

failed haiku

A Journal of English Senryu
Volume 1, Issue 7

michael rehling

'Failed' Editor

www.failedhaiku.com

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senryu by Mike Rehling

image by Terri French



fourteen years gone my fathers shadows move in me

First Annual H. Gene Murtha Senryu Contest

2016 Winners

First Place:

wedding announcement
all those years we didn't ask
and they didn't tell

- Bill Kenney

Second Place:

peace talks
a tissue paper floats
in the limo's wake

- Joe McKeon

Third Place:

spring cleaning
I throw away
the blues

- Debbi Antebi

Honorable Mentions

just one beer
and English becomes
my second language

- Mike Keville

dementia symptoms...
in the garden
an elusive butterfly

- G. R. LeBlanc

leap year
once a year my brother dies
no matter what

- Bob Lucky

heading home drunk
the full moon
all over the place

- Rob Scott

letters from the war—
meeting my father
before he was

- Pat Tompkins

Dad's study
I can still hear
his silence

- Ian Willey

Editors Notes

It was an absolute joy for me to read through the hundreds of submissions Michael Rehling and I received for the First Annual H. Gene Murtha Memorial Senryu Contest, sponsored jointly by *Failed Haiku* and *Prune Juice* senryu journals and judged by Michael and me. The sheer number of entries might have been overwhelming had it not been for the extraordinary quality of the submissions. I'm confident that Michael will join me in thanking everyone who sent us their best work. I'm sure we could easily have chosen fifty winning poems and still wished we could have included more.

It was heartening for me to read so many poets' comments about Gene Murtha. Gene obviously touched a lot of people's lives and he is clearly missed by those who knew him through his poetry and his work within the haiku/senryu community. I'm honored to help keep his memory alive through this annual contest in his name.

When I told Michael that I thought Gene would have approved of our contest, he said, "He would have laughed at the idea – and at us!" Michael is right, of course. Gene would have found it amusing. But that just makes the memorial contest even more meaningful to me.

I had the pleasure of talking to Bill Kenney, who wrote the first place winning poem:

wedding announcement
all those years we didn't ask
and they didn't tell

Many successful senryu are appealing because they transcend borders and cultures, speaking to universal truths and emotions shared by everyone everywhere. I like the way Bill's poem addresses this unique moment in American history. I like to imagine what it would be like if we had senryu from people living during the periods in American history when slavery was abolished or when women earned the right to vote – or when other peoples and cultures around the world found that the yoke of oppression had finally been lifted from their shoulders or the shoulders of their fellow countrymen and women. From that perspective, while Bill's poem does, indeed, address this moment in American history, it also represents the timeless victories earned by people today and throughout history who have fought for their rights and overcome their oppressors everywhere around the world. And it does so in a very human way.

When I asked Bill how his poem came about, he said, "I wrote the poem on the day the Supreme Court released its decision legalizing same-sex marriage. The wedding announcement in the poem is fictional. When the news came down, my thoughts went immediately to B. and J., two men my wife and I had known for years and considered the sweetest, most devoted couple we knew; straight or gay. During the years same-sex marriage was being debated, Pat and I always saw it in the light of our two friends.

“Sadly, J. died a few months before; there would be no wedding announcement from them. I think the poem comes from that place of sadness.

It’s a powerful, beautifully understated poem which tells so little while saying so much. I think Bill has written a timeless classic.

Steve Hodge
Editor: [PruneJuice](#)

I echo what Steve said!!! It was a pleasure to see the entries in this contest, and to honor the memory of Gene Murtha.

Our Second Place winner was:

peace talks
a tissue paper floats
in the limo's wake

- Joe McKeon

Joe has captured a moment that is, sadly, timeless. In our world today, as it has been from the beginning of civilization, we are seemingly hanging on to 'tissue paper' thin negotiations. In my lifetime this poem would have resonated with me during Vietnam, and any number of conflicts since that time. I don't know and don't need to know what prompted Joe to write it, but I know it has a resonance that gives rise to the 'hope' in all of us.

Our Third Place winner was:

spring cleaning
I throw away
the blues

- Debbi Antebi

This poem by Debbi invokes the 'lightness' any fine senryu strives to attain. Many of us engage in the timeless pastime of 'spring cleaning'. Winter has ended, and time of reckoning for many of us is upon us. No matter if you are planting crops, feeding flower beds, or just moving the boots to the back of the closet and pulling out the sandals, it

is a time of positive upheaval. There is work to be done for sure, but another season to look forward to. The 'blues' have no place in this moment of newfound order and hope, so banishment seems the only appropriate approach for any of us to take.

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Thanks to each of the poets who entered this contest! You inspired me by your enthusiasm for this project and your artistic creativity. Most of all, you honored Gene with your senryu. Please take the time to read his work here: [Biding Time, Selected Poems](#).

Mike Rehling
Editor: [Failed Haiku](#)

Cast List

In order of appearance
(all work copyrighted by the authors)

Pris Campbell

Jesus Chameleon

Chris Lynch

Willie R. Bongcaron

Bre Roberts

Marshall Bood

Bruce Jewett

Valorie Broadhurst Woerdehoff

Joann Grisetti

Dave Read

Ian Willey

Rachel Sutcliffe

Pravat Kumar Padhy

Barbara Tate

Anthony Q. Rabang

Garry Eaton

Ramona Linke

Nicholas Klacsanzky

Olivier Schopfer

Eva Limbach

Paresh Tiwari
Jay Friedenber
Adjei Agyei-Baah
Roman Lyakhovetsky
Gergana Yaninska And haiga with Maya
Lyubenova
Elmedin Kadric
Orrin PréJean
Simon Hanson
Robert Witmer
Julie Warther
Julie Warther and Phyllis Lee
Debbie Strange
Jacob S. Blumner
Christina Sng
Steven Woodall
Chen-ou Liu
Jill Lange
Anne Curran
Phyllis Lee
Peter Newton
Shloka Shankar
spiro miralis
Nina Kovačić
Pat Geyer
Barbara Kaufmann

Brad Bennett
Matthew Moffett
Keitha Keyes
Madhuri Pillai
Tim Graves
David J Kelly
Kalyana Hapsari
Elizabeth Alford
Valentina Ranaldi-Adams
Myron Lysenko
Billy Antonio
nancy brady
Bill Kenney
Zoran Doderovic
Goran Gatalica
Helen Buckingham
Munia Khan
Ola Lindberg
Ken Sawitri
Ken Sawitri senryu/drawing Jimat Achmadi
Jade Pisani
Duncan Richardson
Mohammad Azim Khan
Marc Shane, *pen name [ashamed of Mike]*

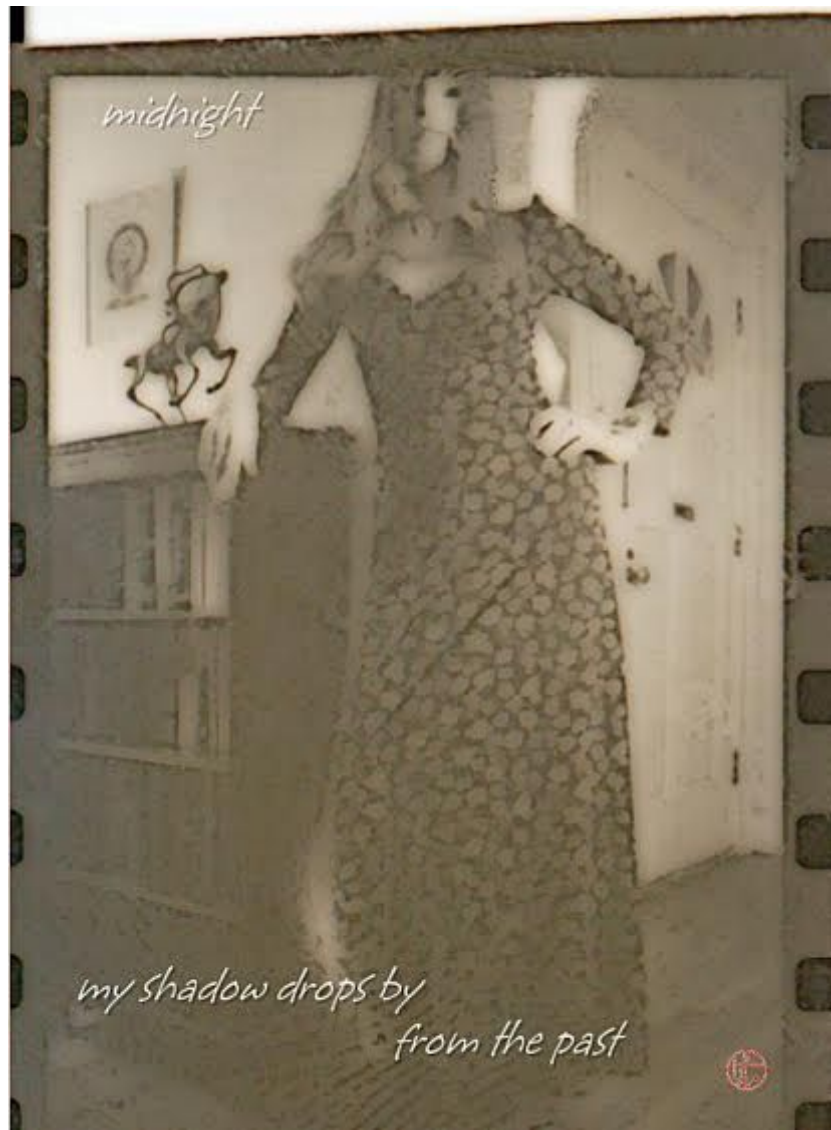
Sondra Byrnes

Emmanuel Jessie Kalusian

Richard Stevenson

Chase Gagnon

Debbi Antebi



midnight

*my shadow drops by
from the past*

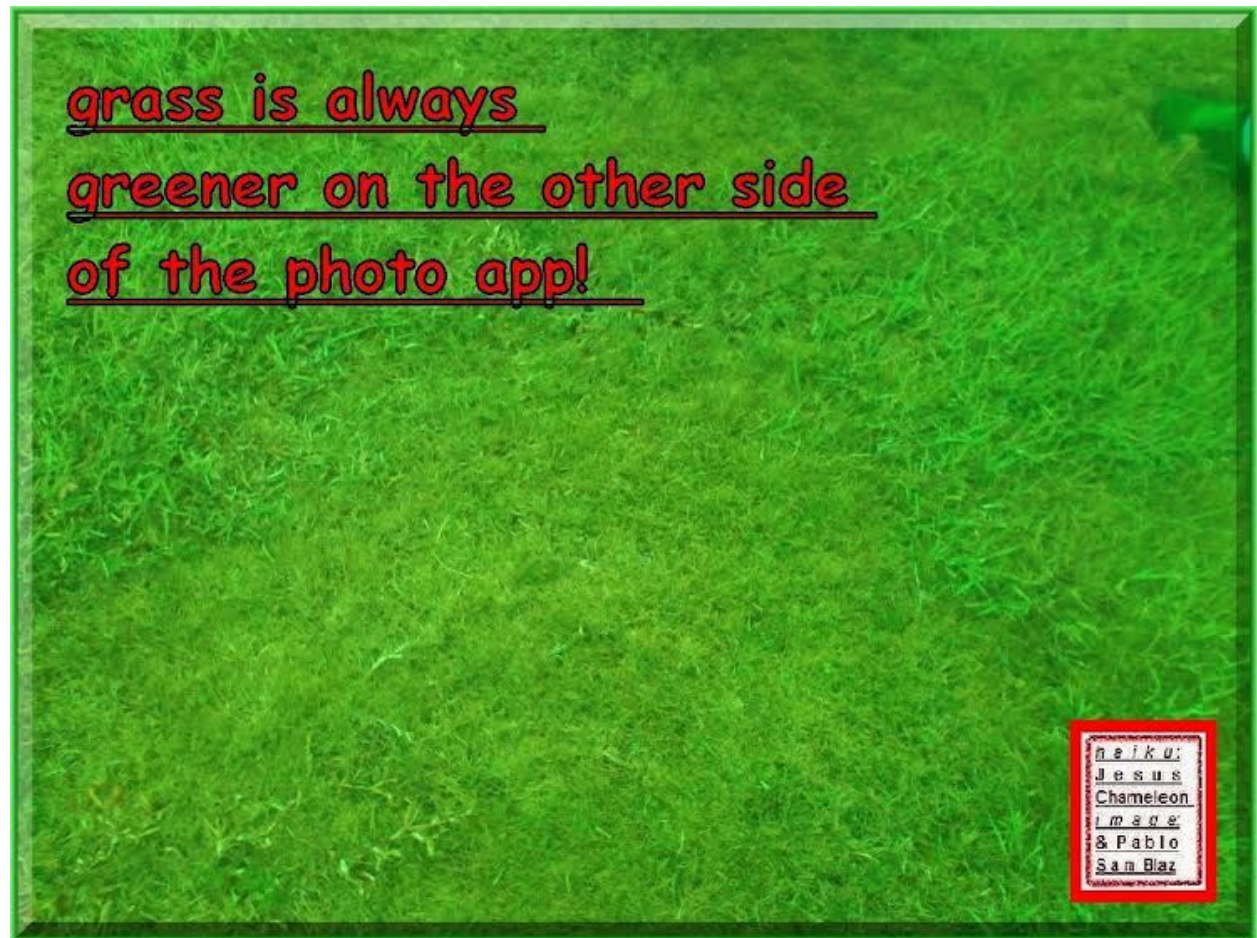
*this night
like other nights....
again the sea*




pns campbell



Pris Campbell



bees –
the vet needles
a zebra

Jesus Chameleon

in my stream a photo of her I decide not to like

in a room of female erotica writers I'm not a snake

thin walls of my new home, you never touch me any
more

knowing you will lie, I ask the question casually

it seems a little pornographic to me your averted
gaze

Chris Lynch

moving out
a butterfly frees itself
from yesterday

cough syrup
a mother let go
of her last peso

Willie R. Bongcaron

When Lightning Strikes

My mother told a story of her teen-aged brother's defiance of Mother Nature's wrath. There was tornadic weather all around their farm and my grandparents insisted the whole family go to the cellar. Uncle Ed had just gotten off a twelve hour shift and gone to bed when the storm was nearing. He refused to go to the shelter with the rest of the family. There were no locks on the inside of the shelter just a long rope that Grandpa would hang on to for all he was worth.

wail of winds
we play tug of war
one against another

About thirty minutes into the storm, the wind suddenly picked up almost yanking Grandpa off his feet. He struggled and jerked the rope back hard as the door tried to lift.

Immediately the hail started pounding on the metal door. Grandpa said "Listen to that hail! It must be a tornado." This tug of war continued with first the wind lifting at the door then a hail upon the door for about five or ten minutes.

in the silence
a voice calls--
and again the hail

When the wind died down a little and the hailing paused, they all heard the voice of Uncle Ed cursing and demanding they let him in. He had been the tornado. Minutes after he had fallen asleep lightning struck the tree outside his bedroom window.

Bre Roberts

liquor store --
beside the dumpster
two pigeons fighting

all primed up --
he floods
the lawnmower

Marshall Bood

sunset on the prairie
shadows of grain elevators
ramshackle castles

Bruce Jewett

<http://brucejewett.wordpress.com>

sway of the candle flame
in the wake
of your words

a sign
on the cigar shop front door:
“No Smoking”

leaving blankets at the shelter
to cover
my guilt

Valorie Broadhurst Woerdehoff



Joann Grisetti

Late Fees

He pulled a book from the shelf. It was the same book every day.
He never read it or even knew its title, but it was just the right height
to set his head down and sleep.

lane change
a fallen leaf stirs
in the breeze

Double A

I toss up a rock, hit it with a stick. This time it lands half way across
the river. I toss another. Strike one. I'll never be ready for Opening
Day.

spring training
her dad catches me
stealing second

Guest Book

I asked her to read my story. "As a writer," I explained, "you might
have some insight." And I was right. She did have some insight. I
probably won't ask again.

rainstorm
she scrapes her boots
on the welcome mat

Dave Read

a spelling mistake--
he find his poem
mistweeted

her computer
getting no response
from her touchpad

"Press 1 followed by the pound key..."
she pounds
the 1 key

wife and daughter bickering
he tries to back out
in neutral

big changes at work...
he searches for
an adapter

Ian Willey

after the rain
sunlight shimmers
in snail tracks

your old tool box
the sharp stab
of a rusty nail

empty house
the same silence
in every room

funeral day
weeping into
the order of service

day in the park
a lost dog
finds our picnic

Rachel Sutcliffe

interesting talk
I volunteer to
translate

dinosaurs story
I recheck my watch
before sleep

airport--
the kids cheer-up for
the big bird

Pravat Kumar Padhy

free range chicken
I take the easy way out

tomorrow
in the presence of absence
bruises bloom

new moon
I make a wish
two days late

wisteria
pulling apart my memories
of childhood

desert rain
my husband brews the
morning coffee

Barbara Tate

the fissure
between our lives
rainbow

Anthony Q. Rabang
[@bigbangthony](#)

public washrooms
a separate lineup
for the deeply confused

her hand on the remote
a fly that refuses
to land somewhere

a visit to grandma
kids so excited
to ride the stairlift

Garry Eaton

firedamp alarm -
the motion of the moon
on the lake

tumbled down house
looking for
another truth

Ramona Linke

<http://haiku-art-rl.blogspot.de/>

<http://www.haiku-art.de/home>

subway
I read a novel
from the stranger's hand

shaved head
of the one-year-old girl
her moon-lit earrings

teacher
the shadow of her finger
pinned by a staple

Nicholas Klacsanzky

taking off
my seat neighbor hums
"Fly Me to the Moon"

night mist
a friend I don't know
unfriends me

asthmattack

Olivier Schopfer

friday the 13th
no matter if
the frog jumps

nothing else
but summer clouds
in the west
the setting sun
telling me lies

Eva Limbach

<http://evamaria-limbach2.blogspot.de/>

Ever-afters

The painter has all but disappeared inside his painting. If you look hard enough, you can still see a pair of unsteady steps at the beach where a weathered tree leans over to whisper its story to the mountain. When the moonlit waves wash over the faint footprints, you know he never meant to return from this journey. Would anyone even miss him, now that he's gone?

In another corner of the studio, the half-finished portrait of a street hooker looks back with an eyeful of anticipation.

dim-lit alley
a spattering of stars
on her breasts

Contours of silence

Do you pluck it from the flight of a yellow swallowtail or the rustle of a browning leaf? Distil it from the calm of a new moon or the warmth of the first rain? Do you feel it on the tip of your lips even before they touch the raga?

There's a quiet before you caress the first note that quivers my breath and echoes my pulse, then the next one, almost too gentle too delicate. And I see you soar.

bonfire moon –
connecting the ends
of our loneliness

You glide, sweep, swoop, rise, fall, breathe . . . etching a vagrant sunbeam with the kernel of life. The music builds up without walls, without boundaries. And in a moment that stretches over a gazelle's leap, you teach me the meaning of letting go. Now there's nothing around except a pulsating vacuum and I wonder where we begin or end as all I ever knew dissolves into a black-hole.

moon shards –
the way my lips seek
your collar bone

Paresh Tiwari

first date
her tattoos not visible
in the online photo

Arizona sunset
vultures circle
the retirement home

at the end
of his death poem
an ink splotch

in a storm drain
police recover the skeleton -
of an umbrella

Jay Friedenber

the feeling
of getting lost in the wind
my first sport car

Adjei Agyei-Baah

insurance agent
he would make a fortune
as a horror writer

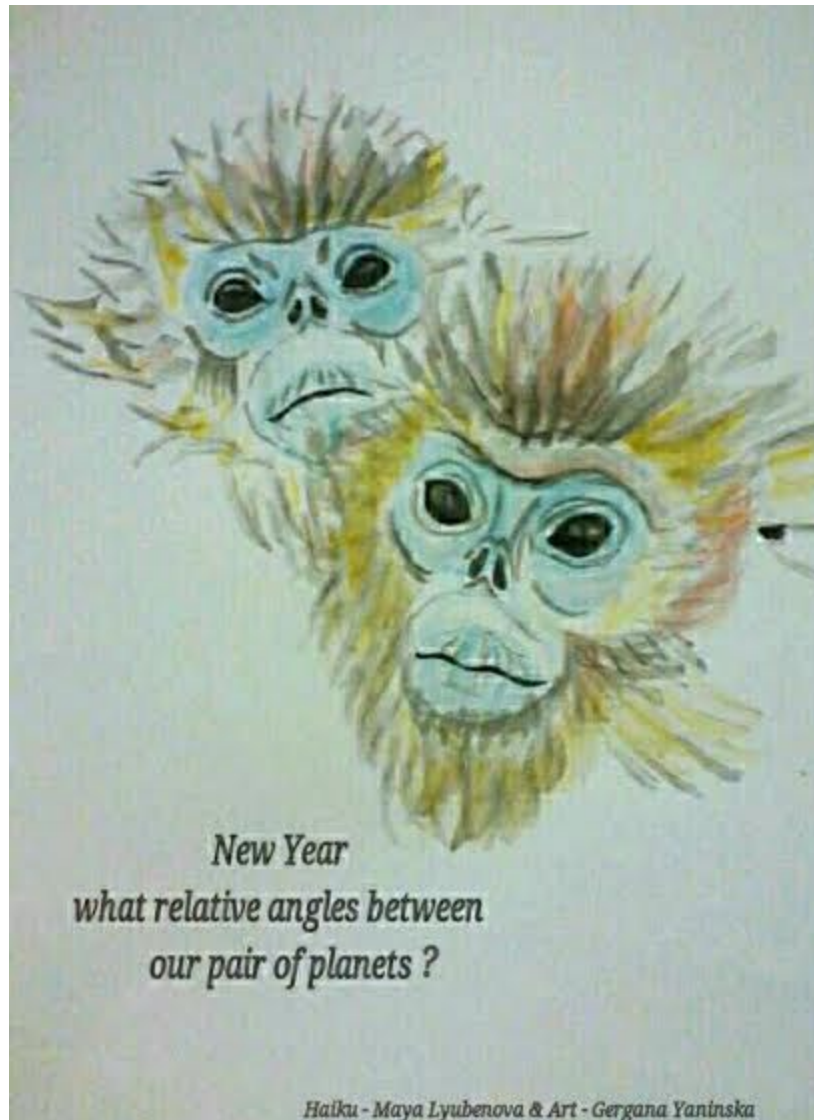
her nimbus clouding my judgement

beer fest
a haijin stands out
of the crowd

beer by beer
trashing myself
to write about it

Roman Lyakhovetsky

paternal house
only a firefly
on the window



**Gergana Yaninska And haiga with Maya
Lyubenova**

making sense
now, your father's
death poem

scarecrow
a widow helps him
to stand up

at the zen resort
a white limousine
is a white limousine

Elmedin Kadric

summer heat
sharp pleats
in her dress

Orrin PréJean

quantum physics tempted to believe in magic

Persian carpet
closing my eyes
hoping for a breeze

nightclub
mirror ball lights
all over her

Simon Hanson

looking this way and that
the clerk disrobes
a mannequin

faculty meeting
the illumination
flickers

fracking
we learn new ways
not to change

clomping through the woods
my only fear
a deaf bear

el nino
the boy next door
throwing snowballs at our roses

Robert Witmer

flag day
our celebration
at half mast

crows return
to the churchyard
Communion Sunday

Julie Warther

Eye to Eye

prom night
even in your heels
we don't see eye to eye

smell of smoke
checking your pockets

saying goodnight --
through your covers
the glow of a muted call

treating your friends
at dairy isle
Dad's silver coins

the dent
you thought I wouldn't notice

poster on your wall
ALL WE LIKE SHEEP
HAVE GONE ASTRAY

Julie Warther and Phyllis Lee





Debbie Strange
debbiemstrange.blogspot.ca

moonlight
on our bed
between us

Jacob S. Blumner
[@leftinflint](#)

starlight
seeing myself
clear as day

Christina Sng
christinasng.com
[@christinasng](https://www.instagram.com/christinasng)

familiar voice
the blind bichon
finds my lap again

skinny old cat
you can't convince me
with your purring

tornado sirens
we take wine and cheese
to the basement

Steven Woodall

midnight argument
giving me the middle finger
she blocks out two stars

gay pride parade
my ex kissing another
man or woman?

Zen garden pond...
the smell of a dead frog
lingering

the last sex
with my soon-to-be-ex ...
three minutes shorter

Chen-ou Liu

<http://chenouliu.blogspot.ca/>

his third postcard
no mention
of her

birdseed aisle
behind my back
a wolf whistle

plaid flannel shirt
how it carries
all those memories

Jill Lange

a felt daisy
on Nana's beanie...
sunshine yellow

Chinese family
the boy talks over
everyone

loneliness
she sidles in
to their conversation

Anne Curran

important meeting
I moderate
my facials

watching a caterpillar
I contemplate
my future

company the mingling of air fresheners

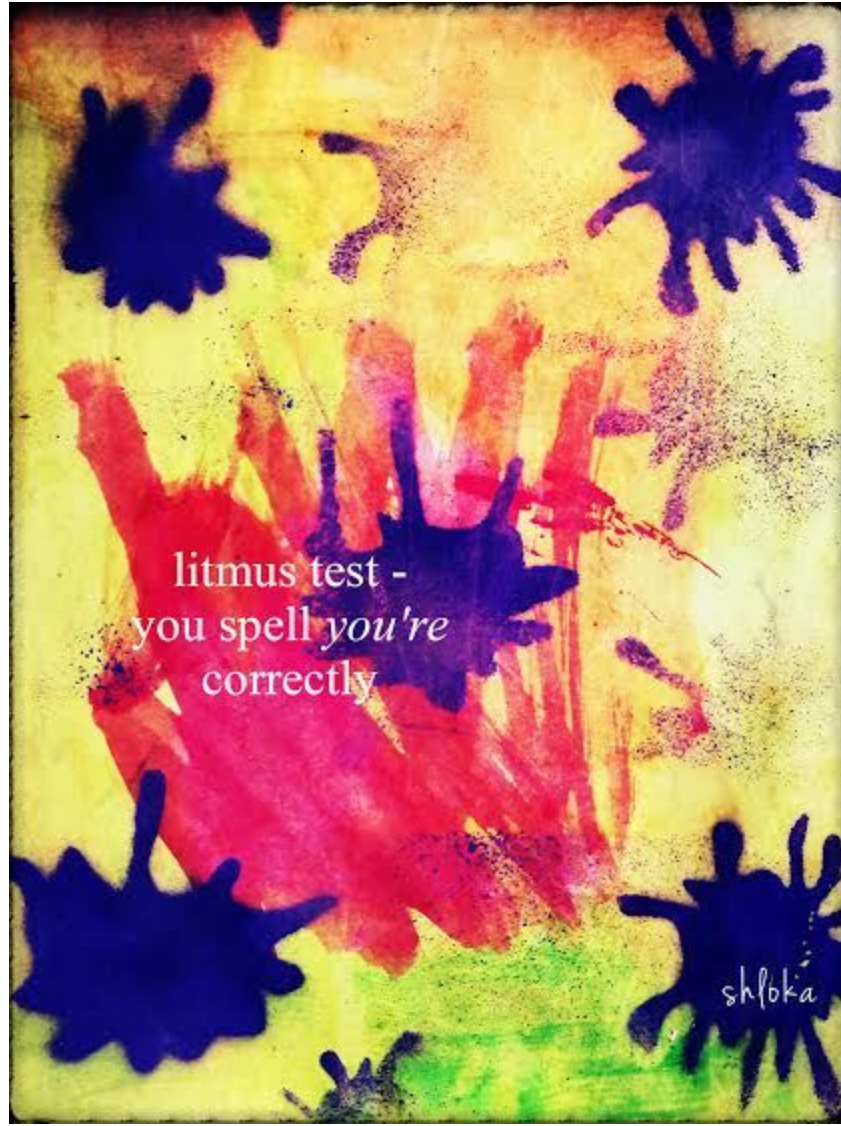
Phyllis Lee

her wobbly letters
I learn to read again
her handwriting

Vegas
the cab driver's eyes
don't light up

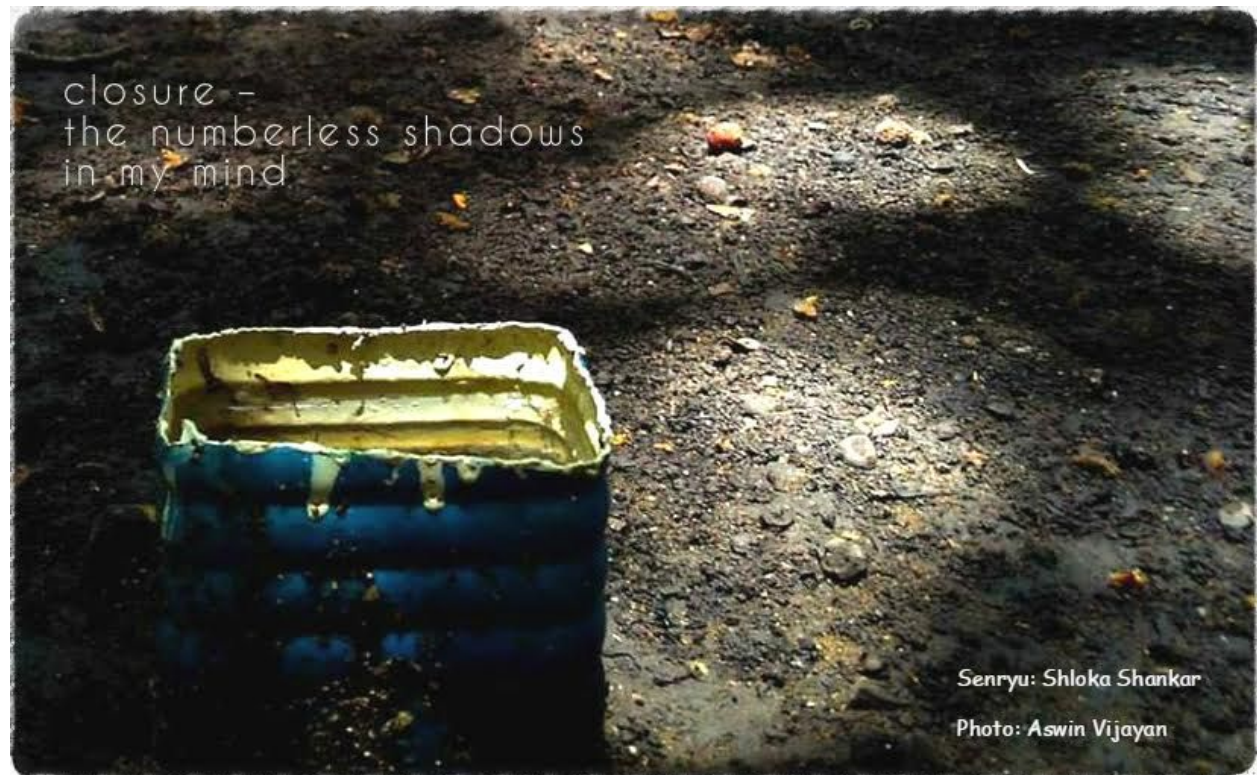
lashing rain
my days at sea
inside the library

Peter Newton
[@ThePeterNewton](#)



litmus test -
you spell *you're*
correctly

shloka



Shloka Shankar
[FaceBook Page](#)

Again to your thighs
Wanting so hard to believe
Nostalgia

spiro miralis

dawn
symphony of chirping
without a conductor

Nina Kovačić

*All the senryu are translated in English by Mrs. Đurđa
Vukelić Rožić.*

hiding in
the fringes of his youth
buckskin shirt

Pat Geyer



morning alarm
blue jays interrupt
the cat's dream

Barbara Kaufmann

reading obits--
passing cars keep hitting
the same pothole

kitty-corner
to the vacuum cleaner
the cat's hiss

donut shop
in the toddler's mouth
a hole

holding back
the urge to write a senryu...
yellow snow

Brad Bennett

beer can
in the library's shadow
finals week

new house
how tall
someone's kids were

another stopsign spraypainted can't

Matthew Moffett

vultures
squabble over the spoils —
tow truck drivers

enjoying
the best scenery —
cows and golfers

Keitha Keyes

receptionist
all eyes follow
her fishnet legs

Madhuri Pillai

Thesaurus attack
its no wonder poetry
gets such a bad rap

Reduced libido
frees up a lot of weekend
for garden projects

Tim Graves

unclaimed melody
the postman delivering
what notes he can

butterfly net
the sound of my words
passing through you

funeral service a murmuration of memories

David J Kelly
[@motto_sakura](#)

power outage
at the front yard
she talks to the moon

playing with kittens
the length of time
to wind the yarn ball

Kalyana Hapsari

Sunday service
I got to church with
scratch marks

"wanna fuck?"
the only English phrase
she knows

when the everyday
becomes the mundane
dried rose



Elizabeth Alford
[Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/ElizabethAlfordPoetry)

going cuckoo trying to write a monoku

Valentina Ranaldi-Adams

rose petals
she begins to lose
her hair

angry words
a small maple leaf follows
us inside

a blackbird
flies towards the moon—
cancer ward

Myron Lysenko

house arrest
the urge to rearrange
the furniture

storm surge
a doll finds its way back
to the shore

Billy Antonio

<http://themoss-coveredwell.blogspot.com/>

last deployment
yellow ribbon replaced
with black wreath

leaving his mark
on the world
fresh concrete

geometry test
the teacher grades
on a curve

nancy brady

roadside stop
I aim to miss
the wildflowers

lying in bed
our promise to keep
in touch

senior admission
I used to be
an adult

Bill Kenney

election silence
on the tv program
sheep shearing

old record
between two songs
the past crackles

Zoran Doderovic

after soccer game
between her tired legs
red sunset

Goran Gatalica

memory pillow
holding
his shape

so near and yet
sofa

Helen Buckingham

arranged marriage—
on the wrong finger
her diamond ring

Munia Khan

how cruel !
birds in cages
cats with bells

citylights
I know she's sleeping
with the lamp on

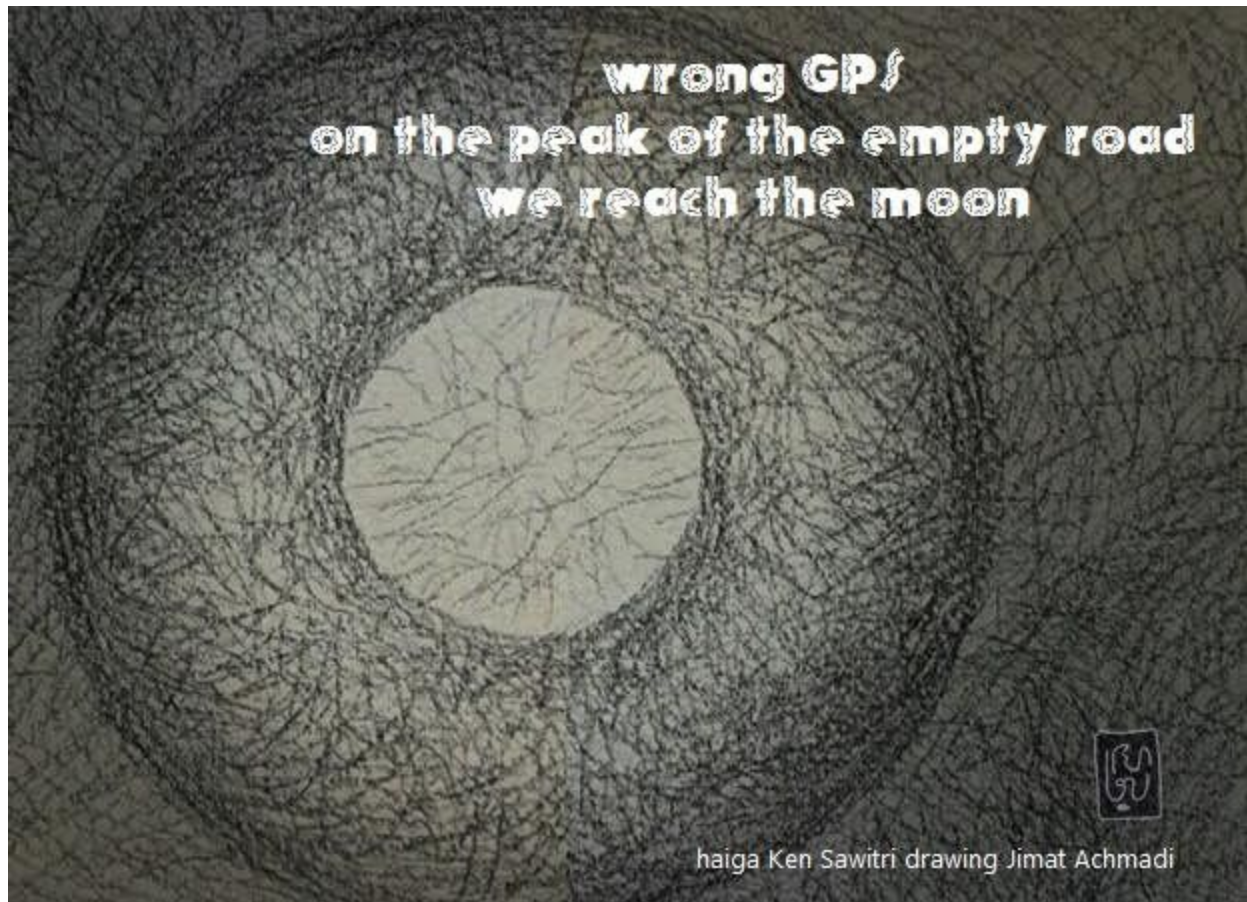
Ola Lindberg

afternoon tea sipping a twisting world

gathered in the mosque
for wedding vows —
a spider weaves its web

end of summer rain
the childless couple's pond
full of tadpoles

Ken Sawitri



haiga
Ken Sawitri senryu
drawing Jimat Achmadi

drunk again
the smell of traffic
in his hair

love birds
how unique this grain
of sand

Jade Pisani

early morning vapour trails
cross each other out

regaining disk space
finally the circle has
 an end

by the lake
looking for coverage
- a fish ripples

Duncan Richardson

morning tea...
waiting for
the milky way

child soldier...
foot prints of
an oversized boot

boat ride...
the lotus rises
again

Mohammad Azim Khan

bali beach
full moon on
full moon

six windows
two tellers
the line grows longer

Marc Shane,
pen name [ashamed of Mike]

day moon—
growing into the person
i thought i was

a neighbor's clematis
on my side of the fence
our detente

moonflower morning
she pivots back
to herself

that place on my back i cannot reach
a bangkok night

Sondra Byrnes
[@SondraByrnes](#)

quick nap
a frog leaps
out of the drainage

Sunday morning
the beggar shakes
his tambourine

Emmanuel Jessie Kalusian

south Nanaimo:
no public washrooms?!
junkies, he said

Richard Stevenson

Bedtime

When I was six, before I knew anything of the world—the world outside where gunshots and sirens wailed like an orgy of banshees up and down the nightmarish streets of East Detroit—my mother would hold me against her chest in the basement and read me tales of horror and poems of madness from the book with a tattered cover she called her favorite; the one she kept on the top shelf of an otherwise empty bookcase.

With a loving but raspy voice that somehow soothed the anarchy outside with the oddity of its grace, she would caw loudly like a raven and pull me close against her chest, tickling me after the long seconds of silence when she'd whisper, "Nevermore!"

Only now, as I look back at the red and blue lights flashing through that tiny window, do I realize that none of this madman's words made any sense to me whatsoever. But even so, at six years old, they were far more accessible than anything else in that world of beautiful chaos.

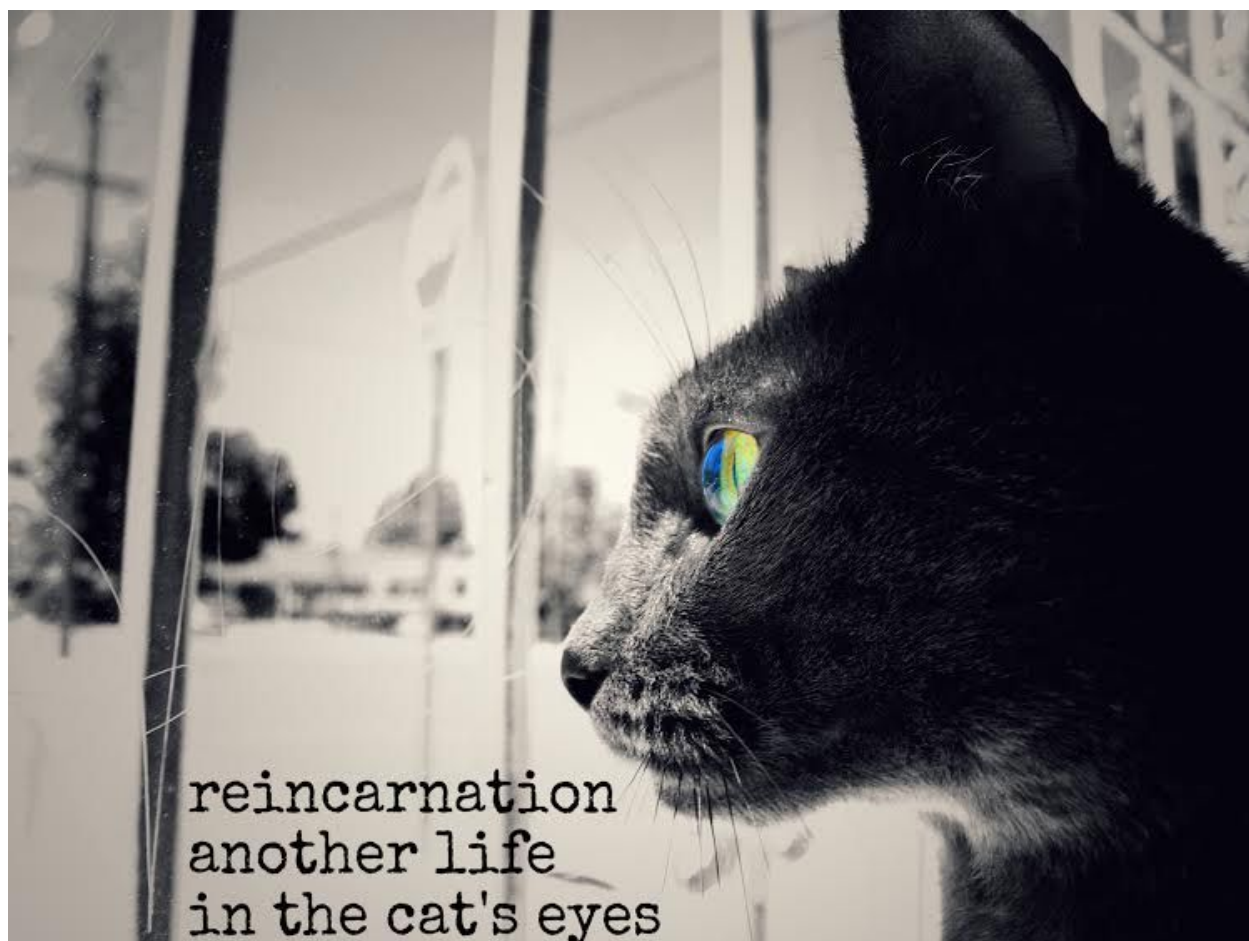
creeping dusk...
the finch's song fades
to black

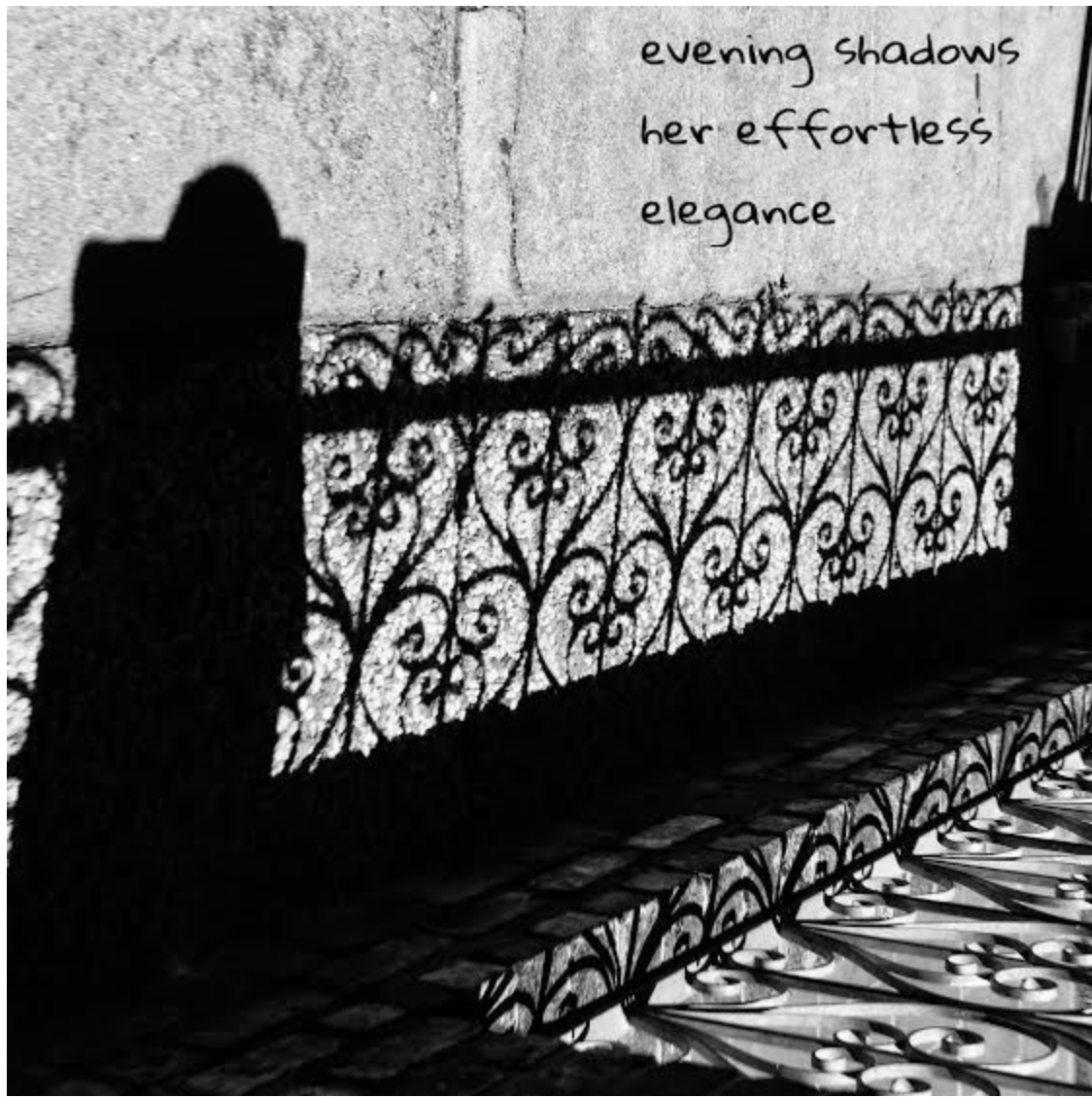
Chase Gagnon

new city
the familiar accent
of graffiti









Chase Gagnon

family dinner
again mom speaks
for me

meditation
rethinking the world
without me in it

Debbi Antebi
[@debbisland](#)

peppermint tea
the cat and i
paint separate dreams

political discussion
i change the subject
to religion

the war
snaps to my mind
high school yearbook

Mike Rehling
'Failed' Editor
editor@failedhaiku.com

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