

# Writing Under the Inspiration

## The Hungry Poet Searches for words Life is full

BY GEORGE VUKELICH

"Hey, guess who was in town the other night," Steady Eddy was saying, "just checking out the old haunts?"

"When you're talking old haunts in Madison," the Indian said, "it could be any of the Old Grandfathers or the Old Grandmothers who are still pissed off at the white eyes for putting up the Capitol building right on top of the old sacred mounds. Do you know that the most crowded place in town can be the Capitol Square when the Capitol

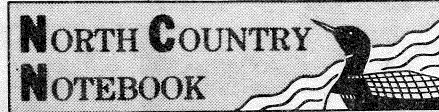
Square is absolutely empty?"

"Well, Steady said, "'old haunts' is a figure of speech in our culture, and that is precisely how I have employed it here. It is interesting that you have referred to 'old haunts' being haunted by old *dead* haunters.

"You don't have to be dead to check out the old haunts. As a matter of fact, the person who was in town the other day checking out the old haunts is very much alive. Most of the time."

"The old dead haunters," the Indian said, "are not dead. That is a figure of speech in our culture. More than that, it is a fact of life."

"Well, who was in town the other night," Steady said, "was the Hungry Poet, and the old haunt he was checking out was Warner Park and the Muskies' last home game. He said he'd like to be there when another era ends. We just



With traditional haiku you are really on a tight leash. HP prefers a bastardized form that meanders all over the place.

.....  
stood there in the rain and cried in our beers and that's what he said: 'Here's to the end of another era.' "

"I suppose we have to hear a poem about that," the Indian said.

"No," Steady said. "HP said that he had to let the Muskie experience filter through his right brain and then back through his left brain, and then one day in the future—*voila!*—the impurities would be all strained out and removed and what was left would be pure gold, 100-proof pure. He said it was the very same procedure the Irish used when they made their whiskey. He also said that's why the Irish were such good poets. They wrote under the inspiration."

"They wrote under the influence, you mean," the Indian said.

"After the game," Steady said, "we continued our lamentations at my house—into the wee hours, as the Irish say—and the Hungry Poet got to discussing haiku. Now, I always thought that was what HP wrote—haiku—but he says, no, no, no!

"True, he said, he writes in three lines, but that's not haiku or, if it is, it's a bastardized Western form that meanders all over the place like a dog off the leash."

"You're kind of poetic yourself there," the Indian said.

"With the traditional haiku," Steady continued, "you are really on a tight leash when you write it. Three lines. The first line has five syllables. Five stresses, if you want to be poetical about it. The second line has seven syllables or stresses. The third line has five again. And there you are."

"There I am," the Indian said. "Are you sure that's not a Hallmark card?"

"HP says," Steady Eddy said, "that his idol was a poet who was born in 1644 in Japan and took the name Basho

because of his love for the banana tree plant, which is *basho* in Japanese. He loved all of nature, and haiku is a great way to express love of nature. Maybe awe, too. One of the most famous haiku Basho wrote is this one."

*Listen! A frog  
Jumping into the stillness  
Of an ancient pond!*

"PLOP!" the Indian said.

"And then some," Steady said. "But Basho didn't write 'PLOP!' But we hear 'PLOP!' and then some!"

The Indian tilted his head and pointed to his ear.

"WATER!" he said. "You hear WATER?"

"HP left a page of poems," Steady said. "This first one is traditional haiku. The others are unleashed and wander. But they're all about nature! Ma! Ma! Big Mama! Love! Awe!"

*In the blacktop road  
Grass snake pounded into tar  
Is snake a question?*

*Along the fence  
Hawk barely flying  
Mouse barely breathing*

*A common loon  
fishing alone  
quiet as the moon*

*Fishermen  
on the beach fish  
beyond their reach*

*Always, all ways  
the ocean  
is in motion*

*I cannot see God  
But, what if God  
cannot see me?*

"My very favorite," Steady concluded, "as summer closes and all the schools open, is this one. Yes!"

*A dead cat  
is not a cat.  
Study hard.*

*George Vukelich reads selections from  
North Country Notebook Sunday nights  
at 11:30 on Wisconsin Public Radio,  
WHA (970 AM).*