

# Q&A

## Anne Burgevin

BY CHRIS ROSENBLUM

Anne Burgevin has haiku eyes.

That's how haiku poets describe their way of noticing small, beautiful moments in nature and life. Burgevin, 51, has been seeing them for 20 years, connecting to the world through her haiku. The Pine Grove Mills resident, writing teacher and mother of two daughters has been published in two prominent haiku journals, *Frogpond Journal* and *Modern Haiku*.

Burgevin also likes inspiring haiku vision in others. In honor of National Haiku Poetry Day on April 17, she's starting the Seven Mountains Haiku Club of Central Pennsylvania.

### How did you get started writing haiku?

I was drawn to more conventional poetry in my 20s. But then I began teaching; I'm an elementary teacher. And I was teaching at a Waldorf School in central New York, in Ithaca, and we were just exploring poetry. We included haiku in that, and my students got writing it, and they loved it so much that it kind of drew me into it.

### What drew you to haiku?

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al. It's brief. As a mother, I never had too much time on my hands, so I was looking for short poems to write. ... You really don't use a lot of metaphors, so it is what it is. And I think that way.

### How do you teach the philosophy of writing haiku?

I haven't really had the opportunity to go in depth like that with students because I only have come to a more in-depth study of it

and then think, "Well, if this was my poem, how would I end it?" Because the last line is usually what's called the cutting line, which is the "aha" moment to the poem.

Do you have a certain style or type of haiku poems you prefer?

I love reading the older poems written by the masters, the Japanese masters. Basho and Issa are two. I really enjoy reading those poems, as well as the more contemporary

### What do you set out to do as a haiku poet?

Originally, what I try to do is to bring two images together. That's a lot of what haiku is. For instance, in the one that I just showed you, there's the baby's bare tummy and the picnic. And the picnic you sort of think of as this busy, active place, but everybody was looking at my child's bare tummy. So you have this moment that you've expe-

So don't search your feelings for what the pine means to you or what you think the pine means. Take it for what it is.

That's exactly right. ... This is about perception, rather than invention. I don't invent these poems. I perceive them. That's a critical distinction. People will say, 'Well, did you sit down and write any haiku today?' And I'll say, 'No,



PHOTO BY NABIL K. MARK

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### What drew you to haiku?

I think what is really so compelling for me is that it's really about nature. It is nature-based poetry. Although you have to consider human nature as well ... But I would say the majority of the haiku poems that one might read, they're pretty much about nature. I just grew up loving the outdoors, spent a lot of time outdoors, as much time as I could, as a child, and really felt a connection and compassion for animals and plants. I felt the haiku was a way to express my love of that, and my joy just for being alive in this world.

### Was writing in the haiku form challenging at first?

Actually, it was the other way around. It was easy for me to go from more conventional poetry to haiku.

### How so?

Because it is what I am. It's liter-

al. It's brief. As a mother, I never had too much time on my hands, so I was looking for short poems to write. ... You really don't use a lot of metaphors, so it is what it is. And I think that way.

### How do you teach the philosophy of writing haiku?

I haven't really had the opportunity to go in depth like that with students because I only have come to a more in-depth study of it myself in the last few years. But I have imagined how I would do that. I hope to, through the club, perhaps, this Seven Mountains club, depending on how serious people are.

What I recommend to people, first of all, is to read as much haiku as possible, because I think that's actually the greatest teacher: the poems themselves. That's how I learned, and there's almost something that you can't even teach about it, except through example.

Another suggestion I've made to people is to find a haiku that you really like, or you don't like, and rewrite the last line, the third line.

### Why?

Well, as a way to make it more of what you want it to be ... somehow embellish it or improve upon it. That's a way to jump into it: Read one, keep the first two lines,

and then think, "Well, if this was my poem, how would I end it?" Because the last line is usually what's called the cutting line, which is the "aha" moment to the poem.

Do you have a certain style or type of haiku poems you prefer?

I love reading the older poems written by the masters, the Japanese masters. Basho and Issa are two. I really enjoy reading those poems, as well as the more contemporary ones. I'm not sure that question applies, because haiku has some pretty spelled-out rules about what you do with it, and I think that's why some people like it so much. There is room for interpretation, but there are also some rules. For instance, it's always written in the present tense, so you can't get caught up in the past, so to speak, when you're writing.

### So it's always in the present moment.

Yes. One [of mine] that was published in the Frogpond Journal I brought was written about a photograph [At the picnic/my baby's bare tummy/the main attraction] ... So I wrote that about something that happened to me when my first child was barely 3 months old, but I wrote it in the present tense, because for me it was still alive like that.

### What do you set out to do as a haiku poet?

Originally, what I try to do is to bring two images together. That's a lot of what haiku is. For instance, in the one that I just showed you, there's the baby's bare tummy and the picnic. And the picnic you sort of think of as this busy, active place, but everybody was looking at my child's bare tummy. So you have this moment that you've experienced, or are experiencing, in which there are two things that are going on, and you bring them together in the haiku. And that bringing together makes the two things very interesting, and sometimes even profound, which in passing you might not have given a second thought.

### What lessons do you take from the Japanese masters?

Very simply put, Basho said two things that really resonated with me: Follow nature, and return to nature. And perhaps even more profound for me was: Learn about the pine from the pine.

### What does that mean to you?

I think that it makes me less centered on me. ... It takes the focus off of me, and when I was writing more conventional poetry, I felt like I always needed to know my voice.

### So don't search your feelings for what the pine means to you or what you think the pine means. Take it for what it is.

That's exactly right. ... This is about perception, rather than invention. I don't invent these poems. I perceive them. That's a critical distinction. People will say, "Well, did you sit down and write any haiku today?" And I'll say, "No, I didn't have anything to write about." Nothing struck me. So I can't make myself write haiku.

Like yesterday, I drove by Park Avenue, and there's that church [The Suzanne Pohland Paterno Catholic Student Faith Center] being constructed. And in the corner of the construction lot, there was this little cherry sapling in full bloom. And I just saw that tree, and these bulldozers next to it, and this church being built, this huge building and this little, tiny tree in full bloom. And I thought, 'Now, that's something that moves me to write about.' I'm working on it now. ... My eye just went right to the corner of that lot. I was having all these impressions, and perceiving these things, but I wasn't inventing it. It was something that I actually saw. A lot of modern-day haiku poets say: Develop your haiku eyes.

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