

Haiku Poet Interviews: Randy Brooks

Questions Provided by Jacob D. Salzer

Country of Residence: USA

Website/Blog(s): <https://www.brooksbookshaiku.com/>

To read samples of Randy's haiku:

<https://terebess.hu/english/usa/brooks.html>

<https://livinghaikuanthology.com/index-of-poets/211-b-poets/383-brooks,-randy.html>

Education:

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), Rhetoric and Composition/
Writing Studies from Purdue University

Interests/Hobbies: haiku, editing, publishing, teaching, kayaking

Haiku-Related Volunteer Positions/Affiliations:

Dr. Brooks serves on the Executive Committee of the Haiku Society of America as the Electronic Media Officer. He is the webmaster for the Haiku Society of America and its journal, *Frogpond*. He also serves as the webmaster for *Modern Haiku Press* and *Modern Haiku* magazine. He is on the editorial board for the *Red Moon Press* series, the *Red Moon Haiku Anthologies*. He also serves on the board of the American Haiku Archives and serves as web editor of its web site.

Past Occupations:

Professor, administrator, editor, publisher, webmaster mentor, website developer, library worker, bookstore clerk, and steakhouse cook.

Current Occupation:

Dr. Randy Brooks retired as the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences and Professor of English at Millikin University in 2022. As an Emeritus Professor of English, he continues to teach courses on haiku poetry traditions. His students' haiku and essays are available on the MU Haiku web site:

<http://www.brooksbookshaiku.com/MillikinHaiku/>

At Millikin University he hosted two haiku conferences: the Midwest Haiku Festival in 1992 and the Global Haiku Festival in 2000. Dr. Brooks also taught professional writing, editing and book publishing courses and served as faculty advisor for the Bronze Man Books publishing company.

He and his wife, Shirley Brooks, are co-editors and publishers of Brooks Books, and edit *Mayfly* haiku magazine. Randy and Shirley have been dedicated to publishing books, magazines, and online collections of haiku in English since 1976 when they founded *High/Coo Press*. In 1990, Randy & Shirley changed the name of the publishing company to Brooks Books. Two of their most recent collections: *Walking Uneven Ground: Selected Haiku of Bill Pauly*, and *My Red: The Selected Haiku of John Stevenson*, both won Touchstone Book Awards from The Haiku Foundation and Haiku Merit Book Awards from the Haiku Society of America.

Translation Work:

Brooks Books has published three books of translations of Japanese haiku:

Tokutomi, Kiyoko. Translated by Patricia J. Machmiller and Fay Aoyagi. *Kiyoko's Sky: The Haiku of Kiyoko Tokutomi*. Decatur, IL: Brooks Books, 2002.

Arima, Akito. Translated by Emiko Miyashita and Lee Gurga. *Einstein's Century: Akito Arima's Haiku*. Decatur, IL: Brooks Books, 2001.

Suzuki, Masajo. Translated by Emiko Miyashita and Lee Gurga. *Love Haiku: Masajo Suzuki's Lifetime of Love*. Decatur, IL: Brooks Books, 2000.

When & how were you introduced to haiku & Japanese-related poetry?

As an undergraduate student at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, before I discovered haiku, I was immersed in contemporary poetry—reading Robert Bly, Gary Snyder, Robert Creeley, Sylvia Plath—and enjoyed studying the modernist poets such as William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound. However, as a Latin minor, I was also very interested in translating epigrams and reading fragments of Greek lyric poetry. My honors thesis was on Western traditions of the short poem—comparing the ability of Greek lyric poetry to convey emotional intensity with the epigram, which more typically conveys witty satire. I became aware of the primary goals of the western short poem to bring the reader to tears or laughter. In my final semester at Ball State, I won the student writing award and immediately took my prize money to the bookstore where I bought collections of short poetry, including two anthologies of haiku: *The Haiku Anthology* edited by Cor van den Heuvel, and *Modern Japanese Haiku* translated and edited by Makoto Ueda. You could say that my understanding of haiku initially “came from” these two books purchased in May of 1976.

One of the most interesting parallels I found between *The Haiku Anthology* and *Modern Japanese Haiku* is that both editors enthusiastically celebrated bringing unknown contemporary haiku to the reading public. Ueda states that “Many of the leading haiku poets of modern Japan still remain obscure in the West; some of them have not had a single haiku translated into a western language.

This book is intended to help narrow the gap” (p. vii). Cor van den Heuvel asserts in his introduction, “Until now, the poets represented in this anthology have been largely ‘invisible.’ Though some of them have been writing haiku for nearly two decades or longer, their work has flowered practically unnoticed” (p. xxvii). I was fascinated with these contemporary haiku and the variety of approaches to writing haiku represented by the included authors. I realized that the haiku tradition was a vibrant, living literary tradition with a wide range of authors exploring the possibilities of the art for our own times. I started writing haiku in my journal that summer after graduation and have continued ever since. I enjoyed the variety of contemporary voices in these two haiku collections, and I began imitating favorite haiku by Kawahigashi Hekigodô, Ozaki Hôsai, and Michael McClintock. While I appreciated Blyth’s volumes of translations, I never agreed with his sexist/elitist perspectives and over-emphasis on Zen in Japanese haiku. Instead, I sought out the modernist Japanese poets and their bold assertions for haiku as a stand-alone twentieth century poem.

As a graduate student at Purdue University, I was fortunate to study Japanese literature with Dr. Sanford Goldstein. He introduced me to modernist Japanese authors, including his favorite tanka poet, Ishihawa Takuboku and Akiko Yosano. We started a small tanka-writing group led by Sandy at Purdue University. At that time, there were few avenues for publishing English-language tanka, so Shirley and I were pleased to publish several tanka in issues of *High/Coo: A Quarterly of Short Poetry*. In 1978, Shirley and I published one of the earliest chapbooks of English tanka, *Rain in Her Voice*, by one of the Purdue tanka writers, Gregg Fitzgerald.

What do you enjoy the most about haiku?

As a writer, editor, scholar, and publisher of haiku since 1976, I have been an active member of the haiku community for over 30 years. Throughout these years, I have never ceased to be amazed by the blessings of this literary tradition. First and foremost, there is the gift each haiku offers if you give it a full imagined

reading—if you let yourself enter into its space of perceptions—if you are open to its insight and feel the emotional significance of its moment—if you let it touch your own life memories and associations—if you let it come alive and if you let yourself come alive while holding it in your heart and mind for a moment.

Second, as you read more haiku and improve at the art of reading haiku, you become more aware of your inner and outer surroundings. You start noticing feelings and things that you missed before. You stop to fully feel and perceive the moments you are living. You also notice the difference one word makes and the importance of the things unsaid in the silent pause common within most haiku.

As some of my students say, when you immerse yourself in this tradition, you get your “haiku eyes” and begin seeing and feeling things you missed before. You become more fully aware of the value of being alive, and, being a human, you get the urge to record those moments of perception and insight as new haiku.

Third, the haiku tradition is very social—it is inevitable that when a haiku touches us, we want to share our response with others, and when we write a haiku—a moment of significant perception—we are eager to offer the gift of that haiku to others for their enjoyment and response. When groups of people share their lives and insights through this way, they are drawn together into a community that values the art of reading and writing haiku.

What makes for a great haiku?

Haiku is a social, transactional art . . . so a great haiku invites readers to participate in the experience of the words and the implied or imagined experiences beyond the words. A great haiku has immediate connection and impact but lasting resonance and depth. It can be appreciated immediately and with repeated readings beyond the moment of its creation. The writer starts something that the readers finish. What a great

haiku does for readers is it invites them into a collaboration of creative playfulness. A great haiku also comes out of—and plays with—the haiku traditions we have seen before us. Ultimately, both haiku writers and readers enter into a collaboration of finding significance in our art and even more so, in our lives.

On the Brooks Books web site, we share our conception of haiku. Here is the key paragraph:

“The best haiku capture human perception — moments of being alive conveyed through sensory images. They do not explain nor describe nor provide philosophical or political commentary. Haiku are not declarative sentences. They are fragmented images or often a fragment and phrase. Haiku are gifts of the here and now, deliberately incomplete so that the reader can enter into the haiku moment to open the gift and experience the feelings and insights of that moment for his or her self. Part of that entering into the haiku moment is experiencing the language, the poetry, the words of the haiku itself. Haiku is both implied consciousness and poetry.”

Source: <http://www.brooksbookshaiku.com/haiku.html>

What do you enjoy the most about tanka?

Whereas haiku suggests and provides connotations implying certain emotions, tanka simply embraces the lyrical expression of emotions directly. Haiku sets the scene and implies attitudes, leaving more room for the reader to imagine. Tanka sets the scene and implies significance, then boldly just blurts out an attitude. So, the question is what kind of tanka do I embrace. Here is an excerpt from the introduction to my collection of tanka, *Walking the Fence: Selected Tanka of Randy Brooks*:

“I am not interested in writing tanka that plod along counting steps or syllables. I don’t seek flashy words to show off my vocabulary or tricky linguistic gymnastics to show off a mastery of twisted

sentences. I am not interested in turning my tanka into word puzzles. I am also not interested in writing waka, following the refinements of stylized beauty and related tropes of the aristocratic traditions. I am not interested in writing tanka based on an algebra of short-long-short-long-long phrases. I am compelled to write tanka out of the Modernist traditions of Takuboku and Akiko [and my tanka mentor, Sanford Goldstein]. I want my tanka to be raw and spontaneous expressions of spiritual or psychological journeys written with a voice of authentic, caring conversation between contemporary friends. This is my tanka, the art of walking the fence.”

What do you enjoy the most about haibun?

I love it when all parts of the haibun work together. The title entices and draws readers into the prose, raising appropriate questions for a reader to pursue. The prose is well-crafted to establish a narrator or writer’s voice. The haiku connects but adds something beyond the prose . . . allowing the reader to make connections between all three parts. Easier said than done! I also like it when the prose provides alternative ways of reading the subsequent haiku but doesn’t shut down other ways of reading the haiku from a variety of readers.

Do you enjoy other forms of Japanese poetry as well, such as renku or haiga?

Yes, I love all the haikai arts. In my opinion, renku is more fun to participate in as a writer than a reader. Haiga is just so much fun as well. I love painting, sumi-e, photographic haiga and mixing the arts.

Who are your top 5 favorite poets?

Raymond Roseliep
 Peggy Lyles
 George Swede
 Bill Pauly
 Aubrie Cox

What haiku/writing projects are you currently working on?

I just finished an annotated bibliography (and historical overview) “Literary Criticism: Studies of Haiku in English” for *Poetry Criticism*, forthcoming from Layman Poupard Publishing.

With my recent retirement, I am going through my years of journals, gathering, editing, and re-visioning my best haiku over the years. I will have more time for submissions to journals now and will be working toward a selected haiku collection to be published in about two years.

Shirley and I also have some more Brooks Books collections of amazing haiku to be published by contemporary English haiku writers. We have four new books in the works.

Book Publications:

- *The Art of Reading & Writing Haiku: A Reader Response Approach*. Brooks Books, (Taylorville, IL), 2019.
- *Walking the Fence: The Selected Tanka of Randy Brooks*. Brooks Books, (Taylorville, IL), 2019.
- *Broadside. Haiku With Legs*. Brooks Books, (Taylorville, IL), 2015.
- *Common Time: Photo-Haiga*. Limited edition of photography by Priscilla Meddaugh and haiku by Randy Brooks, Blue Connections Studio. (Decatur, IL), 2008.
- *Unmasking Us: Photo-Haiga*. Limited collector’s chapbook gift edition with photography by Priscilla Meddaugh and haiku by Randy Brooks, Blue Connections Studio. (Decatur, IL), 2007.
- *School’s Out: Selected Haiku of Randy Brooks*, Press Here, (Foster City, CA), 1999.
- *Broadside. Crows Talking Crow*, Press Here, (Foster City, CA), 1999.
- *The Homestead Cedars, The Virgil Hutton Haiku Memorial Chapbook Competition*, (Normal, Illinois: Saki Press), 1999.

- *In Her Blue Eyes: Jessica Poems* (Decatur, Illinois: Brooks Books), 1998. Online book edition at: <<http://www.brooksbookshaiku.com/InHerBlueEyes/index.htm>>
- Online Book. *Black Ant's Journey to Japan: A Modern Tanka Journal* (Gualala, CA: AHA Online Books), 1998. <<http://www.ahapoetry.com/blackant.htm>>
- *Me Too!* High/Coo Press, (Battle Ground, Indiana), 1985
- *The Last Quarter Mile*, Grey Whale Press, (Florence, Oregon), 1981
- *Barbwire Holds Its Ground*, High/Coo Press, (Battle Ground, Indiana), 1981
- *The Rosebud Bursts*, High/Coo Press, (Battle Ground, Indiana), 1979
- *Where Will Mockingbird Nest?*, Juniper Press, (LaCrosse, Wisconsin), 1977

Anthologies & Collaborations Edited:

- Publisher, Brooks Books (formerly High/Coo Press). 67 literary titles published, 1976-present.
- Co-Editor with Shirley Brooks, *Mayfly*, A biannual magazine of haiku poetry, 1985-present.
- Web-Editor, *Modern Haiku: An Independent Journal of Haiku and Haiku Studies*, Modern Haiku Press, (Lincoln, IL), 2001-present.
- Web-Editor, *Frogpond*, Haiku Society of American, (Dubuque, IA), 2008-present.
- Editorial Board, *Red Moon Haiku Anthology*, Red Moon Press, (Winchester, VA), 2005-present.
- Co-editor with Shirley Brooks and book designer. *Walking Uneven Ground: Selected Haiku of Bill Pauly*. Edited by Randy & Shirley Brooks. Taylorville, IL: Brooks Books, 2021.
- Co-editor with Shirley Brooks and book designer. *My Red: The Selected Haiku of John Stevenson*. Edited by Randy & Shirley Brooks. Taylorville, IL: Brooks Books, 2021.
- Editor. *Student Haiku & Senryu Anthology: The Nicholas*

A. Virgilio Memorial Competition Sponsored by the Haiku Society of America. New York: Haiku Society of America, 2021. Book design by Ignatius Fay.

- *Editorial Team Member. Juxtapositions: A Journal of Haiku Research and Scholarship, The Haiku Foundation, (Winchester, VA), 2015-2020.*
- *Editorial Board. Rotella, Alexis, Editor. Tanka 2020: Poems from Today's World. Winchester, VA: Red Moon Press, 2020.*
- *Publisher and book designer. Another Trip Around the Sun: 365 Days of Haiku for Children Young and Old, Edited by Jessica Latham Malone. Brooks Books (Taylorville, IL), 2019.*
- *Co-editor with Shirley Brooks and Publisher. The Collected Haiku of Raymond Roseliep, Brooks Books (Taylorville, IL), 2018.*
- *Editorial Board, Bronze Man Books, Millikin University, (Decatur, IL), 2006-2018.*

Haiku and tanka titles include:

- *Winter Hearts by Jackson Lewis, Bronze Man Books, 2012. [a tanka chapbook]*
- *Tea's Aftertaste by Aubrie Cox, Bronze Man Books, 2011. [a haiku chapbook]*
- *Moon's Edge by Natalie Perfetti, Bronze Man Books, 2010. [a tanka chapbook]*
- *Millikin University Haiku Anthology edited by Randy Brooks, Emily Evans, Rick Bearce & Melanie McLay, Bronze Man Books, 2008.*
- *Co-editor with Shirley Brooks and Publisher. 100 Haiku for 100 Years: A Celebration of Raymond Roseliep, Brooks Books (Taylorville, IL), 2017.*
- *Editor and publisher. Haiku: The Art of the Short Poem by Tazuo Yamaguchi. A full-length film and book published as a DVD/book by Brooks Books, August 1, 2008.*
- *Co-editor with Shirley Brooks, and Publisher. Lull Before Dark by Caroline Gourlay, Brooks Books (Decatur, IL), December 15, 2005.*

- *Publisher and book designer. The Silence Between Us: Selected Haiku of Wally Swist, Brooks Books (Decatur, IL), April 2005.*
- *Co-editor with Barbara Southard and Brock Peoples, and Publisher. Dark Shade Flickering Sunlight: Selected Haiku of O Mabson Southard, Brooks Books (Decatur, IL), 2004.*
- *Editor and Publisher. To Hear the Rain: Selected Haiku of Peggy Lyles, Brooks Books (Decatur, IL), 2002.*
- *Publisher and book designer. Kiyoko's Sky translated by Patricia Machmiller and Fay Aoyagi, Brooks Books (Decatur, IL), November 2002.*
- *Co-Editor with George Swede, Global Haiku: 25 Poets Worldwide, Iron Press, England, April 2000.*
- *Editor and Publisher. Almost Unseen: Selected Haiku of George Swede, Brooks Books (Decatur, IL), 2000.*
- *Editor and Webmaster, English-Language Haiku Web Site, Brooks Books (Decatur, IL). Begun March 15, 1998, this web site is online publication dedicated to English language haiku at: <http://www.brooksbookshaiku.com>*
- *Editor and Publisher. Fresh Scent: Selected Haiku of Lee Gurga, Brooks Books (Decatur, IL), 1998. Haiku Society of America 1998 Merit Book Award, 1st place.*
- *Foreword. "The Flow of Haiku." Current: Linked Haiku by Marlene Mountain and Francine Porad (Mercer Island, WA: Vandina Press), 1998.*
- *Co-editor with Lee Gurga, A Solitary Leaf: Haiku Society of America Member Anthology 1996, the Haiku Society of America, August 1997*
- *Co-Editor with Lee Gurga, Midwest Haiku Anthology, High/Coo Press, Decatur, IL, 1992. Haiku Society of America 1993 Merit Book Award, 2nd place.*
- *Co-editor with Shirley Brooks, Haiku Review, A bibliography of haiku publications and criticism (indexed by Modern Language Association), (Battle Ground, IN, 1980-1988.*
- *Co-editor with Shirley Brooks, High/Coo, An eclectic quarterly of short poetry, 1976-1982.*

Notes:

1. "Randy Brooks," *Haiku Poet Interviews* blog, October 1, 2022. <https://haikupoetinterviews.wordpress.com/2022/10/01/randy-brooks/>
2. *Brooks Books Haiku* website.
<http://www.brooksbookshaiku.com/>
3. "Randy Brooks," *Haikupedia*, June 25, 2022.
<https://haikupedia.org/article-haikupedia/randy-brooks/>

Randy Brooks is an American educator, haiku poet, scholar, editor, and publisher. With a Ph.D. in rhetoric and technical writing from Purdue University, Brooks served as professor of English and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Millikin University, Decatur, Ill., teaching courses on professional writing, editing, book publishing, and haiku in English. In 1976 with his wife, Shirley Brooks, he started publishing *High/Coo: A Quarterly of Short Verse*. The two currently are publishers of *Brooks Books* and co-editors of *Mayfly* haiku magazine. In 2021 *Brooks Books* published clothbound editions of the selected haiku of John Stevenson and of Bill Pauly, both of which were honored in *THF Touchstone Book Awards* and *HSA Merit Book Awards*. Randy's recent books include *Walking the Fence: Selected Tanka of Randy Brooks* (2019) and *The Art of Reading and Writing Haiku: A Reader Response Approach* (2019). He serves as the web editor for both *Modern Haiku* and *Frogpond* and has resided in Taylorville, Illinois, since 2016.