

German poet finds reality with haiku

By ANNE RICHARDS
Staff Writer

Hans Knospe's father died in the German army during the Russian campaign of 1943.

Among his father's belongings were a diary and some poetry.

"He wrote in his diary he believed Hitler and God were the best things for the German people," Knospe said.

Knospe looked at the diary for the first time when he was 29. He had never known his father. He believed neither in God nor Hitler.

But the thread of a poetic legacy bound the father and son together.

AT 29, KNOSPE was clean-shaven. His hair was trimmed close. He was a top salesman in the German branch of 3M Company.

*towering clouds
mountains in the sunlight
lonesome heights*

He began writing poetry himself about that same time.

"It wasn't until seven years ago I started writing haiku," said Knospe. "Haiku is a special form—simple, yet disciplined. There is a strong feeling of nature in it."

Haiku is a Japanese poetic form highly structured into a three-line pattern of five, seven and five syllables for a total of 17.

"PEOPLE LIKE the feeling of it. Old and young people alike," he said in his heavily accented German. "It can be both fun and serious."

When he began writing poetry, Knospe's life underwent intense change.

He had given up his formal religion—a strong Catholic heritage in Protestant Germany.

His marriage was shaky and he disliked his job.

"The problems with religion, marriage and business—they all came together at one time," he said.

"My wife couldn't accept the way I wanted to be. And I knew business too much. I had had enough business for my life."

*it is possible
that I do not know what you want
even in sunlight*

HE TOOK EVENING classes in philosophy, psychology and literature. He started a bookstore without enough capital and closed it six months later. He taught for two years in a boarding school for boys with behavior problems.

And he wrote poetry. Wrote poetry and took photographs.

There were some rough spots in his new lifestyle.

Long hair, for example.

Two German policemen pulled his car off the freeway, ordered him out with drawn guns and interrogated him for two hours.

"THERE IS A great fear of terrorism in Germany today," he said. "The mentality in Germany is much more conservative (than the U.S.) There seem to be only the two extremes, conservatives and terrorists."

He was tempted to settle in Sicily.

"I was so happy in Sicily, that I thought maybe I would want to live there. But maybe I ought to see the other half of the world first."



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Staff Photo by Henry

German poet Hans Knospe pauses to read in his converted mail truck.

next door to it, the white house of government.

"You don't believe it when you see the traffic at first. Now I have sympathy for the traffic. It is much quieter than in Germany. There are no speed limits on the freeways and people there travel, 90 miles (per hour), 95."

The pair arrived in Sacramento in October. She has an aunt in North Highlands.

With all the efficiency of a top salesman, he began to promote his poetry.

He used savings to get a small book of his haiku poems published.

HE HAS BEGUN a line of postcards illustrated with his photographs and each containing a haiku poem. The book and the cards are available at Tower Books and Beers Book Center.

The most striking of the cards bears a photo of two lonely men in an Amsterdam bar. The picture is so timeless it could be a scene from Hemingway's 1920's novel, "The Sun Also Rises."

The photo doesn't conflict with his basic orientation which is nature poetry and outdoor photogra-

HE SPENT SIX weeks in Baja over Christmas and wrote enough poems, more free verse haiku, to fill another book. He is currently helping translate the poems from German to English. Everything he writes is published in German and English forms.

Meanwhile, he is guest lecturing in the German classes at local colleges with a poetry, music, slide presentation.

"The poems are my own," he said. "The music is Japanese flute and harp. Also modern music like Fleetwood Mac—the old Fleetwood Mac. And Joplin. Some is Zen meditation music."

Coming up is a lecture he will give to the California branch of the American Association of Teachers of German. His topic will be tea haiku.

AND HE IS preparing for publication a notebook with simple lessons in haiku for children.

Included are drawings, examples of haiku