



## English Language Haiku Master John Stevenson (Interview) [983] Episode Transcript

### Introduction

Hello listeners, welcome back to Luke's English Podcast. How are you doing today? I hope you're doing fine. How nice it is to be talking to you again on this podcast today, and I've got a lovely episode lined up for you.

This one, it was a kind of a surprising episode that this happened. I didn't expect this episode to happen, but it for me is a kind of serendipitous moment of podcast magic that this happened. So let me just give you a bit of background, a brief introduction, and then we'll get straight into it, okay?

So this year, you've probably noticed I did a couple of episodes about haiku in English. They were called Haiku in English and Haiku in English 2. And in those episodes, I talked about the form of poetry known as haiku. I talked about its Japanese roots. I explained what a haiku is, the sort of conventions of this form of poetry, talked about more modern English language haiku, and I read out various haiku poems, including some of the old traditional Japanese stuff translated into English, and then more modern English language haiku, including quite a lot of work by celebrated haiku author John Stevenson, okay? Now that episode, those two episodes were inspired by an

email that I received from a LEPster called Helene in Canada, and Helene got in touch with me to tell me her story and to tell me about how her love for haiku, and in fact for writing haiku, contributed to her motivation towards learning English.

And she also shared with me some haiku written by John Stevenson, and I read them and really liked them. I wasn't really familiar with haiku poetry, but then I read a selection of John's work and really liked it, and I thought that I could definitely read out some of those poems on the podcast and that they would provide me with some things to talk about, a sort of jumping off point to talk about different topics and also to teach you vocab. And so yeah, I did those, and Helene heard part one, and she really liked it, and in fact she shared part one, episode one, with John Stevenson himself, and then he actually wrote me an email.

He got in touch with me to tell me how much he'd appreciated the episode, and in fact that he would love to have a conversation with me to talk about some of the things I'd mentioned while talking about haiku in part one. So of course, I jumped at the opportunity to talk to John and to record a podcast episode with him, and thankfully he was happy to do that, and so that's what you're going to listen to in this episode, a conversation with John Stevenson himself. And what a privilege for me to be able to do that, because well, first of all, John was very keen to clarify and give more information about some of the things I'd said, including some things about the form of haiku and other similar forms of Japanese poetry, including another type of poetry called senryu, and he was keen to point out the differences between those things and how maybe his poetry tends to fall into the second category.

He also wanted to talk about Masuo Basho's frog haiku, the one about the frog jumping into the pond, and he felt that there were some significant things he wanted to tell me about that. And so that's a sort of important cultural background about haiku and its history and stuff like that. So there's about 15 minutes of John saying some very interesting things about that.

But then the rest of the episode was wonderful because I got to ask John specific questions about his approach to writing his work, and I actually was able to read out some of his haiku to him and then, first of all, watch his

reaction and also let him talk about what he actually meant when he wrote those lines and the situation in which he wrote them. And in most cases, he remembers the specific moment when he had the idea, the specific bit of inspiration, and he was able to talk in a fascinating way about the stories behind his haiku, what they really meant to him. And I was able to ask him various random questions about other things I was curious about and ask him things for more in-depth conversation.

And John was very gracious, very open, very willing to discuss his work. And so I feel very lucky, very privileged to be able to present the conversation to you. I really hope you enjoy it as much as I enjoyed recording it.

I just want to give you a couple of other bits of information about John Stevenson at this moment, just to give you a sense of the calibre of the guest that you're about to hear.

So John Stevenson has been a pillar of the English language haiku community for decades. He is maybe the world's leading practitioner of English language haiku.

He served as a longtime editor for the prestigious Heron's Nest journal, which is essentially considered to be the gold standard for contemporary English haiku. He has served as president of the Haiku Society of America and won numerous awards for his work, including the Museum of Haiku Literature Award. His collections, such as *Some of the Silence* and *Quiet Enough*, are considered essential reading for anyone studying this form of poetry.

John Stevenson has proved that haiku doesn't have to be about cherry blossoms or frogs jumping into ponds to be authentic. He has brought the form into the living room, the office, the city street, and has shown that poetry exists in the stuff of our ordinary daily lives. I feel privileged to have spoken to him on the podcast and I very much hope you enjoy listening to this conversation, which was recorded over Zoom just a few weeks ago.

I'll speak to you again at the end of this conversation, but for now, let's get started with my conversation with haiku poet John Stevenson.

## Interview

John, it's a pleasure to actually talk to you. Thank you very much for listening to my episode about haiku.

I'm actually curious, what did you think of it? I loved it. I'll tell you why I was impressed, because as far as I know, you're someone who is new to the haiku community in English. The very great amount of information you presented accurately was very impressive.

Okay, good. So, I didn't get anything wrong? You didn't get anything wrong. I wanted to talk to you about some of the things, not because they were wrong, but because there's more information I could offer in some cases.

I expect we'll get into some of those things. Are you referring to specific lines of yours that I read out, or facts about haiku? Well, actually, the main thing I wanted to talk to you about, just person to person really, but we can do it here, was about the basho poem that you were speaking about. Just remind us what the basho poem is.

Well, okay. First of all, there are hundreds of English-language translations of this one poem. So, the version that I know of it is, Old pond, a frog jumps in, sound of water.

Now, this is a very, very famous poem in Japanese haiku, and if there's nothing that you said about it that was incorrect, but I've heard some other interesting things about it I would like to share with you. In particular, Professor Richard Gilbert at the Haiku North America Conference in 2007 talked about this poem. So, Japanese haiku contain a kigo, which is the season word or phrase.

In this poem, it's kawazu, it's frog. Now, kigo are not intuitive. Kigo are formal, and what I mean by that is, so we have the moon all year long, but the moon in a haiku, if it's mentioned and not modified in any way, is considered to be the autumn moon.

Oh, really? Yes. And you can put it in another season, but you have to put something in there to explain that it's in the winter or spring or some other season. If you simply say moon, though, it means autumn.

So, again, this is a formality, not intuitive. So, this poem by Basho, before it was written, for centuries, the mention of a frog was to invoke the song of the frog, the sound of the frog croaking. So, when Basho presented this frog making a different sound, a splash, this was a very big splash, because essentially this was saying, let us renew our thoughts about haiku.

I see. So, it's a kind of revolutionary haiku, in fact. Exactly, and over just that tiny little detail.

But you don't get that detail unless you understand that there was a very general cultural understanding that this now addressed. That's interesting, because I think in the West, that haiku is kind of the starting point. It's often the people's first entry point.

And yet, it seems in Japan, that was actually a turning point rather than a starting point. That's interesting. Okay, so that's a detail that I hadn't noticed.

That's maybe one of the reasons why that particular haiku is notable, because it kind of changed the form somehow, kind of rewrote the rules. And it was consistent with what Basho was doing with renga and renku. It had become very formal and kind of stale.

And he and his contemporaries, but especially Basho, were finding ways to renew it, reinvigorate it, and make it meaningful outside of court circles. You know, by the time that Basho lived, the same thing was happening in Japan, that was happening in Europe, in a sense that there was beginning to be a wealthy merchant class who wanted to have art that reflected their lives, their values, their realities. And so Basho took this art form, which had been essentially practised only in aristocratic circles for centuries, and he modified it to meet the realities of his time.

I see, yeah. And this one poem was a reflection of that larger task. Okay, and that's been continuing, hasn't it, ever since, really? Absolutely.

And the haiku that you write, how different is it to those old traditional Japanese ones? Well, I'm sure it's very different, mostly because these poems are very meaningful if you see them in their cultural context. If I was to tell you about when I first heard haiku, what I was impressed by was all the cultural vectors that met at this one little crossroad of a few words. To do something like that in English, and particularly in English in an American culture, which is the absolute opposite of the situation where haiku was created, that was a very homogeneous culture.

Our culture here is completely a mixture of influences and information from around the world. A great deal could be understood without being said in a homogeneous culture where haiku developed. We could approximate something like that in English, but it's not quite the same.

Here's the thing. Let's think about the seasons of the Kigo, okay? Japan has the same kind of variation of climate that the United States has, from very cold in the north in the wintertime to absolutely tropical in the southernmost parts. But their understanding of the way the seasons are applied in haiku is that they are applied according to the way that they occur in Kyoto.

So if we're talking about the cherry blossoms, we mean the cherry blossoms when they're blooming in Kyoto. If you're going to write something like that in English, where's Kyoto? Mason Yeah. Where is the cultural sort of ground zero, as it were? Peter Plus, in our situation, we're writing in the northern and southern hemispheres where simultaneously the seasons are different.

So any Kigo that relates to a calendar date just isn't going to work on a worldwide basis in English, because if you say Christmas down in the northern hemisphere, you're talking about the early winter. But if you're in the southern hemisphere, you're talking about the early summer. Mason Right.

So this makes a difference to your word choices and context. Context is everything. In the homogeneous culture, I always get confused between high context and low context cultures.

It's a very high context culture, I think, which means that less needs to be said. There's more unspoken communication, a higher level of mutual understanding, to the point where just even a raised eyebrow or a pause, everyone understands exactly what it means, unlike low context cultures, where everything needs to be clearly stated. Peter And it's very easy to misunderstand each other.

Mason In a low context culture, everything needs to be really laid out on the table, clearly stated. Otherwise, we misunderstand each other. Peter Yeah.

Luke, you lived in Japan for a while. Luke Yes, I lived there for two years. Peter Did you learn to speak Japanese? Luke I learned a little bit.

I used to go to my local bar, which was just around the corner from my apartment. I'd go down there and I would play darts and drink too much. I made a bunch of friends there that I only ever saw in that bar.

When I was there, I would chat to them. I learned to count to 180. I learned to make fun of each other.

We would say, oh, that was close, or that was a good shot, or it's your turn. Then basic stuff like, oh, I like this. I like that.

Do you like this? Do you like that? Things like that. I was able to do a bit. Peter Were you able to do enough to get some sense of some of the big distinctions between the way the Japanese language handles information and the way English handles it? Luke Yes, absolutely.

The basic sentence structure is different. A lot of things are unsaid in Japanese, whereas in English, they're a bit more explicit. For example, often it's parts of sentences in Japanese.

A simple example of that would be in English, we'd say, what is your name? In Japanese, they kind of say, your name, question, even. They might add, you know, or namae wa, which is like, and your name is, almost, kind of like that, or and your name. It's a lot more minimal.

Also, the arrangement, yeah, the sentence structure, the syntax is different. Putting the verb at the end is interesting, because you almost put the elements together, and then you tie it up with a verb at the end. So, it's very interesting and a different kind of way of thinking, almost.

Peter So, you also have a sense of the situation with the kireiji, the cutting word in haiku. Luke Right. I was wondering about the cutting word.

Am I right in thinking that the cutting word, the kireiji, as you said, is a sort of interruption? Peter Yeah, it's a marker where something has changed. So, the problem is, of course, we have no such word, really, words in English. So, what we tend to do in English is we tend to mark this either with punctuation or with very clear line breaks that tell us that there's a break here.

Luke Literally, the arrangement of the text on the page, yeah. Peter Yes, yeah. It's interesting that we receive haiku as a three-line poem here.

Of course, it's not that in Japan. It's a single column of characters. What's interesting to me, now I don't actually speak Japanese or read it, but I've read about this a lot and I've worked with Japanese poets.

When you have those column of characters, there's no space between words, per se, the way that we do. Before and after every word in English, there's a space. These characters basically appear one after another without any visible break.

So, where are the words to see is a different situation for someone reading haiku in Japan. They have no problem with it. Luke Also, one character could be an entire phrase contained in one single character with space around it.

Peter Right. But, you know, take the word haiku. You know, in English, how many syllables is that? Luke Yeah, two.

Peter Two syllables. But, you know, if you write it, it takes three characters in Japanese. Luke Oh, it does? Oh, okay.

Peter Yeah. And if you talk to a Japanese poet about their work to my ear, and I think most English speakers' ears, you think what they're saying is haiku. So, one syllable.

Because the u part of it is just often not pronounced. So, the idea of trying to base our understanding of haiku on syllable structure is hopeless. Luke Right.

So, the fact that we do this five, seven, five-syllable structure as a rule is kind of attempting to explain something that, through a paradigm that doesn't work, lost in translation. Peter So, groupings of five and seven sounds are the basis of most the traditional Japanese poetry. It has a particular sound to the ear of a Japanese person, I think.

I mean, I've been in workshops where some of it was being presented in Japanese and some in English. And I could see that the Japanese audience knew that they were hearing a poem every time something was presented in five, seven, five. But five, seven, five in Japan, Japanese is nothing like five, seven, five in English.

Five, seven, five in English is almost always a much longer poem with a lot more information. Luke So, the concept of syllables is different in Japanese, right? So, yeah, that, yes. It's a totally different thing.

So, I suppose when you approach it in English, then the rules are off. I mean, what is the thing that makes what you do haiku? Peter Yes, good question. Thank you.

Luke I'm trying to write an essay about this now. Actually, I'm trying to write an essay about the distinction between haiku in English, the distinction between haiku and senryu. Peter Senryu, yeah.

Luke Yeah. Senryu is the way it looks, but senryu is the way it is pronounced. The R is pronounced as a D, basically.

Senryu. Peter Yes, I see. Senryu.

Luke Well, it's not form because in Japanese, they have exactly the same form. But a Japanese person knows when they're hearing a senryu and they know when they're hearing a haiku. So, what is the difference? And we're learning that.

I mean, that's the exciting thing that's going on now. As far as I'm concerned, it's exciting. Every few years, we learn a little bit more about what haiku actually are.

We thought we knew a thing or two as far back as the 1950s. Every few years, we learn that we didn't know as much as we thought we did. And the new things that we learn, many of them are truly new to us.

I mean, they're really kind of exciting because it's a truly different aesthetic. Peter Okay, yeah. So, this distinction between haiku and senryu, which I'm not sure I'm pronouncing correctly.

But before we started recording, you were talking to me about the two forms. And in fact, you said that a lot of the poems, let's say, that I read out of yours are actually more like senryu than haiku. So, is there a difference in terms of subject matter as well as form? What is the difference? David Well, this is an evolving topic in English language poetics.

For me, I get my understanding of it because I also have a background in renku, in the art form from which haiku developed. So, my sense of what a haiku is is developmental in that sense. It goes back to what a hoku was, what the opening verse of a renku had to accomplish.

Peter So, just a bit of background. The hoku is the first part of a renku, which is a much longer poem. And the hoku was the first few lines of this much longer poem.

And that became a thing on its own. And that's what haiku has become. It's kind of like the opening few lines of a much longer poem, which became a form of its own.

David Yes, exactly. And in renku, the opening verse, the hoku, but also all the other verses after that have certain things that they're supposed to accomplish. So, my sense of haiku begins with at least what it is that a hoku is supposed to accomplish.

But the term haiku in Japan is a relatively recent term. It was really created in this way, used in this way since the last decade of the 19th century. So, once it became truly discreet and no longer associated with the renku, it began to also have developmental phase that took place then.

So, my understanding of what a haiku is, is based upon where it came from and what I know about what it's become since then. So, I have to say that my sense of the distinction between haiku and senju has to do with the attitude of the poet, the way that the poem works for a reader, if it works at all, and the aesthetics around renku. Have you heard of the johaku structure? Okay, so let's say a 36-verse renku, which is the most popular form, the kassen form.

The first six verses are called the jo, J-O in English. They are like the beginning of a party because this actually was a poet's party game to start with. And in those, we're a little bit formal.

We're being introduced to each other, we're finding out where to put our coats, we're introducing ourselves, basically. The ha, which is the middle, let me think, 6-6, the middle 24 verses, that's the party. It gets wild and crazy in there and anything can happen.

And then the kyu is basically the last six verses, and basically it's quiet again. It's like we're just reflecting on what we've done and saying, until we see you again, kind of. So, the tone of haiku is the tone of the jo.

So, it's a little bit formal. It's quieter. It's subtle.

It doesn't involve strong emotion. I mean, it may involve very deep emotion, but not overtly strong emotion. There are topics that you're likely to avoid.

It's not an absolute rule, but you're not going to start with politics usually. You're not going to start with religion. You're not going to start with illness.

You're not going to start with war. But once you get into the ha, the party, anything goes. And to me, that's the basis of senju.

Now, I don't mean it's literally, because it has a separate development and all that. But in terms of tone, that's what senju is about. If you want to write about a verse...I mean, there are love verses, and by love verses, I essentially mean sex verses.

If you want to do something that's controversial, if you want to do something that's provocative, if you want to really make a statement of some kind, you do that in the middle section of the renku. And I do that in senju. Yeah, that's interesting.

So yeah, it's a tonal difference. And doing the episode, I was reading out some of your things, and I was struck by the fact that they are quite observational. There's a lot of them are commenting on people's behaviour or things that you've seen.

And I thought it feels a bit like observational comedy. It's almost like stand-up comedy, which is a similar sort of approach where you see something and you kind of observe something that we all experience, something funny in the world that we all experience. And you put it into words, people haven't necessarily verbalised it before.

And there's a sort of aha funny moment in seeing something revealed like that. And that seems to be again, part of the spirit of the renga. Is that right? No, no.

Senryu, senryu, senryu. I think say it the way you want to. A lot of people in the haiku community say senryu, senju is the sort of Japanese pronunciation as the English version of the Japanese pronunciation.

Right, right, right. So yeah, okay. So a lot of the things that you're doing are not strictly speaking haiku, but you kind of moved into the senryu kind of spirit.

Well, here's the thing. There are quite a lot of poems in the English language canon at this point, which are looked upon as sort of borderline. That is, they have elements of haiku and they have elements of senryu.

And I actually, I think a lot of my work really falls into the kind of borderline category. Yeah. Okay.

It's interesting because you're known as a haiku writer, but in fact, maybe sort of without people realising it, you're writing in a different form, but the world is catching up. Everyone's still catching up on, you know, the different types of poetry. Yeah.

Here's another distinction between the two. Okay. And this I touched on before we came on here.

Haiku often are so simple and so subtle that on your first reading, they seem like almost nothing to know. But if you give them another reading and you give them a little time, they begin to sort of open. And they have this quality of doing that over and over again, of opening and opening and opening.

Senryu is really like a joke, you know. It doesn't have to be humorous by the way, but it works like a joke in the sense that it does its, it has its maximum impact the first time you hear it. Yeah.

I mean, an example of one of those would be the one of yours, which I think if I can do it from memory is a nude beach, right? Nude beach, his enormous sand castle. Yes. I read that this morning and I thought that's very funny because that it sort of works on three levels.

I don't know if, I don't know if it's okay to, to, uh, all of them, all of them, sand, different levels of sand. Exactly. Exactly.

Yeah. Um, maybe we can come back to that one because I do actually have a few of your bits of writing that I'd like to talk to you about. So humour is not the, so humour is not the defining quality.

Um, the longtime editor of the modern haiku journal, Bob Speece said, a haiku might make you smile, a senryu might make you laugh out loud. Okay. Very, that's very interesting.

Okay. So I like the senryu then. I think that's definitely my kind of cup of tea.

Yeah. Um, how did you end up getting into writing these forms of Japanese poetry exactly? Well, I got into it through my theatre work, uh, strangely. I, I've been a poet most of my life.

My first publication was when I was eight years old and I was writing daily in my early teens. Uh, but I didn't encounter haiku and I'm glad I didn't in school or anything like that. I was at a theatre conference, um, and I was teamed with a Japanese actress and on a break we were talking, we realised we both, uh, loved poetry and she shared with me her favourite poem in the world, which was a Basho haiku.

Now that's the way to be introduced to haiku. Nothing about syllables, nothing about, you know, that this is my favourite poem in the world. And what she did, here's why it was impressive.

She said, she, she recited the poems for me in Japanese so I could hear the music because poetry everywhere is some version of music. Then she gave me the translation of the terms so I'd know what the images were in the poem. But the killer was, she said, now for a Japanese person, the, uh, the mention of this season will have this, this, and this association.

For a Japanese person reading this poem, they are likely to think of this historical era. For a Japanese person reading this poem, they are likely to think of this region in Japan. For a cultured Japanese person reading this poem, they are going to think of this Chinese poem.

And here I, you know, like four or five words, you know, and it's, and it's a crossroads for all these cultural vectors. I was impressed. Yeah.

Yeah. I can see that. Okay.

So that was your introduction to it. And then eventually, as you, you were already writing poetry, but you just started experimenting with this form and, and what was it about it that sort of grabbed you? Well, I think the, the, the initially the obvious, uh, quality of it is, is it's brief. Mm-hmm.

You know, and, uh, it requires you to really work on your focus. Uh, and in my, my mind, well, first of all, I, uh, in theatre, I've always been impressed with Samuel Beckett, and I've always been impressed with his, uh, progressively more terse drama. Mm-hmm.

Yeah. So there's that aspect of it. But there's also the fact that I, I was aware as a poet all my life that most people, if they know any poetry at all, they, they just know a couple of a line or two.

Yeah. Yeah. Um, and so I have, as an actor, I have background playing in Shakespeare.

Uh, I can, I can spout whole sections of Shakespeare, but most people, uh, well, they can't do that, are quoting Shakespeare every day without knowing it. But they're quoting Shakespeare in pieces like this. Yeah.

It's not the be all or end all, or it's, um, a foregone conclusion or, you know, all these phrases that come from Shakespeare. Right. And, and people are, you know, they, people who have no interest in poetry whatsoever, this is still part of their, their life.

Well, I wanted to go directly to writing those rather than the whole mass of whatever would surround those. Yes. Yes.

I see. So you, yeah, you went minimal rather than expansive in this, like the sort of the beat poets or anything like Allen Ginsberg, the opposite of Allen

Ginsberg. Do you know that Allen Ginsberg put out a, a collection of haiku? Oh, did he? Okay.

So that proves me wrong instantly. Well, no, it doesn't prove you wrong at all because his haiku are very long for haiku. They are.

Okay. All right. Cause I thought, you know, his, his, uh, famous work is what Howl, I think it's called.

And it's extremely long. It goes on for ages and ages. Yeah.

So I just thought of that as a contrast. Um, yeah. Okay.

So is that inspiring then the fact that it's so brief? Is that, does that help? Well, uh, it helps me. I mean, it's the kind of thing that I like to best myself to read. Uh, so always while I've been writing poetry, uh, for as long as I've been doing that, I've tried to write something that I would like to read.

Yeah. Okay. Yeah.

And what are you trying to achieve? If you write a few lines, what is your objective? Well, you're saying you're asking me that in terms of haiku or you're asking me that in general? Um, I don't know. I feel like we've blurred the distinction between haiku and other forms. Um, let's, let's, I mean, I'm prepared.

To say that just any poem, any short poem. Yeah. Let me, let me just say what I've said about this for a long time and see if this answers your question.

I'm not sure we can cut it out if it doesn't answer your question. So what I do is I just go through my life. Like, you know, I don't, I don't sit down and say now I will write blah, blah, blah.

But every once in a while I have this little, this little spark of, you can call it inspiration, I guess. You know, in my mind, it's just like the thought of, oh, that's something. Now, if that something resolves itself into an idea, then I'm going to write a longer poem.

I'm just going to take that idea and I'm going to riff on it. But if that something holds on to that sense of something more without resolving into something specific, that's the material for a haiku in my mind. See, the creative act as we perform it in the West is often, it's completed in a sense by the art, the artist.

You know, our way of doing art, whatever the art is, it's kind of if you've got it, flaunt it. You know, let me show you how brilliant I can be at this. Like, let me show off the colourful language, the rich vocabulary, the control of sentence structure.

Let me wow you with my beautiful control of language. Yeah. Or if it's, you know, if I'm singing, like, you know, my range or, you know, if it's, I've been playing an instrument, the fingering that I can do that nobody else can do and et cetera.

So, the reaction we're looking for frequently is awe. We are asking our audience to see what we're doing and to go, my God, how did they do that? I could never do that. Haiku, though, are different, you know.

Haiku, the reaction of people who first encounter haiku often is, that's kind of cool. You know, I bet I could do that. And the fact is they can do that, you know.

Haiku will accommodate any degree of skill that you're able to bring to it, but it doesn't require that because it's not about the showing off of your skill. It's about a sense of common experience, of shared experience with a community, imagined community in our case, you know, of people. So, if I have this sense that something I've seen or, it's a sense thing, you know, something I've seen or heard or smelled or whatever, you know, that that has this feeling of some additional meaning but not something that I can, like, say, this particular meaning, that's a good, it's because the creative act for haiku doesn't get finished by the haiku poet.

The haiku poet, if they're working well, brings the reader to that moment and then the reader finishes the creative act. Yeah, yeah. Again, funnily enough,

I'm finding parallels with stand-up because when you're writing some stand-up, when you have an idea, you just get one idea.

Sometimes it's not entirely clear, even to you, what the actual crux of the funny idea is. So, I'll give you an example. I was fishing, okay, and I didn't catch any fish.

So, I essentially stood there, or in fact, I was in a boat. I sat in the boat looking at the water for about two hours and it was really nice but you can't, so the point that I was trying, the funny point is there, in there, is that you can't just go and stare at water for two hours because people would think it's strange. So, you have to bring some fishing equipment with you and then if you've got a fishing rod, you're okay.

You can actually stand in a river and stare at the water for two to three hours and no one thinks it's strange. But if you do it without the fishing equipment, everyone will just look at you and think, oh, there's that strange man standing in the river again. So, the idea is something about the fact that the act of going fishing is sort of an excuse for doing something else which would otherwise be socially unacceptable.

And I don't know, I'm still trying to work out where the actual funny point is in it. But by searching for that, you have to be quite brief. You have to try to explain the situation and it is up to the audience as well because they've got to fill in the gaps and arrive at the same kind of conclusion that they've kind of, that's something that's obvious but they haven't really ever thought of it before.

And the way you have to write that piece is that, you know, there's the setup and the punchline as we know. But just, you know, the way you set up the idea, the way you demonstrate the thought process is what allows the audience to kind of follow your train of thought and then arrive at the funny conclusion. So, it's just sort of a strangely similar thing.

That's how I can understand it. It's similar, I feel. Yeah.

Well, yeah, haiku is a little like sitting in a boat and looking at the water, you know. Yeah, especially when a frog jumps in to that water. See, see there.

In a haiku context with your audience here, you just got to laugh, you know. Actually, it's interesting that you mentioned the way that you write because that's one of my questions which is that how do you write? Are you always like ready with a pen and paper or do you actually sit down for specific writing sessions? Do you sit down in front of a notepad or a computer or something or do you just always carry something with you? So, audio listeners, John has picked up a little pad, the sort of pad that would fit in a pocket and he's showing me that there it is. So, you carry this pad or these pads with you all the time, do you? Well, there's times when you can't use a pad if you're driving.

I mean, I can't drive anymore. It's a vision thing. But when I was driving, I had a handheld dictaphone that I could do with one hand and I didn't have to look at it.

On the headboard of my bed, I have another handheld dictaphone thing, you know. Sometimes that's just to get things, to stop thinking about things so I can get some sleep. Because you'll lie there and your thoughts are going, turning around and around and you think, right, I've got to note this down and you just sort of ramble into the dictaphone and then you can actually sleep.

Yeah, you know, that thought of that's something that doesn't lead to sleep. No, it's true. When you're like, oh, that's an idea, that's a good idea, then your brain desperately wants to conclude that bit of inspiration, right.

Yeah. And of course, in the morning, you know, most of us on the dictaphone is nonsense, but every once in a while, there's something that was worth saving. Yeah.

Okay. So, it's definitely the former that you're just always kind of writing on the go, noting down ideas. And then I suppose you then go back to actually composing, editing, rewriting and so on.

Yeah. Right, right. You know, what I tell people who are just starting with haiku is it's important to write a lot of bad haiku.

Because if you tell yourself that I will only do it right, that's a prescription for writer's block. Yeah. You know, take whatever volume of inspiration comes to you, you know, and use it.

And then later on, when you're at the stage of applying craft to the material, you know, be your own editor. And then you can be critical and then you can figure out which ones worked and didn't work. But, you know, don't shut up the tap, you know.

Yeah. Again, parallels with standup. I mean, I could just say exactly the same thing with that, you've got to get a number of bad, you could just, you know, fail a lot and hone your craft.

But also learning English, which is the same thing, that you can't just expect to just do it right every time from the start. You have to get, you know, get a lot of errors, you know, a lot of trial and error of trying something, failing and then kind of coming back to learn from your mistakes. Yeah.

Yeah. Failure is an important learning tool. Yes.

Yeah. Perhaps the best. Yeah.

Right. So now I've got some questions for you based on or inspired by some of your specific haikus. So what I've done here is I've taken some of your poems that I read out previously, and I'd actually like to use them as the starting point for a little bit of conversation.

In some cases, I'm going to ask you questions that might seem a bit specific or random. They're kind of like jumping off points for just asking you questions, anecdotal things and things like that. And other questions might ask you about the specific haiku and what it actually means, because reading them myself, I had several interpretations and I was curious as to, you know, whether you had one particular idea in mind.

Feel free to pass on any of these. I don't want to make you feel like you have to discuss your work. I feel free.

You do? Okay, good. Let me just say that, you know, I never tell anybody they've misinterpreted my poem unless what I see is that they have completely misread a word, you know. Yeah.

Because if you've got the wrong word, then we're not connected. Yeah, okay. So you're quite happy to write your thing and let it go and then let the reader take their own interpretation? I think that's an important skill, especially for a haiku writer.

Yeah. I found the ones that I enjoyed the most were the ones that were the most open-ended and where I could see, oh, this tells either a happy story or potentially a sad story. Okay, so the first one, and this is quite random really, the first one is on the subway, a woman with sheet music moving her lips, right? Do you remember writing that? Yes, I sure do.

On the subway, a woman with sheet music moving her lips. So my question about that is basically, do you often people watch and does it give you inspiration? My mother would be happy to hear this, you know? She used to encourage us to people watch, you know, and we thought that was awful boring as little kids. But yeah, sure, I think people are fascinating.

I mean, you know, you asked me if I remember writing that. I mean, I remember where I was sitting and where this other person was sitting in relation to me on the subway car. Yeah, in New York? In New York, yes.

Okay, and so what was it that made you think, right, I've got to write this one down? Well, I think what made it particularly interesting to me besides sort of the obvious things of this is a sketch of a person doing something unique, you know, and at the same time, completely understandable. I think the first thing was the presence of the music, as I sensed it with for her, and the noise of the subway. You know, the subway was extremely noisy.

This is a Brooklyn line where, you know, it's like the old cars. And she was like, you know, involved with her music. And, you know, she was hearing something that I couldn't hear.

And I couldn't have heard it even if she was playing the music, though. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, just interesting.

And you kind of think to yourself, where is she going? Is she a music student? Is she on her way to conservatoire or something? Yeah, just an interesting glimpse into someone's life. Another one on the theme of music was complicating my love of music, her urge to sing. Complicating my love of music, her urge to sing.

So I guess a description of a woman who suddenly felt compelled to sing. And there's you, you're a lover of music. But this, this was a bit too much.

Was this about a specific experience? Can I ask you about it? Well, it's, it's a, in my mind, it's a poem of misdirection, you know, because the poem is what it says. But also it's complicating my love of her, my love of music. Okay, so that, yeah, right.

Now it's a totally different story. Now this woman is in your life. This is not just some person that you have to spend the afternoon with.

That's, you know, that's a choice. By the way, one of my dearest friends, Hilary Tan, was a composer of orchestra music, and also a member of our local haiku group. And I have, I've been gifted with some ability in the area of writing, and then the area of acting, and then the area of visual arts, but not in music.

And my getting along with Hilary, I think, so well, partly had to do with the fact that I had, I had no skill to, like, sort of, flaunt. I've seen her with other poets who, who wanted to show, like, how much they knew about music, and it was very difficult, you know. What, because she, she didn't want to know? She's, you know, she's, she knew, she knew better than anybody who talked to her.

Yeah, so they're trying to show off to her about their musical knowledge, and she, yeah, wasn't interested. Okay. And she was just sort of forced into being gracious, but, you know, not, not entirely open with, you know.

Yeah. Yeah. Yes.

Okay. So, music is a bridge between us, but it's also, it's a bridge that, you know, sometimes has a toll gate, you know. Absolutely.

Yeah. I mean, you can have two people who absolutely love music, but it might not work because, yeah, they, they, they're, it's not a sort of mutual, they don't enjoy the same things. In fact, it can be the most divisive thing, you know, music, music fans can, you know, have big disputes about music.

I mean, you know, just look at fans of the Beatles. If they, if you get them discussing, you know, the, the, the best or worst songs, then they can end up having big arguments about it. Okay.

Next one I've got for you is, so much of what I do involves my body. Yeah. I remember that.

I remember writing that. I was at the Haiku North America conference in 2001 in Boston. I was sitting on a curb.

Really? Just in the street? Well, outside of the venue. Yeah. On the sidewalk.

And, uh, and it just occurred to me, I just started laughing and, and there happened to be like an editor of a Canadian journal there. Like she just asked me what I was laughing about. And so I immediately put it into words, those words.

That's great. I mean, I, again, I read that one this morning because I recorded part two of my episode this morning and that included some more of your, your work and that one. Well, it made me think of things that my mom and dad said to me recently.

Um, I interviewed them both on the podcast about life in general. And my dad specifically said, um, you know, old age creeps up on you. And he said, I can't, I can't be this old.

He said, uh, and he said, you know, you just realise one day that there's certain things you can't do. So I went to my parents to help them with the, with the house changing light bulbs and things. You know, my mom said, I can't go up a ladder anymore and I can't look up at a light bulb while I'm changing it.

I start to get dizzy and other things, you know, aches and pains and just the inconvenience of having to do things. And I mean, I'm, I'm, I'm 48, but I feel it too every day. Just the inconvenience of having to get down to put your shoes on and to carry my, to carry my son up the road to take him to his daycare centre and just, yeah, it's a bit exhausting.

So I don't know what, what, what do you, what do you, what, how would you answer that? Uh, how is it getting older? Well, Robert, Robert Frost said this, you know, he said, you know, that, uh, that his poem, the oven bird, he said that the bird asks in all but words, what to make of a diminished thing. And, and life becomes a diminished thing little by little, you know? Yeah. Yeah.

I, I, I've accepted, I don't, so, so two years ago, I had a problem that resulted in me having a serious loss of vision to the point now where I can no longer drive and where I had to learn how to redo things that I, especially with the computer and writing, you know, that I had done for years with ease. Of course, I, you know, wish I could do those things easily now, but I have also enjoyed the process of finding alternatives, of finding another workaround. Um, it's, it's, my feeling in general is that everything in life is an asset liability situation.

Anything that's happening is both an asset potentially and a liability. And sometimes one or the other is really obvious. It's really clear why this is an asset or really clear why this is a liability.

But the other side of it's always there, you know, usually it may takes time to, to emerge. So I'm, I'm, I do mourn the loss of faculties I had before, but I also am enjoying the process of creating new faculties to fill the gaps. Yeah.

Every cloud has a silver lining. Yeah. I mean, it's, you know, it's, it's heartening to hear you being positive about, about that, you know, saying that the, even in a situation that, as you describe as being a liability, there are maybe not obviously at the beginning, but there are assets or positives to these things.

We know, we, we know our, we know our path by looking back at it, but, but if we realise how consistent the truths are about what we're looking back at, you know, we can apply those to looking forward too. What do you mean by that? Well, I mean that if I look back, you don't often see both the asset and liability in any given situation in the moment, you see one or the other in the moment. But if you look back at all those situations in the past, you can, you can then see that everything, something bad happened, but like if it didn't happen, this other good thing wouldn't have happened and something good happened.

But, you know, that's, that created a situation where you had a loss over it, you know, and what you can, if that's the way it's always been in the past, then you can also presume that's the way it's going to be in the future. Yeah. So that helps you deal with the anxiety of what's to come.

You kind of think, oh, you know, bad things will come, but then also good things. Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

I've got another one for you. Trying to fit in time for my son to practise parallel parking. Yeah.

What do you notice about that one? What do I notice about that one? Well, the double meaning of fit in is that, is that it? Well, that's, you know, sure, but. Hmm. So trying to fit in, because obviously he's trying to fit into society.

He's got trying to learn to drive, but also literally trying to fit his car into the space, trying to fit in time for my son to practise parallel parking. I don't know. There's something I'm missing.

Well, it's, you're not missing anything. It's just that there's, if it's any good, there's like lots of stuff. So you're, what I had in mind, what I had in mind is, I don't very often write 5-7-5, but when I write 5-7-5, it's an element of the poem.

So, at least in the U.S., when you learn to parallel park, it's a three-part process. Okay. Trying to fit in, five.

Yeah. Time for my son to practise, seven. Parallel parking, five.

Yeah. So that 5-7-5 poem to me, you know, is a little bit like trying to learn to parallel park. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. I see.

Now, all the things that you're talking about though are in, are operating in the poem. This is a true, I mean, this is a true story. Obviously, I was trying, I was teaching my son how to parallel park, you know, and, and I, you know, here's, here's the, trying to fit in time.

It, sometimes it's an easy process, people learning that, and sometimes it takes a lot of time. Yeah, absolutely. I still not, I still haven't really got the hang of it.

Yeah. Now, so yeah, my question was, did you teach your son to drive and how was it? Yeah, well, I taught my son to drive and then I taught my goddaughter to drive. And I've been pressed with you as a teacher.

Yeah. I come from a family of teachers and I'm the black sheep because, you know, I'm not a teacher. But because of Haiku, I've had to learn to do some teaching over the years.

And a point I really instantly realised like, oh, this is a whole set of skills, you know. So I got, so I didn't do as well with my son, who I did first, as I did with my goddaughter, who I did later. Okay.

You just, you sort of like learned the, the, the skills with the first one and yeah. Yeah. I'm wondering how it's going to go when either of my kids are old enough.

How old are they now? Well, my daughter's eight. My son is two. So there's a few years ahead of us.

Yeah. You, you could get good at this before yourself, before you had to teach them. What good at parallel parking? Yeah.

Well, yeah. Okay. I've really got to nail it.

But to be honest, by the time they're driving, they'll probably just press a button and the car will do it automatically. You know, I had a car that was supposed to do that and I never trusted it to do it. I can, I can do it.

Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Exactly.

Yeah. And also cars these days have got so many cameras. I mean, there are cars that have cameras that will create like a kind of simulated image of your car from the, from above, and then it's much easier to slide it into the, into the space.

It's incredible that kids today that just don't know they're born. They really don't. Talking of kids today, here's another one.

All new clothes waiting for the school bus. Hmm. So I guess that describes the feeling of standing there at the beginning of the school year, waiting for the school bus in brand new clothes.

For me, it would have been a school uniform, tie, blazer, the whole works. So how about you? Were you happy to go to school as a child? How did you feel on, on your first day of school? Well, I think I had an array of feelings, but the

big feeling for me was I loved school. And I loved school mostly because I lived out in the country and all my friends, to see them, I went to school.

Right. Yeah. Okay.

I remember feeling horribly sort of nervous and terrible. I used to feel terrible. My first day of school, I like that horrible feeling in your stomach.

I mean, looking back on it now, I mean, it was amazing. You get to see all your friends. You just learning stuff all day long.

Um, it's brilliant, but for some reason it was just this awful feeling, especially Sunday evening, just something, just something so specific about that general sense of dread of having to go back to school the next day. Yeah. It's a weird one, isn't it? I have a lot of vivid memories of school.

Um, I mean, I remember my lines from my kindergarten play. Really? Yeah. Wow.

I remember, I remember what, where I sat at the table when we all sat as a group, you know, I knew which seat I had in the schoolhouse in the, in the first grade. I went to a country school, so there were kindergarten through third grade all in one room. Mm hmm.

Yeah. And so I had all these, this whole range of feelings about it in school. Um, I keep in mind, you know, I was, uh, I was engaged in the second grade.

Uh, Mary Wilcox and I were going to be married, you know? Yeah. Really? Wow. Okay.

So yeah, a whole range of emotions then. Yeah. You had a very active school life, it seems.

I got a good education. I think, you know, um, I lived in an area which was dominated by Cornell university and Ithaca college. And that translated to a pretty good lower level schools experience.

Okay. Yeah. Everybody who went to my school was well prepared if they went on to other kinds of education.

That's great. Uh, I don't know if I could say the same myself. I just went to a standard English comprehensive school, nothing particularly special.

It was all right. Um, another one for you. I'm curious about this one.

If you had a specific interpretation in mind when you wrote this, um, it's the one that goes thin winter coat. So little protection against her boyfriend. Yeah.

Yeah. Um, so I'm, I'm responding to your questions and I'm talking about poems I've never talked about before, but this one, when I recite this one in a recital, I often give it a little preface. And basically what I say is, do you ever see a stranger and just have the feeling that you know something about their life? Now you might be right or wrong.

I'm just talking about that feeling, you know, just the idea that you think you know something about their life. Well, this is a situation I, this is someone I saw in the post office here in my, in NASA or somebody, I didn't know it was a stranger, but to me, like it looked to me like this was her story. You know, uh, if she was going to get away from this boyfriend, she was, she's going to need to like be dressed warmer and maybe with, she'd need to be safer and warmer.

Yeah. The way I interpreted it was either. So she, she's wearing a thin winter coat and it's not giving her enough protection against the cold weather.

And so that's why she's, she is against her boyfriend in the sense that she's up close to her boyfriend, pushing herself against her boyfriend to try and keep warm that idea. But then the other idea, which is definitely what you're talking about, which is that somehow the coat, the fact she's unprepared, she's in this thin coat, it's cold, but it's actually her boyfriend's that is the one that she should be getting the protection against. And that it's, it's, it's a portrait of a girl, an unfortunate girl in a, in a toxic relationship with a guy who clearly is no good for her.

And this is why it's a borderline poem, because if you read it the way that you're reading it, it tends a little more toward haiku in tone. And the way that I was just describing it, it tends a little more toward the Senju in tone. Same words, but a different tone.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

It's a sad, it's kind of a sad one. Yeah. How about, okay, this, this one is inspired by my two-year-old son, the question that I'll ask.

So the, I wonder if you can guess which one it is. So it's, it's the one that goes never touching his own face Tyrannosaurus, never touching his own face Tyrannosaurus about Tyrannosaurus Rex, the dinosaur. So the question from my son, who's obsessed with dinosaurs is what's your favourite dinosaur? Oh, okay.

Pretty simple. Yeah. I mean, I'm an, I'm an old person now, so I have lots of friendly dinosaurs, you know.

But I can remember, you know, that my favourite to begin with was Triceratops. Uh-huh. Okay.

Why, why exactly Triceratops? Well, there's nothing like it. You know, who else has, has this hood and these three horns and, you know, and, you know, the bulk of a rhinoceros, you know, or hippopotamus. Yeah.

Yeah. It's like a rhinoceros on steroids kind of thing. Yeah.

I don't know if Triceratops and T-Rex were around at the same time, but you can sort of imagine that these two would, would have, you know, had a few encounters with each other. Yeah. Yeah.

In the movies, there's nowhere else. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

I don't think they actually meet up in Jurassic Park, although there are both in Jurassic Park. My son, Tyrannosaurus Rex, of course, is what my son is only interested in. And if there's a T-Rex, then he is delighted, basically.

Okay. Moving on. I've only got a couple of others.

All right. Okay. Another sort of observational one, checking the driver as I pass a car, just like mine, which is something that I just thought, yeah, that's it.

Yeah, totally. When you're, you're driving a car and you see another one, same model as you, for some reason, we're interested in whoever it is that's driving that one. So, so my question is a bit specific.

What do you hope or expect to see when you, when, when you check the driver of the same car as you? What are you looking for? What are we looking for when we do that? Well, it's a bit of foolishness, you know? The idea is that my taste, what I might, what I consume somehow is my identity. Yeah. Which is foolishness, you know? But it's there, you know? Absolutely.

I mean, yeah. So at that moment, you know, for myself, that was that, this is something, you know, like, and the something was that foolishness that I've got, you know, that probably other people have got to, you know. Let me just say the one thing about this poem is that I think it's sort of interesting is, does, is it different if you imagine this taking place in daylight or if you imagine it taking place at night? Oh, I see.

I always imagined it taking place in daylight, but anything involving driving at night always ends up with a bit of sort of threatening, frightening darkness to it. It's, you know, you sort of, it's the, it's like film noir, maybe a horror film, two drivers encountering each other on a road at night. Definitely more scary, whereas during the day, it's fun.

Interesting. See, now that's, I'm hearing from a reader and that's great. That's wonderful, you know? And that hadn't occurred to me.

That's just my brain. I always go, end up sort of leaning towards the sort of scary stuff. Yeah.

Well, it's not that you're, I mean, you're right, you know? For me, it actually, I mean, again, I almost always remember exactly where I was and how these things kind of came to me. I know where I was on the road and it was at night, you know? And I couldn't really see the other driver that well, but what I could see was the lights of their dashboard, you know? And my feeling about it was, it was warm feeling, you know? And not that I felt that we, that our purchase, our car meant we were alike, but I had this feeling that we were both around our own little modern campfire of the dashboards and the dark cars. But, you know, I didn't expect that other people would read the poem in that way, because again, it doesn't specify is this darker or light? Is this, do I see the person clearly or do I not see them clearly? You know, and so on.

It's all, it's all, my hope is that people will find in their experience something that's triggered by the poem. Yeah. I just imagined it being daylight and I just kind of thought that it's just interesting that there are other people going around in the world living almost exactly the same experience.

And when you see someone driving the same car as you, there's a curiosity because you just think, wow, here's another person who, it's kind of almost like two parallel universes just kind of coming together at a certain moment. And you look over and you think there's someone who's living kind of the same experience as me. They've got exactly the same dashboard in front of them.

You know, somehow we are united by the fact we're driving the same car. You know, if you have a group of people sitting in a circle, you know, on chairs and around in a circle, what's always struck me is like, the circle looks different to all of us because none of us sees ourself in the circle, but everybody else does. And everybody else doesn't see themselves in a circle.

So we have that in common and at the same time, it's different. It's a common difference. We are both united and divided by the same experience.

Yeah. Yeah. As you know, that's interesting that a simple three lines like that can bring those thoughts to mind.

That's a very interesting experience. I've just got a couple more, right? So the one I mentioned before, nude beach, his enormous sandcastle. So did you really go to a nude beach? Yes, I did.

Okay. And yes, they were. And yes, they were building these massive sandcastles.

And the only place that I got, I built a place I could look comfortably was the sandcastles. Right. Because I was thinking, wow, that must have been pretty awkward.

I mean, it's a very funny poem because the last line, you know, it missed the poem misdirects nude beach, his enormous, his enormous what, and then it's his enormous sandcastle. But then, yeah, obviously the poem is almost looking away, looking at the sandcastle instead of looking at something else. But also it kind of painted a picture of that also would be awkward watching a naked person building a sandcastle is going to be so because they're leaning over digging into the ground.

Oh, God, it must have been so awkward. Well, I tell you, I went once. Never again.

This is the last one. And it actually kind of touches on what you mentioned earlier, something you mentioned earlier, border of sleep, the sound of nearby breathing. Mine.

Yeah. Yeah. I do have a question.

It's basically, do you ever have trouble sleeping? Also, what do you prefer the moment of dropping off to sleep or the moment of slowly waking up in the morning? Yeah. What about trouble sleeping? You mentioned before that sometimes you're struck by inspiration that you're in a monologue is is is going at the moment of sleep and you have to record those thoughts before you can rest. Yeah.

Well, I just want to say first, I had a strong reaction to your picking that one because that was my mom's favourite already. Yeah. And I think it was just her favourite because, you know, she had that experience also, you know.

Well, I just think, you know, going to sleep is just another example of an asset liability situation, you know. Sometimes it's wonderful and sometimes you can tell your body is just saying, like, here we go, you know. Yeah.

Here we go. And other times after you've turned a number of things over in your mind, you realise, like, it isn't happening tonight. Yeah.

Yeah. You mean your mind is not going to let you rest? Yeah. Right.

So, basically, I try and go with what either thing, you know, whatever it is, you know. It's like, I know that if I don't sleep tonight, I'll sleep sometime soon. Yeah.

Yeah. I actually find that those moments when you're trying to sleep but your brain won't switch off, it can be really sort of precious moments because you come up with some interesting thoughts. And it's a strange time, the middle of the night, everyone else is sleeping, it's dark.

You're kind of very up close and personal with your thoughts. And it's a good time to kind of write those things down or record them. But it can be immensely frustrating when you know that you just really want to sleep because you want to be ready for the next day.

Yeah. Did you happen to see my one that says, after midnight, getting some of my thoughts into the lifeboats? Ah, no, I didn't see that, but that's good. After midnight, getting some of my thoughts into the lifeboats.

Yeah. Rescuing some before the ship goes down, before you fall asleep. So, that particular moment in the other poem, though, so that's a success, you know.

That's I'm almost asleep and I've reached the point where I realise that I'm breathing differently. It actually sounds like the breathing is taking place somewhere else. Yeah.

Yeah. That disassociation that can arrive just as you're drifting off. Yeah, that's great.

I mean, that's a wonderful feeling. Yeah. So, my other question was, would you prefer the moment of drifting off or the moment of waking up? I love them both.

I mean, you know, let me say, one of the things I did as a teenager when I was first starting to write daily is I kept a dream journal. So, as soon as I woke up in the morning, I would write down as much as I could remember the dreams. Now, if you train yourself that way, eventually I became a lucid dreamer, you know.

Eventually, I would sometimes, not always, but sometimes I would realise I was dreaming while I was dreaming, which would give me the capability of now steering the dream. Incredible. It's both a source of inspiration at times and it's a source of reassurance.

If you find that you can actually steer your dreams, it's sweet. Oh, yeah. I'd love to be able to do that.

I mean, can you give me an example of a dream that you've actually controlled, steered? Well, the most recent example. So, again, two years ago, I lost a significant amount of my vision and I can no longer drive. So, I still have dreams about driving.

Relatively recently, I had a lucid dream where I realised I'm already driving in a dream. I thought, like, okay, well, where do I want to go? And I just drove through these great places. Wow.

That's amazing. How do you do that? Well, I don't know how you do it because, I mean, to me, it was a byproduct of dream journaling. I got to the point where I could remember whole dreams.

I mean, to begin with, you just remember whatever was the last thing that happened. And you have to kind of backtrack, you know, what happened before that and then what happened before that. But I got so that I could write down these sort of long sequences of dreams.

And it's interesting that they have a lot more structure than you might think. They're almost like, you know, they're almost like crazy plays, but crazy plays that still had a structure of like three acts. Yeah.

Yeah. So, the lucid dreaming stuff just started out of that somehow. I don't know how it happened, you know.

You just kind of tapped into it. Yeah. And again, it doesn't happen all the time.

It's just once in a while that I just realised, like, oh, you know, okay, you know, let's see what we can do with this. Oh, great. I used to write down my dreams as well.

And there were periods in my life when I just dreamt so vividly. And I'd write down a dream or I'd have a dream and it would stay with me the entire day. You know, I'd just be thinking about this interesting space that I found myself in.

So many incredibly vivid things. It's fascinating. Well, John, thank you so much for talking to me so openly about your work and for being willing to let me ask you all these sort of odd questions in response to the things you've written over the years.

I really appreciate it. Thank you so much. And I'm sure that my listeners have enjoyed also listening to you describing haiku and then all the other things we've talked about.

We appreciate it very much. Thank you. Well, thank you, Luke.

It's been a pleasure. And as I say, when I first saw your earlier blog relating to haiku, the feeling I had immediately was like, here's somebody I would just like to talk to. Well, good.

I'm glad that we made that happen. Thank you.

## Ending

So there you go.

That was my conversation with John Stevenson. And what a pleasure and a privilege that was. Thank you again to John for taking the time to do that.

Thank you very much. And also thank you to Helene for sort of getting the ball rolling with this whole thing. I want to encourage you to read some of John's work and maybe to buy some of his books or collections of his books.

How do you do that? You could probably just Google. You could Google John Stevenson haiku. That's a good place to start.

But also there are some collections of his work available. Brooks Books Haiku Brooks Books B R O O K S Books Brooks Books Haiku. And you'll probably find his most recent collection, which is published by Brooks Books.

It's called My Red. My Red by John Stevenson is his most recent collection of haiku published through Brooks Books. So you could search maybe My Red Brooks Books Haiku.

Also from Red Moon Press, you can find a collection called Some of the Silence. And also online, you can find a lot of his work on the Heron's Nest website. Just search for Heron's Nest Haiku.

And simply searching for John Stevenson Haiku will also turn up other results that you can enjoy reading. But if you loved this episode and you like the things that you've heard, then why not invest in a copy of My Red via Brooks Books? Because, you know, nothing compares to having a proper printed book with all the work lovingly presented on paper in your own hands. This

episode, I feel was like one of those serendipitous moments of podcast magic for me, because, you know, a few weeks ago, I had no idea about John, not really much of an idea about haiku poetry.

And I never, I probably never would have done these episodes if it hadn't been for Helene sharing her enthusiasm with me via email. And as a result, I actually got to talk to a great celebrated poet and what a lovely bloke he is. As ever, listeners, I'm curious about your thoughts, so leave them in the comments section.

Also, please be inspired. Please continue to be inspired by this episode and these haiku episodes that I've done and write some more haiku. I love reading them.

Listeners have been writing haikus in the comments section of my episodes, and they're great. I've really enjoyed reading them. So please continue to do that.

I will continue to be impressed by what my audience comes up with. Coming up on the podcast then, over the next few weeks, I have a smorgasbord of different guest appearances. It's been the season for guest conversations on this podcast.

It seems I go through different phases of doing solo episodes, and then guests arrive a bit like London buses. They all arrive one after the other. You wait for ages and then they all arrive at the same time.

So I've recorded quite a lot of episodes with guests lately. It's been a sociable kind of time. So a smorgasbord of different guest appearances, including the return of various fan favourites, family members, and popular people talking on a range of topics.

Some everyday stuff, some extraordinary stuff, some pretty insane stuff, and some supernatural stuff as well. Included in the mix for premium subscribers will be a few vocabulary previews in the form of vocab quizzes, which have proven to be very popular. So become a premium lepster if you want to get that extra content.

Teacherluke.co.uk slash premium is where you get started. What else? Episode 1000 is approaching. I think it's going to arrive at this rate, at the current rate.

Episode 1000 will probably arrive in August. I don't know what I'm going to do for episode 1000. I've got no idea yet.

What to do for that? I mean, you know, the obvious thing is to do some sort of live recording. But sometimes if I do a live recording on YouTube, for example, sometimes I find it a little bit overwhelming because I get too many comments in the comment section and it's impossible to keep up with them. So I love doing that.

Maybe I'll just do that randomly at some point, or I say randomly. Maybe I'll maybe I'll set up a live podcast recording, but it might not be for episode 1000. So I don't know.

What shall I do? Any ideas? Let me know if you've got any good ideas for what I can do for the official episode 1000 of Luke's English Podcast. I'll have a think. You can have a think.

Let me know if you've got any good ideas. Who knows? Maybe I'll just do a ramble on my own. Maybe I'll just do a classic solo ramble, or maybe I'll come up with something else.

We will see. But anyway, episode 1000 is approaching. And also, it was around this time exactly 17 years ago that I opened up my laptop in my brother's bedroom in my parents' house in 2009 and recorded episode one of this podcast, which is still available in the episode list, of course.

17 years ago, more or less 17 years ago to the very day that I started doing this podcast. The 17th birthday of Luke's English Podcast is more or less here now. I can never remember the actual date of episode one.

I think it might be like the 9th of April. I don't know why I'm thinking the 9th of April, 7th of April. I can't remember, but it's more or less 17 years ago.

So yeah, 17 years of Luke's English Podcast, nearly 1000 episodes. Actually, it's more than as we know, it's more than 1000 episodes, in fact, because if you include all the premium episodes and all the sort of bonus episodes that don't have numbers in the episode list, then it takes us closer to about 1250 episodes, in fact. And then there's all those phrasal verb episodes, and there's nearly 150 of them.

So I don't know. Maybe I should be celebrating episode 2000. But anyway, after all this time and all these episodes, episodes, I'm still very much full of ideas and full of enthusiasm for talking to you on this podcast.

I have too many episodes to record, to be honest. I've got a big long list of ideas, partially finished, partially completed episode plans and various random ideas and things. I've just got loads of ideas and things to record, too many things to upload.

And actually, I have to hold myself back from publishing too much, because I don't want to overwhelm you with too many episodes. But I'm still enthusiastic about doing this, which is just great. I hope you agree.

I hope you also enjoy listening to the stuff that I do for you. Anyway, as ever, thank you very much for listening to this episode. Thank you to John again for his time.

Thank you to Helenee for the original inspiration. And I hope you enjoyed this episode. I hope you enjoy the next one, the next one after that, and the next after that, and so on.

Long may this continue. Have a lovely morning, afternoon, evening, or night, wherever you are in the world, in the universe, whatever you happen to be doing with yourself right now, or maybe with other people, I don't know. That's your business.

Until next time, I will now say goodbye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.