

This Week's Montage

—*Birthdays (II)*

Comparative Haiku

selected by

Allan Burns

It's a remarkable coincidence that three of the finest American haiku poets born at mid-century were also born within a stretch of three calendar days. Jim Kacian, founder of Red Moon Press and The Haiku Foundation, is the youngest but comes first on the calendar (July 26th). Lee Gurga, former editor of *Modern Haiku* and author of *Haiku: A Poet's Guide*, and Gary Hotham, a precocious poet who has been publishing haiku since the late sixties, share a birthday (July 28th). When I first joined the haiku scene, these three poets were among those who defined excellence in the genre for me and helped inspire my own vision of haiku (such as it is). Nothing's changed in those respects. Lee accepted some of my earliest published haiku; like so many others, I learned a lot simply from which haiku he took and also from his handbook. Jim, through an incredible array of activities, has arguably done more than any single individual to advance the cause of English-language haiku. And Gary remains active, recently having assumed the position of assistant editor at *Wisteria*. I asked him whether his was the first "distant thunder" haiku in English, there being so many at this point, yet his is still surely the best known; he responded he was pretty sure it was the first haiku in English about linoleum. This gallery's a small chance to give something back, by way of tribute, to three poets who have given so much to the haiku community, not least some of its finest poetic creations. Unconstrained by a theme, I've simply selected seven personal favorites by each—haiku that just don't stop resonating.

Gary Hotham (b. 1950)

Lee Gurga (b. 1949)

Jim Kacian (b. 1953)

fog.
sitting here
without the mountains

coffee
in a paper cup—
a long way from home

distant thunder—
the dog's toenails click
against the linoleum

last night's snow down river

she comes back—
the ocean drips off
every part of her

clouds move in
under the clouds
moving out

the wind changes—
my plan to sit still
changes

1–5 from *breathmarks: haiku to read in the dark*
(Canon Press, 1999)
6 from *Snapshots* 3, 1998
7 from *Frogpond* 31.1, 2008

a bike in the grass
one wheel slowly turning—
summer afternoon

frozen branches
measure the emptiness—
winter sunset

fresh scent—
the labrador's muzzle
deeper into snow

a spot of sunlight—
on a blade of grass the dragonfly
changes its grip

opposum bones
wedged in an upper fork—
budding leaves

rows of corn
stretch to the horizon—
sun on the thunderhead

morning birdsong
light filters down
to the boy's prism

1–6 from *Fresh Scent* (Brooks Books, 1998)
7 from "Autumn Mosquito" (Modern Haiku Press,
2005)

splitting wood—
for a moment the log
holds the axe

pain fading the days back to wilderness

no way out
of these mountains
rolling thunder

the river
the river makes
of the moon

camping alone one star then many

clouds seen
through clouds
seen through

whittling
till there's nothing left
of the light

1 from *Mayfly* 42, 2006
2 from *Roadrunner* 7.3, 2007
3–7 from *long after* (alba libri, 2008)

Previous Montages

July 12: Quotidian Moments
July 19: Moonstruck

Next Week's Montage: Lifefulness

R. H. Blyth
James W. Hackett
Christopher Herold