

*Faith, Hope
and Fiction*

Three ... Two ... One ...

By Neal Whitman

an old friend arrives
with a sheaf of poems
tick, tick, ticking time

early winter darkness --
Salvation Army bells ring

hand-in-hand to town
where the crowd counts down
Holiday Tree Lighting

Note to the Reader: I am a poetry professor. No, I do not teach English in a university, but I am a poet who professes his beliefs. One of my beliefs or professions is that the reader does not have to be "schooled" in a poem's form to appreciate it. But, knowing a bit about it can add value. So, let me offer a brief explanation. John Daleiden, the editor of *Sketchbook: A Journal for Eastern and Western Forms*, invited me to collaborate with him on a variation of linking haiku poems: renhai. I learned from John that this form was invented by his friend, Vaughn Seward. This poem is my first renhai — a solo effort.

First, a brief lesson on Japanese, which, truth in advertising, I do not speak.

Haiku is the 3-line Japanese form now popular world-wide — *hai* means "amusement" and *ku* means "verse."

Renku is a long poem of linked haiku — *ren* means linked, hence "linked verse."

Renhai, thus, means "linked amusement." As formulated by Seward, there are three verses:

- #1. three line haiku
- #2. two lines
- #3. three line haiku

In renhai, the poet begins with #2. Those 2 lines suggest a theme. In this case, my theme is the passing of time. Plus, the poet identifies a season of the year. Well, here we learn it is winter... more specifically early winter.

Next comes #3. Yes, we begin at the end! The aim is to link #3 to #2. Here my link is that time at the end of day time in the winter when the sun sets early. It is a time to pause. In the early winter, it feels to me like a slow time of the day when nothing seems to move fast – not the sun or people. But, it can be a special time of the day, spent in the company of a friend or with strangers. We feel safety in numbers as we prepare for the long winter ahead. In the middle of winter, we speak of "the dead of winter." There also is a link I am making between counting and ringing — in my home, a Westminster clock counts the time with rings.

The poet finishes with #1 that links to #3. An old friend. Holding hands. Sharing memories. The gift of time. The gift of charity. In giving we receive. What else is there? Oh, right! There is time ... passing.

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