its own that make it a unique and challenging genre.

Gay was born in Glendale, Calif., on March 28, 1951, and has been a professional photographer for almost thirty years. He started writing haiku in 1975. Bashō's *Narrow Road to the Deep North* was and is one of the greatest influences on his poetry. He has published five chapbooks of haiku. The first, *The Billboard Cowboy*, was put out by Smythe-Waithe Press in 1982; the most recent, *Along the Way*, was published in 2000 in England by Snapshot Press. He has a sharp comic wit; his senryu tend to overshadow his very fine haiku. Here are two of his classics:

Weight lifter
slowly lifting
the tea cup

Old retriever;
he opens one eye
at the tossed stick

Family life plays an important role in Gay's writing. His daughter Alissa appears in a number of his haiku:

In cupped hands
she brings me
the cricket's silence

People, or their absence, mingle with nature in many of his haiku, but sometimes it is he himself who mingles:

Her mailbox
leans into the honeysuckle
rusted and empty

Autumn begins
leaves follow me

into the shed

Michael Dylan Welch has been closely involved with Garry Gay in several haiku projects. In 1992 he was the first poet to write a rengay with its inventor. They were cofounders of—and have continued to work together on—Haiku North America as well as the American Haiku Archives and have been coeditors of several books. Welch came a long distance to be part of the West Coast haiku scene and the American haiku community. He was born in Watford, England, on the outskirts of London, on May 20, 1962, and grew up in England, Ghana, Australia, and Canada. He wrote his first haiku in 1976 at the age of fourteen. He joined HPNC in 1989, the same year he started Press Here, his own publishing house for haiku books. At the time he worked as a technical writer and later as publications manager for a software company. Since 1991 he has worked as a book and Web editor. He currently lives in Sammamish, Wash. He holds a bachelor's degree in communications/media and English, and a master's in English. Besides haiku, his literary interests run from tanka to Lewis Carroll to E.E. Cummings. He is also an avid photographer.

Welch edited *Woodnotes* for the Haiku Poets of Northern California for about five years before he took it independent in 1996, publishing and editing it on his own. Under his editorship *Woodnotes* set a new standard for the quality of haiku—and related forms such as tanka, linked verse, and haibun—published in haiku journals. The articles were groundbreaking and the quality of the layouts and art work were outstanding. He discontinued this journal in 1997 to launch *Tundra*, a new magazine for short poetry. The first issue came out in 1999 and the second in 2001. The books that Welch has published under his Press Here imprint retain the fine standards he set with *Woodnotes*. More than half of the twenty-five or so books Press Here has published have won Merit Book Awards from the Haiku Society of America, starting with the first one in 1989. Welch has edited or coedited all of the anthologies for the Haiku North America conferences, and has also edited important anthologies of senryu (*Fig Newtons: Senryu to Go*, 1993), tanka (*Footsteps in the Fog*, 1994), and haibun (*Wedge of Light*, 1999). Welch also served as California regional coordinator for the HSA in 1995 and 1996: in 1997 and 2003 he served as HSA vice president. He inaugurated the Tanka Society of America in 2000 and was elected its first president.

Welch's haiku encompass a large variety of forms and subjects. He plays with different indentations of lines and employs white space within the poem for various effects. Memories of childhood are presented in present tense immediacy and sometimes are juxtaposed with happenings in the present itself:

home for Christmas:
my childhood desk drawer
empty

paper route
knocking a row of icicles
from the eave

He often uses domestic and urban images, though he also employs scenes from field and woods, streams and lakes, and other natural environments:

beach parking lot—

where the car door opened
a small pile of sand

mountain spring—
in my cupped hand
pine needles

The first of these two poems has a sense of *sabi*. The parking lot seems empty of cars. It is dusk and the only sign that the lot may have been crowded with cars during the day is this small pile of sand. As it grows dark, a chill wind comes off the sea, and the viewer feels the end of summer and the loneliness of existence. Other readers may see a middle of summer scene, or . . . something else. The second captures the freshness of a spring day on a wooded mountain, for "spring" can be read two ways. One feels, smells, and sees the pine trees that surround the poet as he drinks from the spring where a few needles have fallen.

Ebba Story, in an autobiographical note to *Beyond Within* (Sundog Press, 1997), an anthology of rengay, writes:

As a child, I was very much alone. I explored the pine woods and the sandy stream beds and caught fireflies and tadpoles. I wandered through the hot Georgia nights that smelled of marshes. I lay in sweet green meadows under the far away stars and dreamed. Everything was vibrantly alive in the dark.

At college, I read intensely with the hope of finding a path through the university back into nature. Now, years later, my intuitive awareness of the wild complements my years of disciplined study. Words and writing have become a way to bring intellect and spirit together. I live with gratitude and awe for nature and for the friends I've discovered along the way. And, aloneness has ripened into solitude.

Story seems to share with Tripi similar attitudes towards nature, writing, and the spiritual life.

She was born in Augusta, Ga., on July 27, 1952. While she was growing up her family moved back and forth between Savannah and a rural county thirty miles north of the Okefeenokee Swamp. A third-person autobiographical sketch in *Summer River* (1992), a Haiku Poets of Northern California haiku anthology, says she "spent the first twenty-four years of her life in Georgia. In spite of extensive travel across the United States, Scandinavia, and India, she still hears the mockingbird's call from deep in her heart and loves best those marshy places that hold the secret life of pulsating tides."

Story moved to California in 1977. In 1995 she wrote a thesis entitled "The Adaptation of Hinduism in the Writings of Henry David Thoreau" and received a master's in humanities with an emphasis in Asian studies. She had been interested in Asian literature since the early 1970s, after she discovered the Cold Mountain poems of the Chinese poet Han Shan, but did not start writing haiku until 1991. That same year she joined the HPNC, and soon thereafter she joined the Haiku Society of America and the Yuki Teikei Haiku Society. She has served as HPNC secretary and was an associate editor of *Woodnotes* (1993–94) and has coedited the group's new magazine *Mariposa*.

Story has been active in giving presentations and workshops at meetings of the various groups she belongs to as well as at Haiku North America conferences and elsewhere. Her haiku have appeared often in the major haiku journals and have been included in a number of anthologies. She is now preparing a manuscript of her collected haiku for publication.

Story's haiku can have the freshness of spring breezes or the lonely blues feeling of autumn rain. She can also communicate the feeling of joy one can find in jazz:

jazz clarinet
the tassels of one loafer
bouncing

tarp slapping—
the fragrance of lumber
in the winter mist

"Tarp slapping" beats a different kind of rhythm. Here is winter's lone-liness bittersweet with the fragrance of forests that have been cut down. The mystery of winter mist and the strange sound of wind and tarp combine with the ghostly scent of the lumber to create a superb example of haiku concision and depth.

Story's close and caring attention to the world of nature is obvious in the following haiku:

my open window
my open palm
night takes the moth

waiting
for whales to breathe
poppies close

Night "takes the moth," and there is an implication that, like the poet, night will also take care of the moth. The praise inherent in the repetition of "open" helps halo the flight of the moth. In his introduction to *Summer River*, the anthology mentioned earlier, Tom Lynch wrote about the "whales" haiku:

On the most obvious level this poem seems to be about a person who, while waiting for whales to resurface far out to sea, notices that ... the poppies have begun to close. And perhaps we wonder why we are more interested in the distant spectacle of the whale than in the intimate, small, yet no less wondrous movement of the poppies. On the other hand, the poet/observer may be waiting for both the whales to breathe and the poppies to close, though neither has yet occurred.

The East and Southeast

Though Wally Swist was for a number of years (1988–97) book-review editor for *Modern Haiku*, working for this Midwest-based journal from his home in New England, and has had some association with the Boston Haiku Society, he seems to have had little immediate contact with other haiku poets. He has written thousands of haiku and published many hundreds. As a result of this productivity, and probably a lack of editorial feedback from fellow poets, much of his published work has been less

than outstanding. Robert Spiess, his editor at *Modern Haiku*, seems to have liked his work indiscriminately, so much so that Spiess would sometimes print twenty or more of his haiku in an issue. Even Swist's weaker haiku can provide interesting glimpses of the out-of-doors, but many of them do not rise above being nature notes, or jottings for a journal, rather than full-fledged haiku. This has led some readers, who may have skimmed this poet's work too quickly, to miss those instances when he does connect solidly with his subject to produce an outstanding haiku. Swist may strike out a lot but he ends up with an impressive number of home runs.

Swist, who lives in Connecticut and works as a bookstore manager, was born in New Haven on April 26, 1953. In his early twenties, when he was seriously practicing Zen meditation and reading in Eastern literature, he learned about haiku and began writing them. He eventually dropped his Zen practice, but has been writing haiku ever since. Swist also writes lyric and short narrative poems and has published two full-length collections of these. The most recent was *Veils of the Divine* (Hanover Press, 2001), which was highly praised by Robert Creeley.

Swist's writing of haiku has been strongly influenced by the environment of rural western Massachusetts where he lived for eighteen years. For twelve of those years (1984–96) he occupied a refurbished barn next to Haskins' Flats, a conservation area on the edge of North Amherst. While living in the barn he wrote almost daily, often hiking and walking the meadows, wetlands, and mountains. He estimates that he produced more than four thousand haiku in this period. Of this number, he published more than 900 in haiku journals and other magazines. He has published eight books of haiku. The first was a chapbook, *Unmarked Stones*, published in 1988 by Burnt Lake Press in Canada. His most recent was *The White Rose*, published by Timberline Press in 2000.

Swist's work has been influenced by Spiess. Often his haiku have two images juxtaposed to create a resonating moment. The subject matter, as noted, comes from the woods and fields of New England, and his best work captures with startling immediacy the simple everyday occurrences one can encounter there:

mist lifts from the hills
wet barn wood
steams

trembling in the steady rain
caterpillar tents
in the crabapple

The first is a vivid rendering of a summer morning after rain. The sun has come out and the heat is causing steam to rise from the barn roof, but the resonance comes in because we see this in the setting of the surrounding hills where the mist is rising, and feel the relationship between the human, represented by the barn, and nature, embodied in the hills. The attraction of the caterpillar haiku is more difficult to explain. Though there is no overt personification—"tents" is the common term for these gauzy web-like constructions that protect the caterpillars—we feel a unity with this life sheltered from the rain. Though we know they are pests and will harm the tree, we cannot help but feel a sympathy for the trials they will probably face, which is somehow conveyed by the trembling of the tents.

Some of Swist's haiku are reminiscent of those of John Wills, but with his own magical twist:

rain sprinkles the river—
pollen yellows the funnel
of a trout swirl

the heat . . .
the wetness of trail stones
deep in pine shade

The first haiku could be an homage to Wills, recalling the classic Wills haiku "rain in gusts / below the deadhead / troutswirl." Swist makes the image his own, however, with the delicate touch of the yellow pollen. The second verse has an ambiguity that makes it appealing. It could be a hot day in summer and the trail stones are in such deep shade that they are still wet from the morning dew or a rain shower. Or, it is an unusually warm day in spring and the wetness of the rocks is from some snow still under the branches.

A bit to the west of Swist country, in New York state, in the land of the old Iroquois Confederacy, is a writer with a darker vision than most American haiku poets. John Stevenson, who was born in Ithaca on October 9, 1948, grew up in the wooded farm and vineyard areas of the Finger Lakes region, and has lived all his life in New York. Half his life has been spent in rural areas, the rest in Buffalo, Ithaca, and New York City. He now lives with his teenage son in Nassau, a small town near Albany, and works as an administrator for the New York State Office of Mental Health.

Stevenson was a poet long before coming to haiku in 1992, writing and publishing his first poem at the age of eight. Since 1993, when he joined the Haiku Society of America, his poetic muse has been devoted to haiku and he has been busy in the haiku community, editing books, judging contests, and working as coordinator for the Northeast Metro Region of the HSA in 1995–96, traveling to the City to attend the group's meetings, and serving as HSA president in 2000. In 1997 he edited *From a Kind Neighbor*, that year's HSA members' anthology.

Stevenson began as an art major at Buffalo State College but graduated with a degree in theater and was a professional actor for most of his twenties. He has been involved with a kind of improvisation called playback theatre for about ten years. Stevenson relates this activity to his haiku writing, believing that the two pursuits "have important areas of shared aesthetics." To one who knows Stevenson's haiku, especially his recent book, *Some of the Silence* (Red Moon Press, 1999), it is not surprising that he admires the work of Samuel Beckett: "Beckett's impulse toward ever briefer dramas both parallels and strongly contrasts with my sense of the motives that attract me and other Westerners to the brevity of haiku." Stevenson's views of life and the world, and his choice of subject matter, result in haiku that suggest the cynical and ironic existential despair that Beckett's plays relentlessly and broodily embody. Of course Stevenson writes other kinds of haiku as well, but this trend is apparent in much of his work.

Stevenson looks at this dark side of life unblinkingly. One finds in his haiku more than just traces of cynicism. The sadness in his poems about sickness and death often borders on hopelessness. We also find haiku with a world-weariness and a sense of

things falling apart:

old slippers
the comfort
coming apart

her eyes narrow,
seeing for the first time
my little house

Not quite what we expect from haiku, but haiku is finding more aspects of life to explore than ever before. If haiku is about our relationship with existence, why shouldn't it be able to go wherever the theater, movies, or even the novel go—wherever life goes? See how Stevenson finds the dark side, perhaps even menace or a sense of the ominous, in such ostensibly innocent things as a piece of driftwood or a child talking to a dog:

winter beach
a piece of driftwood
charred at one end

the three-year-old
making their big dog
sit

Beyond the obvious humor of the second haiku there lies a sense that the big dog may not always be ready to obey this proud little ruler but instead may suddenly lunge at him. When Stevenson presents us with emptiness or nothingness it does not have the sense of bringing us to a sense of enlightened awareness, but rather to an awareness of how life can seem careening out of control into a terrible blankness:

wind-beaten marquee
saying only
"Coming Soon"

the train picks up speed,
in a paper coffee cup
concentric waves

At least in the second of these two haiku there is a mysterious sense of unseen forces at work and that even if they may not save us they are at least something—something more than absolute nothingness.

Also living in New York state, but tending to write haiku about more cheerful, domestic scenes, is Tom Clausen. Though he treats the ups and downs of marriage and being a parent, his experience seems to have been that the ups seem to make up for the downs. He first learned of haiku in the early 1980s when a friend gave him the "Autumn" book of R.H. Blyth's four-volume *Haiku*. Though he was interested, he did not seriously take up the genre until 1988, after he read an article about Ruth Yarrow, who was then living in Ithaca, N.Y.

Clausen has lived almost all his life in Ithaca. He was born there on August 1, 1951, and lives there now, in his childhood home with his wife and two children (and two cats). He writes that his parents encouraged him to keep a journal at a very young age. By the time he went to college he was "well into the habit of writing to record experiences and to find expression for thoughts and feelings in solitude." After college (Cornell University, 1973) he took a series of bicycle trips in North and Central America and helped develop his literary skills by writing letters about his experiences on the road. By 1980 he had begun to write what he "hoped were poems."

Many of Clausen's haiku are about his family and his relationships with his children and his wife. This emphasis may show Yarrow's influence on his work. Here is a senryu about his daughter and another about his wife and cat, which presumably refers to something the poet has said (or it could be understood as a small child mimicking an adult):

after speaking importantly
she quickly resumes
sucking her thumb

to the cat
"that's complete and
utter nonsense"

Clausen writes,

Haiku has consistently appealed to me as a means of centering, focusing, sharing, and responding to a life and world bent on excess. As the layers of my own life have accumulated, I've often felt overwhelmed by both personal changes and the mass of news, information, and survival requirements that come with being human these days. Haiku are for me a means of honoring and celebrating simple yet profound relationships that awaken in us, with a gentle and silent inner touch, a spiritual relevance that adds meaning to our lives.

He, too, has practiced Zen meditation and looks on haiku as a tool for "spiritual tuning and guidance, shining light on the way we go."

Clausen joined the Haiku Society of America and Haiku Canada in 1988. He sometimes attends HSA meetings in New York City where he has had contact with such poets as Stevenson, Dee Evetts, and L.A. Davidson. He has self-published three small chapbooks of his haiku, in 1994, 1995, and 1998. A collection of his tanka, *A Work of Love*, was published in 1997 by Tiny Poems Press. In 2000 Snapshot Press in England published *Homework*, a book of his haiku. It was a small collection about, once again, family life. Clausen also writes haiku with a more traditional focus on nature. Here are two: the first one has a very strong sense of *sabi* and the second shows a bonding with the world of wild nature—and more *sabi*.

twilight
the only car ahead
turns off

snow flurrying . . .
the deer, one by one, look back
before they vanish

Many important haiku poets live or have lived in the New York City metropolitan area, but Dee Evetts stands out. He became a member of the Haiku Society of America in 1987, before he started living in this country. Born in England on May 16, 1943, he settled in New York City in 1990 after spending time in Southeast Asia (with the British version of the Peace Corps in Thailand) and Canada. He became vice president of the HSA in 1993 and was its secretary from 1996 to 1999. In 1990, just before coming to the United States, he co-founded the British Haiku Society. In 1991 he started the Spring Street Haiku Group in New York City. Still active, it is made up of about a dozen poets (including such gifted haiku writers as Carl Patrick and Tony Pupello) who meet once a month for a workshop discussion of their haiku. In 1994 Evetts curated the "Haiku on 42nd Street" project in which haiku by twenty-six poets were featured for six months on the marquees of vacant movie theaters. (In *The Source*, a feature documentary on the Beats released in 1999, Allen Ginsberg is shown reading and photographing several of these haiku.)

Evetts makes his living mainly as a carpenter and cabinetmaker. In New York City he was involved with special programs for haiku in the schools and participated in public readings and haiku events at Poets House, Japan Society, and various other venues. He attended an international haiku conference in Tokyo in 1997, writes "The Conscious Eye," a series of articles for Frogpond, and is coeditor, with Jim Kacian, of *A New Resonance: Emerging Voices in English-Language Haiku*, the first volume of which was published in 1999 by Red Moon Press and a second appeared in 2001. He now lives, as does Kacian, in Winchester, Va.

Evetts first discovered haiku in England in 1963 while reading the works of Alan Watts on Zen Buddhism. As he says in the introduction to his haiku collection, *Endgrain* (Red Moon Press, 1997), "I was sufficiently intrigued to go searching for more examples, and soon found a collection from Peter Pauper Press." Though the verses were not the best translations available, enough of the original poems came through to keep Evetts enthusiastic about haiku. A poem by Onitsura made an enormous impression on him: "There is no place / to throw the used bathwater. / Insect cries!" (translation by Harold G. Henderson, whose work Evetts found later). He continues,

I had only recently left school, having endured substantial overdoses of Wordsworth and Milton. It was a revelation to me that dirty bathwater could be the subject of a poem, and that a poem could be so brief and yet have such resonance. My response at the time was a feeling of having been born into the wrong literary tradition.

Evetts's first haiku appeared in 1970 in *Haiku* magazine, which was then being edited and published by William J. Higginson in New Jersey. In 1988, Higginson's From Here Press published *A Small Ceremony*, a collection of Evetts's haiku and longer poems. Though the haiku were respectable, they did not make much of a splash in the haiku world. His next book, *Endgrain*, devoted solely to haiku and senryu, clearly demonstrated that he had learned a lot in the intervening nine years. It helped establish Evetts as a front-runner in American haiku and senryu. Here are examples of each:

freshening breeze
the skillet softly chimes
against another

with a flourish
the waitress leaves behind
rearranged smears

Evetts has little tolerance for those who do not take haiku seriously as poetry, those who think it is only useful as a tool for meditation, or poets who write 5–7–5 sound bites with a religious or political message. He writes in *Endgrain* that fundamentally, haiku is a literary genre. For all its brevity, it must ultimately be assessed by the same standards as all other literature. That is, by its aptness, wit, accuracy, felicity of language, and by its lack of sentimentality and moralizing. The future of English-language haiku is unknowable, but there is no escaping that such criteria will continue to apply.

"Most of my own writings," Evetts adds, "can be described as celebratory. In one way or another they attempt 'to taste life twice,' as Anaïs Nin has so vividly expressed it." Here are two haiku that do that:

summer's end
the quickening of hammers
towards dusk

thunder
my woodshavings roll
along the veranda

The first is a fine evocation of the harmony of man and nature: summer, dusk, and the workers all moving to the rhythm of the hammers into completion. In the second, an implicit breeze is making the delicate hoop of a shaving, the thin curled wood strip that comes from a carpenter's plane, roll across the porch. The breeze is a precursor of the coming rain shower, announced by the thunder, and in the poem it unites the small curl of wood, and the man who is working, with the thunderstorm, the world of nature, and the universe.

To the south of New York, in Virginia, we find a poet whose haiku activity has spread out to all parts of the world: Jim Kacian. Kacian took over the editorship of the haiku magazine *South by Southeast* in 1995 when he became coordinator of the Southeast Region of the Haiku Society of America. He edited and published it until 1998, developing high standards for layouts, paper, and typefaces and demonstrating what a haiku magazine might look like. The journal contributed to the process of establishing a canon for haiku in English by featuring imaginatively designed spreads on the work of such haiku greats as John Wills and Nicholas Virgilio.

Since 1997 Kacian has been editor of *Frogpond*, the haiku journal of the HSA. He was a cofounder in 2000 of the World Haiku Association. His Red Moon Press is one of the most productive of the haiku publishers working in the English language. The contents of RMP books are usually of high quality and often appear in creatively conceived formats. Kacian is the editor-in-chief of the annual "Red Moon Anthology" series,

which since 1996 has tried to present the year's best haiku writings. He has authored eight books and chapbooks of his own; five are books of haiku: *Presents of Mind*, came out from Katsura Press in 1996, two appeared in 1997, *Six Directions: Haiku & Field Notes* from La Alameda Press and *Chincoteague* from Amelia Press, the fourth, *In Concert*, was published by Saki Press in 1999, and the fifth in 2001 from a press in Slovenia.

Kacian helped support his press during the 1990s by working as a part-time recreation director on cruise ships, where he put to use his skill at tennis. The cruises took him to the Mediterranean, Alaska, South America, and Africa. In 1997 he traveled to Japan in the American delegation to the Haiku International Association haiku conference. He returned to Japan in 2000 as part of a round-the-world haiku lecture and workshop tour that lasted almost three months. He helped establish national haiku organizations in several countries, including Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Australia. This trip helped awaken international interest in his work and resulted in the book of his haiku being published in Slovenia, *Out of the Stones: Selected Haiku of Jim Kacian*.

With all his activities it is a wonder Kacian has time to find haiku moments and turn them into haiku. Yet even here his energy and drive are evident, perhaps too much so. He writes and publishes many haiku that are technically proficient and pleasant to read but that are not very exciting. When he includes them in a haibun they fit in neatly as journal jottings, but cannot stand very high by themselves. Like Swist, perhaps he needs to slow down his prolific output and aim for more quality. His promise as a major poet is evident in the power and control he demonstrates in his use of language. His supple prose flows in measured cadences and the language always serves the image. Frequently, however, the images in his haiku are too involved with the poet's activities, rather than his observations—that is, they tend to be too subjective. The poems also lean towards conceptual or abstract thought (the "plan" of an orchard) and Western poetic devices (a "Milky Way" of sparrows). Such devices often distance us from what we are looking at rather than making us one with them. Most often the attention to his own actions or reactions does result in fine haiku, as in these two:

spring rain
if i lie
quite still

shipping oars
my own wake rocks me
into shore

The faint sound of the spring rain is suggested by the almost breathless attention of the poet. His awareness relates him and us to the rain and to the natural world of which it is a part. The second has a nicely subtle suggestion that our past helps propel us into the present, into the future, and even to our final destination.

Jim Kacian was born on July 26, 1953, in Worcester, Mass., and raised in Gardner, a town not far from the New Hampshire border. He writes that Gardner is "surrounded by forest, especially to the north, and alpine bog to the west, and so is ideally situated for a budding poet interested in nature." Kacian remembers writing his first poem in September of 1968: "it was during a lunch period which split biology class in half, and which I spent in the lab. The technique I employed, aiming for a resonant

expansiveness out of minutely observed and rendered reporting, is one that I have returned to again and again, notably, of course, in haiku."

At Bates College, Kacian continued to write, learned to play the guitar, hiked and took canoe trips in the Maine woods, and graduated with a degree in English literature and religion. His final semester was at the University of London. He remained in England for several months, where he had a "brief career on the professional tennis circuit."

After earning a master of fine arts degree in music theory and composition from the University of Virginia in 1979, Kacian moved to Nashville "to sell some of the many songs I was then writing. I had a modest success there, supplying a few songs which were performed and recorded by well-known artists." He wrote a song called "Red Moon" that grew "into Red Moon Music, then Red Moon Productions, and ultimately was the inspiration for Red Moon Press." He returned to Virginia and the Shenandoah Valley in late 1985 where he says he began his "first systematic study of haiku, inspired by the writings of Jack Kerouac, and, from him, R.H. Blyth. I vowed to write a thousand poems before I would try to publish one. I succeeded in this, but now feel this was not the best plan: what I learned from the feedback of editors and readers was equally important to the discipline of honing the craft in solitude. If I had to do it again, I would write 300–400 poems purposefully, and then seek interchange with other poets."

In 1989 he moved to Wickliffe, Va., to a house in the middle of an apple orchard. He called it Six Directions. He writes about his life there in his third book of haiku, *Six Directions*. He moved again in 1999, but still lives in Virginia, "in a small city environment."

Kacian has been closely associated for about a decade with a small group of poets that calls itself the towpath haiku group. It is part of the Southeast Region of the HSA and its members live in and around Washington, D.C. Meetings are held in members' homes to discuss their haiku. Perhaps this intimate exchange of ideas at towpath meetings has been a factor in raising the quality of Kacian's haiku. We can, I am sure, expect many more haiku from him with the depth of awareness and sharpness of image evident in the following:

the boat sails
close-hauled to the breeze
windward pines

calm evening
the ballgame play-by-play
across the water

The sailing haiku reveals a close relationship with the sea and perhaps looks back to the poet's experiences in Maine. It reminds us of a painting by Winslow Homer. The wind unites boat, water, pines, and us. In the second haiku, the magic sounds of the distant ball game seem to bless the summer peacefulness of the pond. Each of these haiku captures something essentially American. They shine on the page.

In a suburb of Atlanta lives a poet known for meticulously crafted haiku that combine elegance and a gently startling, spare simplicity, Peggy Lyles. Her haiku

first frost . . .

on a silver card tray
wild persimmons

is a favorite of anthologists. Its subtle evocation of autumn stillness, both inside a home where culture and nature are obviously treasured and outside where the landscape is brushed with the first frost, reveals a master's hand. Sound and image are entwined like scrollwork on the tray. The tangy alliterative chime of "first frost" rings in the sharpness of the chilly weather outdoors, while the smoothness of the sil in "silver" united with the knife-edge fineness of the hard c and d in "card," the t in "tray," the rounding r in both words, and the hard a in the latter all match and complement the image of the metal tray and even the absent cards. These elements become the setting for the red-orange wild persimmons, whose soft richness is echoed by the m, n, and s sounds of the fruit's name, while the melodious adjective "wild" holds the image in balance, harking back to the frost, and keeping the poem from lapsing into sentiment.

The author of this exceptional haiku would surely appreciate being introduced by one of her poems. This one is particularly apt. Instead of a traditional Western calling card or a modern business card (like the Japanese *meishi*), the poet is introduced by the wild persimmons. Peggy Willis Lyles was born in Summerville, S.C., on September 17, 1939. She attended the College of Charleston and The Citadel and graduated from Columbia College. She earned her M.A. in English from Tulane University in New Orleans. While a graduate student she taught freshman English at Sophie Newcomb College and later taught at both high school and college level in North Carolina. Her two children were born in the mid-1960s in Charleston and the family moved to Athens, Ga., in 1968, where they lived for the next eighteen years. Peggy and her husband, Bill, now live in Tucker, Ga. She still enjoys visiting Charleston and the South Carolina low country where she grew up.

In an interview by Lidonna Beer in 2000 that appears in *To Hear the Rain: Selected Haiku of Peggy Lyles* (published by Brooks Books in 2002 as part of its Goodrich Haiku Masters Series), the poet says in reply to the question "When did you begin writing haiku?"

I published some uninformed attempts in *Haiku Highlights* and a few other little magazines in the mid-sixties. Later, the first edition of Cor van den Heuvel's *The Haiku Anthology*, which I found in the University of Georgia Bookstore in 1976, brought me firmly into the North American haiku movement. The haiku there still sparkle with vitality and create ever-widening ripples. The poems thrilled me with a "shock of recognition." Something fine was in progress, and references to books and contemporary haiku magazines offered steps toward becoming a part of it.

Over the years Lyles's haiku have won numerous awards from haiku organizations and magazines. She is a long-time member of the Haiku Society of America and a founding member of Pinecone, the North Georgia Haiku Society. She read her haiku at the Haiku Chicago conference in 1995, the Global Haiku Festival at Millikin University in 2000, and at Haiku North America 2001 in Boston. She has published several collections of her haiku: *Red Leaves in the Air* (High/Coo Press, 1979), *Still at the Edge* (Swamp Press, 1980), *Prisms* (Wind Chimes Haiku Sheet, 1986), and *Thirty-Six Tones* (Saki Press, 2001). For five years she was poetry editor of *Georgia Journal*, a regional

magazine, and since 2002 she has been an associate editor of *The Heron's Nest*.

In his preface to her *To Hear the Rain*, Christopher Herold points out that Lyles is a master of "show, don't tell." ... She calls attention to something in particular without ever naming it. Sometimes it's an object, for instance the sky in:

bare branches
I choose a layer
of blue silk

Sometimes an emotion, like the empathic ache in:

lingering heat
the third-grade classroom
one desk short

All the seats in a classroom have been taken. The last child to enter is left standing. What third-grader wouldn't be embarrassed to stand out in such a way?

Another of Lyles's well-known haiku is the title poem of this remarkable book we have been quoting:

summer night
we turn out all the lights
to hear the rain

This haiku, first published in 1980, has been imitated dozens of times in the haiku magazines but never matched. Its freshness endures: the coolness that comes with the dark and the rain wafts from out of the words.

As Herold also points out, Lyles has a gentleness in her poetry, a gentleness combined with power and courage: "the courage to be vulnerable." Here is another of the gems that she fashions out of the simplest of elements:

yellow leaves
a girl plays hopscotch
by herself

The loneliness and briefness of human existence is reflected in the gentle eye that watches the girl (herself?)—yet the sadness is mingled with the joy and brightness of life. Look how in the following she gives us a town, a day, and a whole parade with just a few "notes:"

the first notes
squeezed from bagpipes
small town parade

The Midwest

For the last two writers in this sampling of American haiku's best new poets I look to the Midwest, America's heartland. John Martone has been publishing a series of very tiny chapbooks, about twenty or more of them from 1991 to the present. The poems in them are polished, lapidary, vertical constructions that, aside from a few startling exceptions, look little like regular haiku. They can be anywhere from three to fifteen or

more lines long, but most run to between five and ten lines. Each line is usually only one word or one syllable long. The lines are grouped into two- or three-line "stanzas." These ultra-short lines perhaps owe their genesis to the typographic influence of E.E. Cummings. Excepting haiku poets, Martone has been especially attracted to the works of Cid Corman, Larry Eigner, and Frank Samperi among others. Corman's short poems, Eigner's use of space, and Samperi's short-short lines (creating narrow poems) may be seen reflected in Martone's poems—a few words arranged vertically on an otherwise blank page. Martone thinks of the poem "as a charm / amulet / meditative object," and "the book ... as space, meditative precinct, garden."

John Martone was born April 22, 1952 in Mineola, Long Island, N.Y., and grew up in nearby Williston Park and later, through high school, a bit further out on the island, in Huntington. He is from a large Italian family, with grandparents, aunts, and uncles all nearby while he was growing up. He was very religious as a young boy. Some of his early life experiences are reminiscent of those of Jack Kerouac growing up Catholic in Massachusetts. Martone writes in the *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, "Certainly I did once see the immense Christus on the crucifix over the altar turn his head from right to left." (Kerouac had a similar experience with a religious statue.) Awed by the beauty and pageantry of the church, he says he "celebrated Mass with a sherry glass and Wonder Bread in the dormer, dreaming of missionary Maryknollers in Uganda, houses on stilts as in the geography books, everyone in the world speaking Latin."

In junior high school he wrote his first poem, about moss in his backyard. He still writes about moss. Often it is moss in the pots of ferns and other plants that appear and reappear in his poems. In high school he became interested in acting and wrote "apocalyptic plays about nuclear war." It was a Catholic high school, yet the nuns gave him such things as *The Fire Next Time* to read. One nun, Sister Regina, had him read Thomas Merton, E.E. Cummings, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti—and even the Auden translations of Dag Hammarskjöld's haiku in his book, *Markings*.

Martone's sensibilities were also deeply affected by the Vietnam War. Although his classification in the draft rose from 2-S to 1-A, his number never came up, and he has been haunted ever since by the fact that he "slipped by" while so many other lives were lost. "All my studies thereafter of Japanese poetry and Mustard Garden Tao and Buddha, of Thich Nhat Hanh and Suzuki, Nyanaponika and Takuboku root in this shame of taking life." He has a strong interest in Vietnamese Buddhism and has traveled to Vietnam to talk to its nuns and priests. Some of these experiences are recorded in a book of haibun, *Rainy Season Notes*. It is in his little books of poetry about potted ferns and everyday life in and around his house, however, where John Martone's art shines brightest, as it does in these four poems:

not
noti
cing

breath
until
this

fern

trembles

•

por
celain
shards

at
bottom
of

one
tree's pot

no
idea
which

•

across
2 lots

shack-door
left wide

such
a day

•

kitchen breezes
children
water color!

The first two are from his book *Shards* (Dogwood & Honeysuckle, 2000). In the first, the passage from the negative "not" to the selflessness of "noti" (not I) to the sing of "cing" to the life of the poet's "breath" to the life of "this fern" swings the poem like a scented censer swaying at a religious ceremony. The shards in the second poem become the mysterious hidden remains of some lost civilization. The second two are from *Children's Guide* (Dogwood & Honeysuckle, 1999). Bob Grumman, who has reviewed a number of Martone's books for *Modern Haiku*, says of the last poem "I think it instructional to point out how much extra quick vividness Martone charges his picture with by drawing it in three short lines of unbroken words—after so many longer poems containing words cut up into syllables nearly as much as full words: a signal advantage of breaking with convention is that one can get a great deal out of the broken convention upon return to it." That is, by writing a haiku in the conventional

three-line form. The children in the haiku may be Martone's two daughters. A number of his little books are dedicated to "r & e"—which stands for Rebekah and Eva.

Grumman has such penetratingly revealing things to say in his reviews of Martone's poetry, I will end my review of the poet's work with that critic's remarks after he quoted the following three poems in a review of *Without a Word* (Dogwood & Honeysuckle, 1999) in *Modern Haiku* 31.3 (fall 2000):

just
enough
snow

to
see

the
path

•

first snow—
&

eva's
done

a
water

color
rose

•

white be
gonia

blooms
fall

to
floor

in
tact

Note in particular the different kinds of fragility and liquidness in the one about Martone's daughter. And its subtle dip from whiteness to colorlessness and then up to a red conclusion. In his haiku about the begonias, Martone exhibits an especially near-

perfect sense of where to break off lines, and stanzas, to snatch away the "verb-ness" of the word, "bloom," and the "preposition-ness" of the syllable, "in"—with wonderful tact. As for the third of this trio, I think it sums up what he does with words to reveal paths.

Our last poet inherits a Midwest haiku tradition from such major figures of American haiku as Raymond Roseliep and Robert Spiess. In fact, Lee Gurga worked with Spiess from 1998 to 2002 as associate editor of *Modern Haiku*, and he became editor of the journal in 2002. Gurga published his first haiku in 1986 and his first haiku chapbook, *A Mouse Pours Out*, from High/Coo Press, in 1988. His second book, *The Measure of Emptiness*, was published in 1991 by Press Here. His rise in importance in American haiku has been meteoric. He has published three more books of his haiku since *Measure*, an impressive number in the haiku world, but it is the high quality of the haiku in them that catapulted him into prominence in record time. The most important of these books is a full-sized hardback, *Fresh Scent: Selected Haiku of Lee Gurga*. When it was published by Brooks Books in 1998, I wrote of its author: "Lee Gurga seems destined to forge a fresh poetic heritage for the Midwest." The book was a remarkable achievement for a poet who had been seriously writing haiku for only about a dozen years. As John Wills captured the essence of the mountains of Tennessee in his classic book, *Reed Shadows*, Gurga gives us in *Fresh Scent* the mystery and wonder of the Midwest: the vast spaces, the rolling prairie, the immense sky, and the majestic rivers.

rows of corn
stretch to the horizon—
sun on the thunderhead

winter prairie—
a diesel locomotive
throttles down in the night

Gurga was born in Chicago, Ill., on July 28, 1949, and grew up in a blue-collar family in a "cop-and-fireman neighborhood" there. He went to the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and graduated with a major in mathematics and minors in Asian studies and dance. After college he worked in the editorial offices of *Encyclopædia Britannica*, then as a bus driver and a welder. He returned for graduate work in dance to the University of Illinois, where he met his wife, Jan, in ballet class. Now a dentist in the small farming community of Lincoln, Ill., he lives in the countryside with his wife and sons Ben, A.J., and Alex, three horses and a dog. The family spends part of each year in Key West, Fla.

Gurga writes,

I discovered R.H. Blyth's four-volume *Haiku* on the shelf of a bookshop in Chicago when I was sixteen. His books opened up a new world to me, a world I have been engaged with in one way or another ever since. I even tried writing some haiku at the time. I read and reread Blyth's books, unaware that other books on haiku were available. By having only Blyth to focus on, his love of haiku permeated me, as did his conviction that haiku's most profound use is as a vehicle to develop a special awareness. I first learned that there were other people interested in haiku when I read a

review by Cor van den Heuvel of William J. Higginson's *The Haiku Handbook* in Newsweek in about 1985.

Since then, as well as being busy writing haiku, Gurga has been very active in the haiku community. He was a vice president of HSA in 1991 and again during 1995–96. He became president in 1997. In addition to his work for *Modern Haiku*, he started a regular haiku column in the Illinois Times newspaper in 1999 and another in Key West in 2001. Though such columns are common in Japan, these may be the first in the United States. In 1992 with Randy Brooks he coedited the *Midwest Haiku Anthology*, and he has recently worked with Emiko Miyashita on three books of translations of Japanese haiku: *Love Haiku: Masajo Suzuki's Lifetime of Love* (Brooks Books, 2000), *Einstein's Century: Selected Haiku of Akito Arima* (Brooks Books, 2001), and *Tsuru: Selected Haiku of Yoshiko Yoshino* (Deep North Press, 2001). His *Haiku: A Poet's Guide* was published by Modern Haiku Press in 2003. He has received a number of awards for his haiku. Two of his books, *In and Out of Fog* (Press Here, 1997) and *Fresh Scent*, received first prizes in the HSA Merit Book Awards, and *Einstein's Century* and *Tsuru* won for best translations. He was awarded an Illinois Arts Council Poetry Fellowship in 1998 for his work in haiku. Active in world haiku circles, he was a guiding force in organizing Haiku Chicago in 1995, an international haiku conference involving the HSA and Tokyo's Haiku International Association, and helped organize and spoke at a follow-up conference in Japan in 1997. He has also represented America at several other conferences in Japan.

Not only do Gurga's haiku let us see the beauty and grandeur of the land, they let us see the actions and traditions of its people so that their loves and aspirations, their sense of God and family, and their good humor and friendliness reach out of the words like a warm handshake. In Gurga's sensitive and often humorous poems we discover the living heart of America:

silent prayer—
the quiet humming
of the ceiling fan

graduation day—
my son & I side by side
knotting our ties