

## Reviewed

**Charles Trumbull.** *A Five-Balloon Morning*. Santa Fe, New Mexico: Red Mountain Press, 2013, unpag., 5.5 x 5.5, perfect softbound. ISBN 978-0-9855031-3-0. US\$16.95 + tax and shipping from the publisher at [www.redmountainpress.us](http://www.redmountainpress.us).

by Marian Olson, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Haiku poets around the world know Charles Trumbull's work mostly through his editorship of *Modern Haiku*, arguably the premier journal in the West. For the last seven years (2006–2013), he has served as its consummate editor, leaving behind a wealth of contemporary haiku poetry and provocative scholarly essays. Indefatigable in his service to the haiku community, he has selflessly served and promoted the best of modern haiku. Now that he has stepped down, he has had the time to devote to his own poetry and with it has written *A Five-Balloon Morning*.

Through the years a smattering of Trumbull's poetry has appeared in journals worldwide. But this is the first time poems about his native New Mexico are gathered in one rich volume. Throughout they paint the southwestern state with nuance and variety that natives will readily recognize and strangers will remark, "So this is what New Mexico is like." The haiku flow from the innocent awe of a child to the irony and appreciation of a mature adult. Because of this uniqueness in content and cultural color, *A Five-Balloon Morning* is destined to become a haiku classic in the state of New Mexico, for there is no other book like it.

Trumbull grew up in Las Vegas, a small historic town in northern New Mexico, near the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, the Old Santa Fe Trail, and Fort Union, built to protect interests on the Santa Fe Trail. His youthful imagination was etched by vast desert landscape, immense sky, working

folks, and yes, cowboys and Indians. In the introduction, Trumbull tells the reader that *A Five-Balloon Morning* “collects bits and pieces: my impressions from a small-town New Mexico childhood, my many visits home while I was living in the East and overseas, the joys and vicissitudes of living in New Mexico, an interlude about the momentous events of 1945, and a sentimental tour to various points around the state.” He then asks the reader to join him “in a kaleidoscopic look through the lens of haiku, at the land of enchantment.”

The volume is organized into five parts: “Leaves from the Tree” (22 poems), “Leaving New Mexico & Coming Back Home” (20 poems), “A Coyote Circling” (30 poems), “Trinity” (20 poems), and concludes with “Turtle Dance” (32 poems), the longest and most sweeping section of the book. The titles are highly illustrative with echoes of history, place, and cognitive musings.

“Leaves from the Tree” opens with haiku fueled by memories from the poet’s childhood. He begins this saga of his life with “raking into piles / leaves from the tree / I climbed as a boy,” a poignant haiku about his symbolic tree of life.

whiff of creosote—  
childhood summers  
walking railroad ties

two boys  
flip the stinkbug on its back  
dog days of summer

line drive to center  
all faces turn toward  
the alfalfa field

heading and heeling . . .  
a cowboy loses his hat  
in the summer rain

The section concludes with two haiku about the deaths of his parents. The underlying emotion runs deep and reflects the end of those formative years.

my parents' ashes strewn  
on Johnson Mesa  
wind stirs the aspens

first Christmas  
without my mother  
without my childhood

“Leaving New Mexico & Coming Back Home” continues the odyssey of Trumbull’s connection with the Southwest. After leaving New Mexico he traveled the world and lived in great cities until the pull of his native state brought him back to his heartland. In this section the man has matured and so have the images he writes about with humor and wit.

sunflower field  
all the windmills  
face the same way

small-town café  
a special tip for the waitress  
named Destiny

Colfax County  
the oncoming driver  
tips his hat

rural speed limit sign the necessary bullet hole

“A Coyote Circling” is marked by the connotative haiku of a mature observer who shows the beauty, wildness, and pathos of this high desert country.

yucca in full bloom  
a sky full  
of cumulus clouds

cold rain on snow  
a coyote  
circles the garden

along the roadside  
obscured by tumbleweeds  
cluster of white crosses

Also in this section, the poet submits to subjective material, giving the reader a glimpse into the private interior of the man.

daydreaming  
the cry of the elk  
is me

taut strands  
of barbed wire  
so much left unsaid

“Trinity” haiku take the reader to Trinity Site, the infamous testing ground for the first nuclear bomb in a remote stretch of desert east of Socorro, New Mexico. Trumbull’s prologue to the haiku about that fateful summer day in 1945 that blasted the pristine desert of native plants and animals reminds us how that detonation “instantaneously shifted the political, economic, military, and especially moral landscape of the modern world.” What sends shivers down the back is the apparent calm innocence of the haiku in this section when we know full well the dragon-monster living inside each one.

October dawn  
a fireball rises  
over the mountain

Trinity Site  
in the guard’s vehicle  
fuzzy dice

Trinity’s garden:  
snakeweed, Russian thistle,  
yucca, sagebrush

“Turtle Dance” concludes the volume with a melding of the ancient worlds of Native Americans, 400 years of Spanish/Hispanic traditions, and the modern world of McDonald’s. Unlike most other states in our union, Native Americans and government own forty-two percent of the land. The uniqueness of the culture doesn’t escape Trumbull. The haiku in this section include images from Carlsbad in the southern part of the state to Taos in the north.

ancient lava flow  
a small *descanso* nestles  
among the rocks

rhythms of the Turtle Dance  
beneath Taos Mountain  
first dawn

*conjunto* music  
blaring from dusty low-riders  
Española summer

small-town directions  
all start at  
McDonald's

sunrise  
over the Sandias—  
a five-balloon morning!

Oh, those five-balloon mornings. In the fall when balloonists from all over the world converge in the Duke City of Albuquerque, the chilly blue air tingles with vitality. Residents and visitors alike can feel it as the colorful balloons with fires hissing beneath their giant canopies glow in the pre-dawn, and then on cue, begin to rise, filling the sky with myriad shapes and colors, as varied as Trumbull's poems. While crowds cheer, automobiles hunker at the sides of the highways with their occupants mesmerized by the joyous spectacle. The title of this volume mirrors the tone and mood of the book.

Coming full circle with "Turtle Dance," Trumbull's poetry encapsulates the essence of New Mexico while sharing with the reader the soul of a poet whose heart and mind were hewn from a land with an uncompromising and rugged energy, an energy that inevitably summoned him home once again.



*Marian Olson is a nonfiction writer and poet. She has been publishing haiku since 1979 and is the author of seven books of poetry, including Songs of the Chicken Yard, a critically acclaimed book of haiku and senryu. Desert Hours won first place in the Haiku Society of America Merit Book Awards for 2008, as well as being a finalist in the 2008 New Mexico Book Awards. Consider This placed first in the 2011 free verse Snapshot E-book competition. Moondance is her latest book of haiku poetry. Forthcoming in 2014, Kaleidoscope will be her first book of tanka.*