

## Past the Stars: Remembering Marianne Bluger

by Terry Ann Carter, Ottawa, 2006

Marianne Bluger was obsessed by poetry. As a child, bed-ridden with fever, her father read her Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, Blake, Whitman.

The lyricism and magic of those poems left an indelible mark, for the pursuit of the exact word in its exact place became a life's quest.

In The Ottawa Citizen obituary, Charles Anman wrote: "The Ottawa-born poet, who had fought cancer for twelve years, died at home... with her husband, Larry Neily, at her bedside. In a touch of poetic rightness, her new book is entitled **The Eternities**."

Allan Shipley in the Globe and Mail sketched a compassionate scene: "Too ill to attend the launch of **The Eternities**, a collection of deeply personal poems, she asked my wife Jocelyn and me, along with Professor Margo Swiss and Rev. Roland Kawano to appear and read on her behalf.

By entrusting these poems to us, she placed her innermost self in our hands. An early morning e-mail alerted us that the end was near. The reading of each poem felt as if it were a eulogy. Afterwards, we learned she had died just three hours before we read her words."

Other collections of lyric poetry included **The Thumbless Man**, (Three Trees Press, 1981), **On Nights Like This**, (Brick Books, 1984), **Gathering Wild**, (Brick Books, 1987), **Summer Grass**, (Brick Books, 1992, which won the Archiblad Lampman Award), **Scissor, Paper, Woman** (Penumbra Press, 2000).

For the last twenty years, Marianne also practiced the discipline of Japanese forms, publishing **Tamarack & Clearcut** (haiku by Marianne Bluger, photography by Rudi Haas) Carleton University Press, 1997; **Gusts** (tanka) Penumbra Press, 1998; and **Zen Mercies/Small Satoris** (tanka) also by Penumbra Press, 2005. Buschek Books published **Early Evening Pieces** (haiku) in 2003.

Of her tanka in **Gusts**, Christopher Wiseman wrote: "I have really enjoyed this book. It's the images and depth and modesty and dignity and insight and sheer humanity that distinguish Bluger."

Her haiku were published in journals all over the world. In Japan: *Azami*, *Mainichi Daily News*, *New Cicada*, and *Oku no Hosomichi*.

In the U.S.; *Brussels Sprouts*, *Dragonfly*, *Frogpond*, *Haiku Southwest*, *Modern Haiku*, *Windchimes* and in Canada; *The Alchemist*, *Anthologie de haiku d'auteurs canadien*, *Cicada*, *Haiku Canada Anthologies*, *Haiku Canada Newsletters*, *Inkstone*, *Milkweed*, *RAW NerVZ*, *Tidepool*, *Tree*.

Some haiku appear in broadsheets *April &*, *The Marigolds*, & *is the hub*.

In a recent tribute to Marianne's work, Dorothy Howard, editor of RAW NerVZ chose these haiku for her Nov./05 issue:

having missed the bus  
I walked  
into spring  
(*The Marigolds HC Sheet 88-89*)

wind bunts  
the marigolds  
bunt back  
(*The Marigolds HC Sheet 88-89*)

ah these soft spring nights  
full of bawling cats  
and lilac  
(*Haiku Moment, Tuttle, 1993*)

all down the road  
escaped from her garden  
lupine blooms  
(*for Ruby Spriggs, RAW NerVZ III:3*)

Dorothy composed this haiku for her friend, commemorating Marianne's great love of horticulture and gardening:

haiku poets gather  
to the bloom of  
bluger tulips  
(*Tulip Haiku, Shoreline Press, 2004*)

a gift which she shared annually at the Haiku Canada weekends held in Alymer, Quebec, and later in Ottawa, by appearing with armloads of blossoms and branches from her illustrious gardens. However, her contribution to Haiku Canada was far more than mere decoration. Over the years Marianne (along with Muriel Ford) wrote the Haiku Canada Constitution which we treasure today.

Whether crafting language for legal purposes, or responding to spring nights, Marianne had a knack for getting it right. Diane Hogg said "... she was the real thing..."

In her preface to **Gusts**, Marianne wrote: "A good tanka captures the intensity of our emotionally charged moment and almost always includes a vivid image grounding it in a specific local. This rootedness is so powerfully expressed by the great tanka masters as to affect the very body of the reader."

In **Zen Mercies/Small Satoris**, Marianne paid homage to her tanka masters Izumi Shikibu (974 – 1034?), Masoaka Shiki (1867 – 1902) and Saito Mokichi (1882 – 1953), by composing the following poems:

Middle-aged  
already critically ill  
I met Izumi –  
alive that woman  
aware in the shadow world

Sunday  
too fragile for church  
I crawled into bed  
and curled in misery  
and read how Shiki died

Misty rain tonight  
it's Mokichi's  
red lights  
that bleed on wet pavement  
his sirens wail...

More of her tanka appeared in *Acorn, American Tanka, Arc, Five Lines Down, Kokako* (New Zealand), *Lynx, raw nervz, red lights, Tanka Splendor, The Tanka Journal* (Japan), *Wind Five Folded, Tangled Hair* (England), *The Tanka Anthology* (Red Moon Press, 2003).

The tanka that close **Zen Mercies/Small Satoris** under the chapter “savage spring” foreshadow her own death. The last tanka was chosen by her good friend, Ronnie R. Brown, in The Ottawa Citizen tribute.

I am being  
blown slowly away  
my bones  
washed clean  
in a river of wind

It was in forming and organizing Kado Ottawa, five years ago, that I began a wonderful mentoring partnership with Marianne. I think it was a need for the revival of a local haiku group (earlier poets included Marianne, Dorothy Howard, Grant Savage, Ruby Spriggs) that prompted our discussion during the summer of 2002. Our first meeting was held at Centrepointhe Library that autumn, including 25 poets in the Ottawa area, plus Aylmer, Clarendon, and Kingston. Kado Ottawa (kado – a Japanese word meaning “the way of poetry”) seemed to serve particularly well in the nation's capital, for its pronunciation was very close to the French word cadeau meaning gift.

We met four times in the year to celebrate the seasons, with a small broadsheet launched at the Japanese Embassy each spring. The following haiku are Marianne's contributions:

tulip buds tight  
& a robin in the rain  
stretching a worm

the moonlit station  
empty as the train whistles  
through the small town

first snow falling  
I take up the long unanswered  
letter from Japan

woodland spring  
above dense firs – a jet  
twinkles past the stars

Following tradition, a small chapbook will be launched this spring at the Embassy including Kado poets, plus visitors and presenters. This collection, *invisible tea*, will be dedicated to Marianne.

Let me close with the words of Sanford Goldstein, a friend and confidante, who wrote: "Her passionate concern for the language and for the poetic theory and even the rage to get it right, all these Marianne has. Her intensity maybe due to her long illness, which has forced on her the need to get things down and to get them down with exactitude." (*Gusts: Contemporary Tanka*, winter 2005)

Marianne was unique, and we miss her -- her friendship -- her rage -- her compassion -- her poetic obsession. We should all find comfort in her exact words left in the exact places.

Respectfully submitted by  
Terry Ann Carter, Ottawa, 2006