

From the Lily Pad



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NICK VIRGILIO HAIKU ASSOCIATION

Autumn / Winter 2007

Picture Perfect Afternoon for Birthday Gathering

June 24th seemed made to order for Nick Virgilio's birthday celebration at Harleigh Cemetery – filled with bright sunshine, pine-scented breezes, twittering birds, and honking geese that gathered at a respectful distance on the sandbar across the pond. However, without the group of over 30 attendees, the cemetery would have remained a silent, although idyllic, scene. Attendees filled the air with conversation, laughter, haiku recitations, updates, and applause. Old friends of Nick's shared fond memories of the man they knew personally. Ben Hill described him with affection as an "in-your-face gnat" and with gratitude as a good friend and advisor during the racial strife of the 1970s. New friends expressed their enthusiasm for a man they know only through his work. Robin Palley shared her haiku which ends "wish I had met you, Nick." And, by bringing his grandchildren, Henry Brann interjected into the gathering the sweetness and vitality of youth. Of course, the celebration concluded with eating cake and raising a glass of soda to Nick. As Tony Virgilio said fittingly, "Nick did not want to be forgotten, and we have not forgotten Nick." Filled with camaraderie and good will, the birthday celebration was a loving tribute to Nick and to what he cherished most – haiku, nature, Camden, family, and friendship.

Reaching Out to All NVHA Lifetime Members

Did you know NVHA has over 90 lifetime members representing 15 states in the country? To these members, much gratitude is given for their pioneering efforts in founding the organization. However, as George Vallianos joked at the members' meeting in September, "one lifetime is not enough for NVHA members!" In order to refresh the pool of prize money for youth contests in Camden and nationally, NVHA is asking all lifetime members to consider renewing their memberships. In appreciation for a donation of \$50, renewing members will receive as a gift Donna Dudek's DVD, "A Life in Syllables," a short documentary film collage about Nick Virgilio and his legacy as preserved by NVHA. The documentary is particularly creative because it is

as much about Nick's life and work as it is about how people remember him.

In the near future, NVHA board members will be calling all lifetime members to thank them for their support, to update them on exciting developments, and to invite them to help promote haiku among school-age children, who are NVHA's and haiku's future. In addition, we ask all lifetime members to consider receiving the newsletter by email to defray cost. When board members call, they will be requesting email addresses from all lifetime members. Send your e-mail addresses to: robinson.m.l.@comcast.net

Sad News — The Elgin Diner Has Closed

With sadness and regret, NVHA has learned that Nick Virgilio's old haunt, the Elgin Diner on Mt. Ephraim Avenue in Camden, has closed. The Elgin Diner provided Nick with material for his poetry, with an audience on which to test his haiku, and with enduring friendships with people who help carry on his legacy today. Since Nick's death, the diner has provided cake for the graveside birthday celebrations and a place for new fans to experience first-hand where Nick created many enduring memories. The closing of the Elgin Diner is a real loss for both Camden and NVHA.

Please note that NVHA has chosen the Crystal Lake Diner (Haddon Township, NJ) for future events, including the upcoming Haiku Supper on December 4th at 6:30 pm.

Haiku Hints by Raffael de Gruttola

Beyond Technique

I think we all know that writing good haiku takes discipline and perseverance. Only after many attempts and constant soul searching does a good haiku or senryu emerge. For some of us who started writing longer poems in a traditional manner, the haiku moment was something new and exciting. It meant condensing feeling into a very brief statement with complete concentration on very few words. It meant that every word had to have an important place in the total understanding of the poem.

The first study is to know the rules of what haiku can mean and do as a short poem. In our

first attempts we know that a season word is essential in recording the time and place of an event:

autumn tornado
buckles the billboard:
her torn smile

We also know that there has to be a juxtaposition of two images which reveal a hidden or magical awareness. In the above haiku by Nick Virgilio the *autumn tornado* (season word, autumn) is juxtaposed with the advertisement on a billboard. This moment alone would not constitute a good haiku unless there was something more in evidence, and that is, the force of the wind in a tornado that, in effect, rips the woman's smile which disengages what the advertisement hopes to do. Maybe trying to sell the consumer toothpaste or chewing gum.

Again, this fact alone would not make this haiku or senryu unique unless there was the added awareness that the force of the tornado destroys the purpose of the advertisement, that is, to sell a consumer product. I've introduced the word, senryu, here because this unique haiku has the added effect that it deals somewhat with human nature which is to brush our teeth or have a pleasant smile.

I prefer to think of this poem as a haiku, because the greater affect is not that the advertisement doesn't convey its message, but that a force in nature is stronger than any commercial ad. What is also unique about this haiku is that even with the juxtaposition of the *torn smile* we still may consider this an aspect of human nature in that no matter how often you brush your teeth to keep them white and clean or have a pleasant smile, it doesn't necessarily follow that one occurrence can predict the outcome of another.

The defining point here is that rules are made to discipline the writer; however, without a certain extra moment, the haiku would not be memorable.

Thanksgiving alone
ordering scrambled eggs and toast
in an undertone

Haiku Help!!!

If you wish to have your haiku evaluated for publication, consider sending your best poems (no more than 3 at a time) and a self addressed stamped envelope to:

John Stevenson, Editor
Frogpond, P.O. Box 122, Nassau, NY
12123-0122

Email: ithacan@earthlink.net

When dealing with editors, a good tip is to ask for their comments on your work. Most editors will offer their help.

LOOKING FOR A LITERARY HOLIDAY PRESENT??

Don't forget when you renew your membership:

One year - \$10.00

Lifetime - \$50.00

You receive discounts on NVHA books and CDs

**Nick Virgilio's Selected Haiku - \$15.00
(\$13 with membership)**

**Nick Virgilio Memorial CD - \$13.00
(\$10 with membership)**

Please include \$2.00 postage/handling for each book or CD order!

2008 NVHA CALENDAR

Board Meeting

**Tuesday, April 8th, 7:00pm
Crystal Lake Diner, Haddon
Township**

Graveside Birthday Celebration

**Sunday, June 29th, 2:00pm
Harleigh Cemetery, Camden**

General Membership (Annual Meeting)

**Sunday, September 21st, 1:00pm
Sacred Heart Church, Camden**

Board Meeting

**Tuesday, December 9th, 6:30pm
Crystal Lake Diner with Haiku
Supper**

*Please mark these dates on your calendar and inform us of any address changes or e-mail changes to robinson.m.l.@comcast.net.

Visit our Web Sites

www.nickvirgilio.rutgers.edu

**www.nickvirgiliohaikuassociation.org
(submit your photos and haiku through this site)**

<http://nvha.blogspot.com/>

**Contributors to this newsletter include:
Michele Robinson, Raffael de Gruttola,
Kathleen O'Toole and Tony Virgilio**

**Merry Christmas to all
and a healthy New Year!**