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Haiku has its day

"I don't write haiku, or at least, I didn't. But really it's more about how I've always written certain poems in a haiku way, just without what I used to think of as, all that 5-7-5 business," said Ukiah's new poet laureate Theresa Whitehill in her keynote address at the seventh annual ukiahHaiku festival, Sunday, which drew about 160 people to the Ukiah conference room.

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Pet of the Week - Kittens

Updated: April 28, 2009 12:03:09 AM PDT

Woman arrested in domestic dispute

A truncated 911 call placed by a 9-year-old boy led to the arrest of his father's girlfriend on suspicion of damaging a telephone line and domestic violence. [Read More](#)

Man arrested in cyber-date sting

Using a fabricated under-age social networking site profile, Fort Bragg Police Department officers arrested a 40-year-old suspect on suspicion of attempted lewd acts with a child on Wednesday. [Read More](#)

- No Mendocino County cases of swine flu to date
- ukiahHaiku winners
- Haiku has its day
- Greening Mendocino
- There's money out there for innovation in agriculture

Ukiah Sports

Cougars top the Wildcats 6-0 in big NBL rematch

On Thursday, the Ukiah High varsity girls softball team hosted Rancho Cotate in a big rematch. Back on March 17, in the first meeting of the two teams, that game was a scoreless duel going into extra innings with Rancho finally scoring an unearned run in bottom of the eighth inning for a 1-0 victory. [Read More](#)



Photo by Peter Brewer for The Daily Journal

- Ukiah, Elsie Allen swim in JV competition
- Bearcats top Panthers 4-2, up league record to 5-0
- Wildcat varsity boys win big match with Maria Carrillo
- Bowers to continue education and football career at SW Minnesota State
- Ukiah boys varsity golf tops Elsie Allen

Reminisce

This Was News April 19, 2009

25 years ago Thursday, April 19, 1984 Ukiah Daily Journal UKIAH CITY MANAGER OUSTED. Three political adversaries on the Ukiah City Council joined forces last night to abruptly oust City Manager D. [Read More](#)

- Held-Poage Memorial Home and Research Library open to public

Community

The Blushin' Roulettes and their Fine Friends'

It might sound like a bad soap opera. Women are left alone and pregnant. They murder their lovers and commit suicide. [Read More](#)



Michael Monko

- Tapestry Family Services offers unique after school program
- First annual "Taste of Mendocino" held in San Francisco
- Potter Valley Community Health Center hires a mental health provider

Editorial

Judicial Follies: Kicked Where it Hurts

Mark Twain once said, "It takes two people to hurt you: your enemy to insult you, and your friend to get the news to you." [Read More](#)

In Our Opinion: Read before you sign

As the company looking to build a mall on the old Masonite site proceeds with its push to get the voters to say yes to the idea, county residents are now being asked to sign petitions to get the issue on the ballot. [Read More](#)

Another Voice: Retirement Fund says "Critic off base" but it just keeps getting worse

Last October I published a Mendocino County Debt Report (see my website www.YourPublicMoney.com). According to State Controller data our county is the most indebted and pays the most interest expense per resident in California. [Read More](#)



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2. Man arrested in cyber-date sting
3. DAILY DIGEST Saturday, April 25, 2009
4. Greening Mendocino
5. A 30-year tradition
6. Why no summer school for all?
7. No Mendocino County cases of swine flu to date

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Haiku has its day

By **MONICA KRAUTH** The Daily Journal

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"I don't write haiku, or at least, I didn't. But really it's more about how I've always written certain poems in a haiku way, just without what I used to think of as, all that 5-7-5 business," said Ukiah's new poet laureate Theresa Whitehill in her keynote address at the seventh annual ukiaHaiku festival, Sunday, which drew about 160 people to the Ukiah conference room.

Calling herself a "haiku kindergartner in 2002" when the festival began, Whitehill said she has had consistent formal exposure to it.

"That would make me ... a sixth grader by now. I can no longer with any sincerity sum it all up as a foreshortening of syllables. There's nature to contend with, an emphasis on concrete nouns, and a lack of those seductive abstractions."

But before she had learned about all that, she said that during the early years of this festival, they had a category called "loku" because that's what she called her "almost-haiku poems."

"The way I figured it, there's haiku and then there's loku. It made sense to me."

Things like this:

Sun feels good on my money,

hot change in my pocket,

branded lethargy of an iron afternoon

Still, she said, that's not quite short enough Š plus

there are a lot of abstractions Š lethargy "that's not something you can hold in your hand, see, or smell. And afternoons generally aren't made of iron. It is evocative, but I still needed to learn what the poem could be if I could stand to let go of those ideas and look at things."

In 2007, Whitehill took a poetics workshop from Diane di Prima in San Francisco who writes in the "spirit of a wolf woman" and had a profound effect on the new poet laureate.

To Whitehill, di Prima's book, "Loba" speaks of the experience of women during "the amazing times of the beats and hippies, jazz artists and civil rights actions, the peace movement during the Vietnam war."

Whitehill was taken by surprise by the fact that di Prima is devoted to literary craft, "something I never would have guessed from the loose, streaming style of Loba', clearly written in full voice at white heat."

And she never realized that di Prima is a haiku poet. Over the course of nine months the two poets devoted most of their time to a series of loku Whitehill had written while traveling in Hawaii in 2003.

"As I read this series of poems to her and she suggested snipping a little off here, dialing in a choice of wording there, and letting things dangle a bit, she pushed me toward real improvements I could both hear and feel," Whitehill said.

So, there Whitehill is, a haiku sixth grader.

"I still have a ways to go."

"When those of you who have been honored with awards this year come up to read this afternoon, I'm going to be listening intently because you're my

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teachers now; I'm interested in all the creative ways in which you've managed to convey the rhythm of this beautiful planet in evocative images," she said.

To Whitehill, Sunday's festival was the official announcement of her new honorary position as Ukiah's poet-laureate. The proclamation of her position at the recent Ukiah City Council meeting was just a "political transferring of the (poet-laureate) baton," she said.

According to festival committee members, this year there were 1,600-1,700 haiku entries from 10 countries and five continents, which were all judged totally blind. Throughout the event, winners are announced for each of the categories and because haikus are brief, the winners recite them twice.

"For a lot of them, it's their first time reading in front of a crowd," said Whitehill. And the first of two times of reading their haikus, the children often swallowed their words. There are three categories at the festival specifically about Ukiah as a theme, providing the community of a snapshot of what's going on. This year, there are a lot haikus about wildfires.

"While there have been disagreements among the judges about the winners, there's a whole group that rises to the top; then after that it gets pretty darn subjective ... The haiku is really about having a reader, viewer, listener experience. It's a distillation of what you experienced," said poet-laureate committee member Sherrie Smith-Ferri.

"So it's trying to instill the essence of that experience to the reader ... There's a mental flashback of what happens ... Everyone has a different data bank of experiences," she said.

One of the highlights for committee members was an email exchange the past poet laureate had with

Janak Sapkota of Nepal who won all topics first place in the adult category for the following haiku:

A white pigeon

Drops a feather in the yard

First winter snow

Sapkota's response: "I am so sad that I couldn't attend the reading, but my haiku will be kissing the aromatic breeze of that event, which makes me so happy."

Meanwhile, a Romanian haiku writer who won awards at previous UkaiHaiku festivals was asked not to write any this year but coincidentally a friend of his won, Whitehill said. Asked if the friend wrote the haiku himself, Whitehill said the competition is based on the honor of the submitter.

"There were several winners from San Ramon as well. And they happened not to know each other," she said. The prizes this year were oragamis from a local group called the Ukiah Folding Organization, which made used 60 pieces of paper for each award.

While the haikus are judged "totally blind" when the judges learned of the winners' identities, judges noticed that many of the adult winners are "well published." Does that mean that the haikus were published before they were submitted to the UkiaHaiku festival? "We don't have guidelines for that," Whitehill said.

The poet laureate is an honorary, yet unpaid, position that serves educational and ceremonial roles. The goal is heighten public awareness about the of benefits of poetry, says Smith-Ferri. "In addition, they honor poets who live and work in the Ukiah area. The people honored are given this mission to help celebrate poetry." The past poet

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laureate, Smith-Ferri's husband, David Smith-Ferri held the position for three years.

But whether or not there are actually more poets now, is "an interesting topic of conversation," Sherrie Smith-Ferri said. Local poets have said it's almost a natural impulse and that junior high and high school teachers have noticed their students writing more in the way of "lyrics." To them, Smith-Ferri said, poetry or writing lyrics is a "means of sorting through experience and feelings. They are able to access what is going on inside them."

-Monica Krauth can be reached at
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