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Presenting Ukiah's new poet laureate: Theresa Whitehill

By **MONICA KRAUTH** The Daily Journal

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The Ukiah City Council announced the induction of a new poet-laureate Wednesday night. Theresa Whitehill, who will be delivering a keynote address at the UkiaHaiku festival on Sunday, April 26, said early Wednesday that her being chosen was a little funny. "I had to laugh because I have been involved with (UkiaHaiku) for most of its years. I just took a leave of absence a few weeks ago to focus on my own writing. I don't consider myself a haiku writer."

Whitehill, instead, says she's more of a loku writer. "I started out as being as close as I could get to a haiku without the 5,7,5 business."

In the early years of the festival, Whitehill says that they had a category specifically for loku poems. But after a few years, "that didn't really cover it," she said, "It was more humorous than anything."

The poems, she explains, often reference nature by focusing word choice on concrete nouns and not making use of abstractions, like love. Instead it's evocative of emotion without having to stray in abstract language. "The most successful haiku is one that invokes the invisible world by keeping your feet planted in the visible world."

Whitehill's roots go really into passionate, romantic, lyrical realms. So it's no wonder that one of her favorite poets is Spanish poet Garcia Lorca. On the other hand, she also enjoys the work of beat poet Diane di Prima who is also interestingly a haiku poet. "She is just one of those poets. Her reach is so immense and loose streaming."

The UkiaHaiku festival is presented as an afternoon devoted to the Haiku form of poetry. The ceremony will open with music by the City of 10,000 Buddhas High School Chinese Orchestra.

Poets of all ages will then read their winning poems and receive awards. A reception with refreshments will follow, during which time, audience members will have the opportunity to read the poems submitted to the festival which will be exhibited in the hall.

The festival will take place on Sunday, April 26, from 2 to 4 p.m., at the City of Ukiah Conference Center

200 School Street in Ukiah.

Awards will be presented in the following categories:

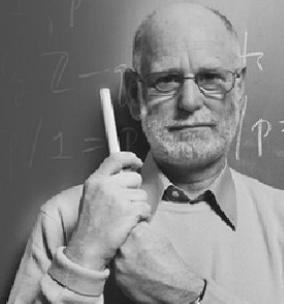
- 1) All Topics, Children, grade K through 3;
- 2) All Topics, Children, grade 4 through 6;
- 3) All Topics, Youth, grade 7 through 9;
- 4) All Topics, Youth, grade 10 through 12;
- 5) Haiku about Ukiah, grade K through 6;
- 6) Haiku about Ukiah, grade 7 through 12;
- 7) Haiku about Ukiah, Adult;
- 8) Traditional Haiku, Adult;
- 9) Contemporary Haiku, Adult -- To be judged by Jane Reichhold, author of "Writing & Enjoying Haiku." The Adult Contemporary Haiku Category has a separate submission fee of \$5 for up to three Haiku (all other categories are free of charge to

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enter).

Winners in each category will be published and receive an award and/or gift. All entries will be on display the day of the event.

The following are a few lokus written by Whitehill, which may be read at this year's festival.

Sun feels good on my money,

hot change in my pocket,

branded lethargy

of an iron afternoon.

Mongoose roves the shoreline.

Beachcombers find a discarded dress

at the water's edge.

The following is a short free verse poem by Whitehill, called "Gates of Winter":

The two gates of winter are guarded by the dead.

All Hallows' Eve in early November

and Memorial Day when summer is allowed to leak

itself out into free air. Death by love, by life, by reason

on the one side, death by patriotism, by ideals by

economy on the other.

We stand and feed the dead in order to fend off winter

and to banish it, to free ourselves of ornamental

limits. We feed the dead our memories and our

sorrows, with barbeques and sweets, with a holiday

dedicated to softening bones over a fire, chocolates

wrapped in iridescent foil. But what is it the dead

actually savor, what's delectable once you've

divided yourself in two and no longer have to stand

on the hill imagining wisdom?

I have been listening to the dead and find them

difficult. They are not as articulate

as they could be. What is it that sets their skin

afame, that causes them to flutter their eyelids

half open with helpless desire? I would think it would be

flowers, and babies, and the more expensive kind

of soap bubbles, red objects, fireworks, swooning,

those things inescapably fertile and passing. We are

this planet's goodbye and its trident. We know how to

feed things, spirits and loneliness, structural steel

and alphabets, now we must learn somehow

to be fed.

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-Monica Krauth can be reached at
udjfeatures@pacific.net.

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