

A Wild Garden

A Visit with Haikumaster Jane Reichhold

by Kate Marianchild

I was tired when I approached Jane Reichhold's windswept home on the Mendocino coast. I had heard that Jane was a haikumaster and an artist, but I had no idea what to expect of this interview. Three hours later I emerged bearing a shimmering beaded lizard, three books of haiku, and a sprinkling of invisible fairy dust. I didn't know quite what had happened, but it was whimsical and profound, and seemed likely to change my life.

The living room, luminous with afternoon light, was festooned with long waterfalls of Chinese brushstroke paintings. "These are my teachers," she explained. "I practice my brush strokes and leave the paintings up until I learn what they have to teach me – then I use them as wrapping paper."

Jane showed me photographs of the plaza-sized coconut fiber installations she had created during her 17-year sojourn in Germany, as well as a photograph of a recently sculpted 10-foot ceramic giant with articulated joints. I marveled at the twenty books she had written on or about Japanese-style poetry and the numerous necklaces and reptiles she had created with beads. In the garage-studio she showed me her ceramic "Talking Heads" – pit-fired humanoid sculptures with hollow craniums containing paper "thought objects."

Two days after my energized and dazed departure I tried to write about what had happened during my time with Jane. A litany of her many creations and art forms failed to convey the magic that seemed to infuse both the woman and her life.

During the interview Jane told me that she had lost everything she owned three times in her life – once to fire, once to divorce, and once to sudden relocation. She found those experiences ultimately liberating. "Aha!," I thought. "She's fluid and fearless because she has lost all her possessions many times and survived, even thrived." But was that the full explanation?

I began reading Jane's book "Writing and Enjoying Haiku—a Hands-on Guide." Jane advises the reader to learn to read haiku before attempting to write it, to explore a page of poems "with a gentle touch of your eyes, as if looking over a branch to choose which flowers you might pick." Haiku poetry, she explains, is about here-and-now observations of the natural world, so the haiku poet must be highly attuned to the present. Yet a good haiku written by a poet attuned to the present acts as a door to the past: "Years after you have written a haiku you can read it and mentally return to that one spot in the meadow

where you saw the purple thistle glistening with dew, or heard the long curling cry of a bird on a summer morning.”

Jane explains the “haiku moment” or “aha!” – an instant of heightened awareness when the observer sees something in a new way or makes a new connection. Then I found what I had been looking for - my own “aha!” Jane wrote, “For me, the way I live in order to be prepared to receive haiku inspiration is more valuable than the poems I finally do write.”

Jane Reichhold’s extravagant creativity, I realized, is “haiku awareness” made tangible – an outpouring of artistic expression resulting from her exquisite sensitivity to the world around her. She bravely meanders down unfamiliar paths, planting and fertilizing artistic seeds with reckless abandon. The risks are few because all paths lead to haiku moments and all moments become fodder for poems. “Failures” are alchemically transformed into poetic insights or humor, becoming, in the process, “successes.”

The result: a wild and exciting garden of a life, filled with flowers and shrubs that bloom and hybridize, self-seed, and re-sprout along a maze of paths that wander toward no particular goal except...haiku awareness.

Haiku by Jane Reichhold

sunny sea winds
shoulders ache
for want of wings

starfish
all the days of a life
going into a gull

morning air
the mountain smells
as if it had slept

fluttering
the butterfly has no time
for a name

autumn storms
shaking moonlight
from leaves