

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.

-

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](#)