

**Drawing Down the Moon: An Interview with Robin White**  
*Questions Provided by Stanford M. Forrester and Tom Sacramona*

We want to start by asking you to recount your haiku journey, Robin. How did you come to appreciate haiku poetry and begin writing it in the first place? Along the way, what people played important roles as models, mentors, or guides to you? We would love if you could share a haiku that set you down the haiku path.

I was in my early 20s when I first read *No Water, No Moon* from Paul Reps's collection of writings, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*. The possibility of achieving satori, or enlightenment, by merely "carrying water in an old pail bound with bamboo" opened up my young mind. I then started reading J. Krishnamurti, Alan Watts, Gary Snyder, D. T. Suzuki, as well as Bashō's *Narrow Road to the Interior*. Yet, it was the English-language haiku I fell in love with. Elizabeth Searle Lamb's *Across the Windharp*. Robert Spiess's *The Cottage of Wild Plum*. I started writing and submitted my first batch of ku to *Woodnotes*, edited by vincent tripi. He was receptive enough to publish a handful of my tiny poems over the years . . .

on the same journey  
 crow, cricket  
 and old man

in love  
 he chops enough wood  
 for two winters

straining mint for tea  
 the green curl  
 of an inch worm

vince and I struck up a long-distance correspondence, and at one point, he was interested in buying the small house I built in West Glover, Vermont, with its views of Mt. Mansfield and Jay Peak, but it was too far out there in wintertime, not practical for

even a yogi/haiku master without four-wheel drive. The nearest bookstore, Green Mountain Books, was some 23 miles away, the nearest coffeeshop maybe seven. The snowdrifts alone could isolate you for weeks. On the other hand, Bread & Puppet Theatre was only four miles away. My mother, Evelyn Lang, lived next door in a log cabin at the time and she, too, had haiku accepted for *Woodnotes*. She and Vince had a shared affinity for the writings of Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk, and so over the next 25 years, Vince, who eventually settled in Greenfield, Massachusetts, would send my mother a note, along with a typewritten haiku, if not about a bird or a bee, one about Merton . . . such as this one he sent in 2014:

Eternity . . .  
almost took it with him  
his old Timex

My mother and I both loved the haiku of Tom Clausen, who also had poems in *Woodnotes* and other journals we submitted to, including *Brussels Sprout*, *Hummingbird*, and *Frogpond*. The first time I met Tom in person was up there in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, late summer I think . . . on a narrow, balsam-scented road no less. He rolled his window down and asked if I knew, by chance, where Robin White lived. As more luck would have it, another haiku poet, and Tom's good friend, James Ferris, was sitting in the passenger seat. Needless to say, I brought them over to my mother's cabin, and she was delighted to meet two of her favorite poets in person. I would have brought them over to meet our nearest neighbor, my mother's Quaker friend Sue Ellin, daughter of mystery writer Stanley Ellin (*The Eighth Circle*, *House of Cards*), but she had already gone back to her Brooklyn brownstone for the season.

**Can you please share a few poems by your mother, Evelyn Lang, that are your personal favorites?**

The haiku my mother is best known for—

perfect summer sky  
 one blue crayon  
 missing from the box

—is one of my favorites. She wrote it for my brother, who had died a decade earlier. This was one of the first haiku she had ever written. It has been published in several anthologies and journals, including *Zen Poems* published by Andrews McMeel. Another personal favorite is:

the old stone wall  
 not really walling anything  
 in or out

My mother loved old stone walls, especially the ones that meander through the woods and are long forgotten. Her old Adirondack chair still butts up to the old stone wall where she greeted the sunrise every morning with her cup of tea. It's bittersweet to think of her waving to the hills beyond. In the fall of 1999, tripi had commissioned Swamp Press to make fifty broadsides of her haibun *October Stone*, from which this haiku came. He was often generous to her, and she to him. My mother passed away in February of 2021, surrounded by her beloved stone walls, books, and wooden santos. Her good friend vince passed seven months prior.

**What circumstances led you to create your own haiku journal *Akitsu Quarterly*? What do you think makes it different from other publications, and what changes are happening at AQ?**

AQ was born in the garden, so to speak. My mother and I were weeding side by side, talking haiku and the journals we loved when suddenly she said, "You should do a journal." When I told her she should do it with me, she just laughed. The fall 2014 issue was published a few months later. It was a kitchen-table, home-printed, staple job with a handful of poets, including Caroline Skanne, Alexis Rotella, Kanchan Chatterjee, Pat Geyer, Kyoko Shibata, Pamela A. Babusci, and Tom Clausen. It has since grown to a perfect binding with ninety or so poets in each issue. Putting out four issues a year became time-

consuming for a one-woman publishing house—the whole process of editing, printing, binding, and trips to the post office. I work full-time and also maintain all the gardens at Wild Graces, as well as host an annual haiku gathering, not to mention my current studies. I knew I had to cut back somewhere, so I decided to limit *AQ* to two seasonally combined issues. I believe it has a smaller following to other journals, with its leaning towards nature and the spiritual, but that following seems to be quite devoted to it.

The name *akitsu* is an old Japanese word for dragonfly. Japan was originally named *Akitsu*, Dragonfly Island. We have several wild ponds here full of frogs and turtles, a few on the threatened and endangered list, and dragonflies. The dragonflies are graceful and keep me company in the gardens, and they also keep our mosquito population under control. So a good name for a little journal chock-full of little poems.

**Can you recount the origins of your annual Wild Graces Haiku Gathering and the ethos behind the event?**

The Annual Haiku Gathering at Wild Graces started after a suggestion by none other than vincent tripi (yep, him again)—old friend, haiku sage, and founder of the Haiku Circle in Northfield, Massachusetts. He thought New Hampshire needed its own haiku gathering and thought Wild Graces/October Stone would be the perfect place for it, having visited it several times over the years, oftentimes bringing Jeannie Martin or James Ferris with him. And so the first gathering came into being in the Fall of 2014 with twenty or so hearty souls attending, including Brad Bennett, Tom Clausen, Michael Ketchek, master sumi-e painter Jan Zarembo, and vincent tripi. Pamela A. Babusci, Jeannie Martin, and *Walden by Haiku* author Ian Marshall presented at our second gathering, along with shakuhachi Grand Master Elizabeth Reian Bennett. Over the years, Stanford M. Forrester, Jeff Hoagland, John Stevenson, Don Wentworth, Alexis Rotella, David M. Carroll, Terri L. French, Kristen Lindquist, Stuart Bartow, Laurie D. Morrissey, Kath Abela Wilson, and Ben Gaa have given either workshops or readings.

Mary Forrester and Jeff Hoagland have often said they were still basking in the *wild graces glow* days later—the combination of haiku kinship, home brew, and the scent of falling apples, no doubt. My husband, Marshall, has been instrumental in grounds-keeping and setting up all the tents and tables for the event. While he would say he is not a haiku poet himself, he found an annual day-after hiking partner in Jeff Hoagland.

**Recently, you are taking classes and coursework in herbalism. Can you share with us your interest in this and other traditional healing and medical practices, such as Reiki? We'd love to learn more!**

Back in the early '90s, I spent a year studying the art and science of herbalism with Rosemary Gladstar, learning botany, herbalism, and tincture making. I identified all the wild herbs in the area by their common and scientific names, gathered seeds and cuttings, and incorporated some of them into my gardens. After dividing my time between Vermont and the Southwest over the next six years, I moved back to New Hampshire in 2004 and built yet another house next to my parents, who, too, had left the cold winters of Vermont. Over the years, I extended my mother's existing gardens and fruit trees and built a small herb house to sell teas, tinctures, photography, and stained glass, fondly known as Wild Graces. I became a juried member of the Deerfield Arts Tour, an annual open studio tour for local artists. Last year, I picked up my herbal studies again with Cornell University's Medicinal Plant Program, as well as the Practical Herbalist Program with Wild Rose College of Herbal Medicine. My thesis was on *Melissa officinalis*, commonly known as lemon balm. I now advance into the Master Herbalist Program, which delves into Ayurvedic and traditional Chinese herbs. This coming year, Wild Graces will become an official Native Medicinal Plant Sanctuary. There are over a hundred medicinal herbs growing here, such as angelica, boneset, self-heal, valerian, and culver's root.

I became a Reiki Master seven years ago and had built up a small clientele prior to the pandemic. I've worked in eldercare and end-of-life/hospice for over 30 years, so Reiki naturally became a part

of my hands-on-care. I both feel and see in colors, sensing bodily energies, and can often detect blockages. Reiki gets things flowing, so to speak. It can also bring calm to those suffering from anxiety, to those fearing the end. The University of Vermont's Larner School of Medicine offers a Death Doula program for caregivers, chaplains, hospice caregivers, and social workers. I recently completed that program, as well. All of these varied interests of mine are connected by way of healing. As is pottery, when I sit at the wheel and throw a tea bowl. As is gardening, when I nurture a tender perennial. As is writing haiku, when I slow down and observe a moment.

**You once shared that you are able to trace your ancestry on both your mother's and father's sides to significant historical events. Don't you also have an ancestor who was a transcendental poet? Can you tell us more about the intersection of your ancestors, poetry, and current studies?**

My 10th great-grandmother Susanna North Martin was accused of being a witch at the age of 70 and was hung during the Salem Witch Trials. Her granddaughter Mary Martin, my eighth great-grandmother, married the Quaker John Peaslee. Their marriage was the first recorded among the Society of Friends in Hampton, New Hampshire. John's sister, my aunt Mary Peaslee, married Joseph Whittier, great-grandfather of the abolitionist and fireside poet John Greenleaf Whittier, author of *Snowbound* and *Mabel Martin*. The famed New England writer and I are also cousins through the Hussey lineage, his mother's side of the family. I found his friendship with Celia Thaxter of the Isles of Shoals the most fascinating. She held salons on Appledore, which included their writer friends Nathaniel Hawthorne (also his critic), Sarah Orne Jewett, James and Annie Fields, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. I visited Celia's flower garden on several occasions, taking a charter boat out of Portsmouth Harbor. According to official town records, my seventh great-grandmother, simply labeled "a native woman," married into the Peaslee family. Whittier also wrote *The Ballad of Cassandra Southwick*, about the religious persecution of my other 10th great-grandparents, Lawrence and Cassandra Southwick. Lawrence was one of the first glassmakers in America, but after being

run out of Salem, Massachusetts, due to their Quakerism, they died on Shelter Island, New York, from starvation and exposure to the elements.

On my father's side, there is yet another accused witch, Jane Walford of Great Island, New Hampshire (present-day New Castle). The Walfords were one of the first immigrant families to settle on the island. Jane, my 10th great-grandmother, was accused of lithobolia, or stone throwing without the use of hands. Her story was recounted in *The Devil of Great Island: Witchcraft and Conflict in Early New England* by Emerson W. Baker: "Over a twenty-one-year period, Jane Walford was involved in three court proceedings related to witchcraft." Her daughters were also accused by an innkeeper/neighbor with whom they had land disputes.

Being a 10th-generation Quaker, I grew up going to an unprogrammed meeting with my mother and grandmother, which basically means silent meeting. For me, the garden . . . the marshes here . . . the woods . . . holding vigil with someone drawing their last breath . . . these, too, are all places of silent meeting.

**We want to invite you to share some haiku, and then we'll end by reprinting a haibun you wrote that originally appeared in *Frogpond* in 1998.**

years  
of just going  
with the flow  
discovering the curvature  
in my spine<sup>1</sup>

stick season  
gathering enough of it  
to keep warm<sup>2</sup>

winter solstice  
my *tilt* towards  
the sun<sup>3</sup>

shaking seedheads  
down the garden path  
the titmice follow<sup>4</sup>

### Drawing Down the Moon<sup>5</sup>

In the center of a lunar garden, a bowl or bath of water is placed for the purpose of reflecting the moon, “Drawing Down the Moon” the Wiccans call it. The Druids used moon-ruled herbs such as cleavers, chickweed, wild poppy, and white roses to increase appreciation, awareness, and sensitivity. Ponds half-hidden by woods are suddenly illuminated by the Hunter’s Moon, as are the gentle ripples of puddle-water, the mosquitos and fireflies dipping in and out. And in both the Waxing and Waning Moons, blue herons have been witnessed performing movements as graceful and deliberate as Tai Chi.

noting in my journal  
that mountains too  
live on the moon

#### Notes:

1. unpublished
2. *Modern Haiku*
3. *Frogpond*
4. *bottle rockets*
5. *Frogpond*

*Robin White* is editor of *Akitsu Quarterly*, founder & hostess of the Annual Haiku Gathering at Wild Graces, and a juried member of the Deerfield Arts Tour. She is also a potter, beekeeper, death doula, Reiki Master, and herbalist. She and her husband, Marshall, a mental health clinician / mushroom hunter, live in southeastern New Hampshire, a stone’s throw from the Pawtuckaway Mountains. This coming spring, *Sitting on a Toadstool*, a *kasen-renku* by Tom Clausen, Robin White, and Bill Waters, will be published by nut hut books.