

A Haiku Journey — Slow Walk Around a Small Island

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*Slow Island walking —
Journey with Christo on his
Island — A Haiku*

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Prologue

I think we're all time travellers. In a second we can conjure events from the past and the experiences and feelings of *back there and then* can flood into our *here and now* and become real. And the opposite can occur — a present moment can activate my memory glands. I often experience this when writing Haiku.

There's a formula to traditional Haiku — three lines — 5 syllables in the first, 7 in the second and 5 in the third. I like and prescribe to the seventeen syllable limit as I experience a satisfying feeling of push-back, a kind of requisite resistance to other poetic foibles I may have at the time.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Please join me for a slow walk around my island home of Coochiemudlo. Along the way I'll let you in on how this journey started, my now abiding passion for Haiku, how I benefit from my practice, a little of my process and how I use it in my work with clients.

Beginnings

It's October 2018 and I'm a participant in a five-day psychodrama workshop. Each evening we sit and write up an aspect of the day's process. Despite encouragement from the group leaders Diz and Sara to write, I find myself in an extreme version of writer's block. As I sit in a funk with myself, I remember that Haiku are 3-line poems. "Maybe I could squeeze out a poem or two to stimulate my reflections" I say to myself. Now, I don't really know what Haiku are, but I start. Here's one of my first efforts:

*The body in full motion
Feels the flowing river
Life is now*

I write it reflecting on a moment in a drama in response to a group member. I read it out to her and she is moved. My funk is shifting. I try another, also from the day:

*People see I'm tall,
My gifts used to make me feel small
Now I see further*

This also seems to land well with the receiver. I feel stimulated to write up other moments in this way. I follow up with the group members with additional (what I think are Haiku) after the workshop.

As I look at these early attempts, I feel slightly embarrassed, but also pleased — “What were you thinking?” says my “more knowledgeable self-critic”. “Ah yes, but it got you moving” responds my *wise guide*.

After my workshop writing experience, I make a commitment to write Haiku each day. I take a breath, compose an email to this effect and send it to my fellow workshop compadres and they respond by flooding my inbox with beautiful messages of encouragement and love. I am buoyed up by this, so off I go and I start publishing on my blog page, LinkedIn and Facebook.

I realized after a bit, that I wanted to *give* more to the reader, this included the use of titles. I like to link the Haiku to short videos as well — no more than 10 seconds usually and this keeps my interest and from what folks tell me, the readers as well.

Lately I've eased up on the use of titles as I want the reader to *get their own juices flowing* without too much announcement of what's to follow. In this article you'll have to make do without the videos, so hopefully your imagination gets going.

A bit about my process — what gets me going.

One of the principles of writing Haiku is that the three lines should include references to nature and the seasons. I hadn't quite grasped this when I started out, but you'll see this principle reflected in a number of my Haiku. I'm also not a slave to this principle, but I think for me, the sense of walking as I warm up to write a Haiku, gives me pause to stop. It's as if the forest, my island, is making a request of me — to stop what I'm doing right now, or to paraphrase what David Whyte says most poignantly “to stop what I'm becoming as I do it”.

Since I started writing regular Haiku, I've found my awareness to my

surroundings has been heightened. I find myself taking time to pay attention to things in my environment and so a greater sense of attunement to what's happening around me.

The stimulus to write a Haiku happens very quickly as I go about my life. It could be an experience from being with a friend, or a moment from my work, or the movement of a bird, or a sound I hear just once, or is repeated, or a shift in the light revealing an object from a shadow I had previously not seen. Often it involves noticing people as they go about their daily lives. I think many people if you ask them, are either secretly or openly people watchers. I notice this when I walk through a city and see the rows of people sitting at tables in a café. Frequently they're watching others as they pass. Hmmmm, I wonder what they make of this?

I find the writing of Haiku similar to mediation. I notice this affects my physiology — my breathing changes, heart rates slacken if it's been racing and I become more in touch with my physical sensations. I think these are good things, given we are physical forms — embodiment is practically being aware of the body that we have and the nuances of how we move, touch the ground, get around and so on.

Using the 5-7-5 syllabic form, shapes me to be present with the stimulus of the Haiku. There's a number of principles for writing Haiku and you can Google "Haiku" to find any number of writers who have shared their suggestions. The work of Mark Blasini (*The way of Haiku*) resonates with me. He talks about *Singularity* (focus on a moment), *Accuracy* (descriptive over interpretive), *Accessibility* (words that allow the reader to enter the experience), *Economy* (take out the waffle) and *Brevity* (the 5-7-5 or such that the entire Haiku is said in one breath). This last one is a beaut — not only has assisted my writing, but guess what else.... my breathing...I guess I'm a slow learner in this reflective meditative space.

I also aspire to have something like a *surprise* in the Haiku. If I break the Haiku into 2 parts, then, in the second part I'm wanting a bit of a shift. I'm not sure if I always get there. See what you think.

Join me now as I set off with you around my island.

Setting off around the Island

Life in downpipes

Coochiemudlo, or just *Coochie*, means *redrock* in the Jandaywal language of the Kuwanpal tribe. It's my beautiful island home in the middle of Moreton Bay. My work as a therapist, executive coach and organisational consultant is conducted on the island but I'm also away from the island much of the time. The 10-minute ferry ride is enough to loosen the hold of life's corporatisation and allow the island to work its magic.

We've had lots of rain lately and the striped marsh frogs are very

audible. I stop and record them, so I become aware I'm paying attention to the ordinary things... they're at it again right NOW in the downpipes.

*Croak croak croak croak croak
Urgent calling now it stops,
My heart lifts a beat*

Steve and Maree's Garden

Steve and Maree are my neighbours. We often hang out over the fence and connect up over the day. Both of us also have a habit of sometimes making *waving* gestures to each other which means "afternoon tea — 3.00 pm, just pop over". They have the most fantastic garden and in return for herbs and seasonal veggies, I frequently cook for them and take over a pastiche of different meals. Sometimes this surprises them, but they appreciate the community.

*Sharing garden greens
Is more than just about food,
It says I see you*

From my deck life comes to me

I am constantly delighted by the way the bird life on the island shapes my interactions with the environment.

*The birds come to feed
They fill the world with their voice,
I feel my heart beat*

Pelicans

Pelicans are amazing birds. There are several places on the island, where, if I'm quiet, I can approach — right up beside them, as they move from the land and lower themselves into the water.

*This clumsy walking
Tied in rope — on water grace
And ease — pelican*

At the water's edge

I find the water's edge a liminal space. My eyes and ears wake up as I

position myself right there where the land gives way to the sea in various stages. As I sat half in and half out of the water a few months ago I doodled the following in the mud:

*Sit here with me, let
The stillness of the bay work
Its timeless magic*

Tree of my youth

One day as I walked around the wetlands, I stopped beside a Moreton Bay fig tree. I've often stopped here and pondered and reflected. For some time, I'd wondered what my strong felt connection with this particular tree was. I notice a certain shadow fall across the boughs, and I'm taken back to a similar tree that grew right on the water's edge at Redcliffe where I grew up. My mind immediately fills with joy at remembering climbing the tree when I was younger, pretending to be captaining a ship, aloft in the sails, riding the storm on a windy day, finding hidden treasure in a nook or cranny, escaping barking dogs with my cousin as a guardian angel. I write the following lines in the sand at the base of the tree.

*Mmmm, sweet memories,
Many are the thoughts from climbing
This tree in my youth*

The ferry

The ferry acts as a gateway to the island. It's a short 10-minute trip but that's enough to encourage most folk to leave the vicissitudes of their 'mainland' behind. I usually can't wait to get on the ferry on the way home, but even leaving the island I fill up as I take in a sunrise or feel the salt spray on my face. One evening, in a particularly thoughtless mode for the lives of others who also visit my island, I note the following in my phone:

*The newbie drags his
Overfull trolley aboard
"Fuck you" I murmur*

Adam's memorial

On the northern most part of the track through the wetlands stands a small cairn of rocks, some Buddhist prayer flags, shells and some handwritten notes from Adam's children. This marks where he died, quite suddenly,

one summer's evening 5 years ago. He was running on his beloved Coochiemudlo and suffered a severe heart attack. Adam was a mate and a real community minded man and as I walk past this space on most days, I feel something of his presence in my life.

*What a magic thing
Where this gentle spirit fell —
Cicadas singing*

Curlews

So much has been written about Curlews. I feel like writing a Haiku would be like adding an extra brush stroke to the Mona Lisa. Yet they are embedded in my being as part of Island life. I was reminded about this several years ago when I visited a friend in Canada. He's a bird watcher and he asked straight up as I told him I lived on Coochiemudlo "So how was the curlew count this year?" I hadn't realized how curlews were uniquely identified with my island. Their relationship with the night is with me as I write:

*Can you hear it yet?
The wail and cry of curlews
Piercing the still night*

Kayaking and the life of boats

I'm a keen paddler and as often as I can, I make my way out from the island, away to other islands or simply around Coochiemudlo. There's something about being on the water in my skin on frame kayak which helps me be at one with the movement of the ocean and the seasons. I'm also constantly delighted by how marine life somehow finds me in my floating nylon sarcophagus.

*Half way' round Coochie
I stop paddling and breathe — a
Turtle takes one too*

Letting down into water

When Adrienne, my eldest daughter comes to visit, we almost always make our way to our favourite swimming spot. In summer, mornings are particularly attractive to get to the spot early, shed our clothes and let the water cradle our bodies. I really feel the waters have some kind of curative powers.

*Coochie's warm waters —
Nothing is better than this
For vitality*

The wind

Mostly I find the winds on the island to be my friends. There are limits to this, especially when rounding the tip of the island in my kayak to be greeted by 20 knot headwinds. At these times I dig in, try to keep my form and go steadily. At other times I find my equilibrium and resolve is tested.

*Nothing about wind
Helps me walk more upright when
Carrying my bags*

The ebb and flow of the tide continues

Life on the island revolves around tides. Some movement to the island is restricted by the constantly shifting sandbars, but the rhythm and pace of the tide makes its own chorus. While I love all variations in the tidal opera, I'm particularly fond of high tide in springtime.

*The tide rushes in
Gently kisses the foreshore,
Then rolls out to sea*

Flowers of Coochiemudlo — Fleurs d'une ile

The day after an early autumn rainstorm and while summers hot breath still had bite, I was struck by how quickly flowers seemed to respond to this overnight drenching. My neighbour points out some old flowers which I remember as cottage flowers. Everywhere seems to be alive with colour. I write the following on a notepad and leave it on my neighbours' fence:

*Around the island
Fresh colours blossom, Autumn
Wears a bright palette*

Spider webs

I love watching spiders move in their web. When sunlight or rain catches them, I'm immediately taken by their shape and form and I marvel at how their architects live in their creations. I'm taken by what I sense is the dual purpose of these structures — communication and containment.

*Spider webs restrict
Movement, yet each wriggle is
Felt from far away*

Life in the forest lives in the undergrowth

If I take my time, really take my time, as I walk through certain parts of the wetlands, I can feel the forest's beating heart. At these times, all forms of life reveal themselves to me.

*Unknowing Autumn
A magpie wanders slowly,
Betrayed by the leaves*

Sitting around a fire

Covid 19 has led to some touching evening gatherings with friends around a fire. I sense some of David Whyte's poetry accompany us at these times — "Time to go into the night, where the night has eyes to recognize its own"

*This fire pit has held
The joy, the love, the sadness
As witness to friends*

New Life — my first Grandchild Klara is born in a far-away land

In April this year, my first grand-daughter Klara is born in Warsaw. I am at once delighted and saddened that I can't be with her and my daughter Elyssa and her partner Agatka as their world opens up anew. On this day as I walk past a couple with their new baby, I note "Pictures can say a thousand words. Sometimes less is better":

*Not for no reason
Do I look at this beauty
And sigh— here is love*

Are we the only species who have to explain ourselves?

There are several large patches of rocks on the eastern beach of the island. They seem to me to be eternity's reminder of the inevitability of the forces of nature — exposure in this place is not a development option, it's just how things are. As I sit on these weathered remains of giants, I etch the following:

*The rock worn smooth by
Thousands of years of weather
Need not explain self*

Ageing Gracefully

Gary is an island legend. He has an old border collie called Jack and the two are inseparable. This couple are like many on the island — two sides of a decrepit old church leaning against each other to hold each other up. I am touched by their companionship. One day as they shuffled past my house, I could see Jack sniffing the breeze and strain slightly against the lead towards the fresh bread I'd just taken out of the oven and was resting on the deck. I immediately broke off a piece and tossed it to him

*Lift your head old dog
And sniff, cooking smells still bring
You out for some love*

High Tide

High tide seems to clear away what lingers at low tide:

*High tide this morning
Water covers mangrove roots —
Seaweed smells are gone*

Even an island has midlife

I think the island is keeping pace with me through midlife and beyond.

*BMW
Ridden for only six months
Through midlife crisis*

Driftwood rings the island

The bleached bones of fallen forest leviathans litter the northern and eastern beaches. They welcome strangers with their shape. Their limbs carve passages to navigate the dross.

*The years work all their
Usual changes — driftwood,
Chronos and Kairos*

Wild mushrooms grow everywhere in the wet months

Now, I'm not into picking wild mushroom when I don't know whether they'll kill me or not, but I am taken by the many delicate colours of several of the types that spring up throughout wet and even cold months on the island:

*How amazing, how
Remarkable, how deadly
Grow poison mushrooms*

Banjo Man

He's become a regular on my walks around the island. Mark finds a sunny spot each day on the deck of the community hall that overlooks the rustic 9-hole golf course and picks out a tune or two. On quiet days when the tune is carried on the breeze, I'm accompanied by Mark and his banjo for much of my walk

*April shelters the
Banjo man, soft emerges
The tune as he picks*

Sunset stillness

Sunset colours are vividly etched in my memory from sitting and watching the sun go down on so many occasions.

*That moment when the
Sun cools into the sea — the
Watchers all breathe out*

Rounded rocks work best

Last year I spent an enjoyable hour with my two adult sons on Kaladi beach on Kythera, a little island off the coast of Greece which has some similarities to Coochie. Kaladi beach is all rounded weathered stones. We skimmed stones across that clear Adriatic Sea and laughed and laughed and laughed. Today, it's just me and the odd rounded stone I can find to do the job:

*On a silent sea
Under a cloudy grey sky
A stone skims 8 times*

Storms on the bay

There's something about a storm on the bay which stirs everything up:

*As the storm builds the
Colour grey diminishes
Not the wild beauty*

Even my unformed street has magic places — Dans ma rue

I was the beneficiary of the local council turning my street into a cul-de-sac. My front yard has now extended, and I like how it's a place where people walk their dogs, stop and talk. Sometimes I take a chair and sit out in the middle of the oil sealed track and invite folk to have a cup of tea. Sometimes they accept.

*On my street wind blows
Leaves into places people
Never walk or see*

We're back home.

Some Extras — working with my clients

A great benefit to me from writing Haiku is the creation of a sense of stillness after I've worked with a client. After they've left, I can see them moving around the room or sitting in the chair beside me or the shape of their body as they express themselves. This helps my clarity as I write up my notes and I see them progressing in their life. Sometimes I'm surprised with these afterthoughts and I consider how I'll bring them forward when we next work together. I put this down to the 5-7-5 structure of Haiku providing me with a 'workable container' for some reflections.

I give some of my clients Haiku assignments which link to their therapeutic goals. I find the principles (*Singularity, Accuracy, Accessibility, Economy and Brevity*) mentioned earlier very helpful to assist them focus and get clarity on their goals. Implicit in my work is the development of spontaneity — mine and theirs. I know this brings us both to the edge of what we can do in the moment to moment interactions in a session. This is good as we're working on new responses to situations and not repeating old patterns. When clients are developing new responses, they aren't practiced like old roles. This means they frequently feel awkward or clumsy. I think this is *learning* and it's to be expected but it's *not comfortable*. Staying with the discomfort long enough I find is needed for people to start to integrate the new response into their role repertoire.

Following the session, as homework, I'll get them to write a Haiku about a moment during the session. Usually they'll choose moments where they were stretched. I encourage them to find a situation in nature which reflects their experience. This Haiku assignment often gives them a deeply reflective experience where they gain new insights into their behaviour and can start to integrate both the learning from the session as well as from the writing of the Haiku into their work and life.

Here's an example from a client struggling to express what he was experiencing as his father was dying:

*At ten a.m. the
Ghost gum dropped a limb — trees know
When it's time to die*

Epilogue

I have enjoyed taking you for a slow walk around my island. Perhaps you will want to don your favourite scarf or put on a coat or take off your shoes and head out the door to your own 'island'. You may be happy to simply close your eyes and sit quietly entertaining the images that appear in your mind. I hope this is satisfying. You may be fortunate to glimpse, for just a moment, a turtle's salty tears.



Christo Patty is an advanced trainee at the Brisbane Institute of Psychodrama Australia. In his practice, he works as a counselor, executive coach and change agent. Writing daily Haiku has become one of his passions.